JAPAN
Region: Eastern Asia
Official language: Japanese
Population: 127.56 Million (World Bank, 2009)
Currency: Yen (JPY)
Area: 377,835 sq km
Capital: Tokyo
Number of prefectures: 47
Government: Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government
Religion: 40.5% Buddhist, 54.1% Shinto, 0.7% Christian, 4.7% Other (Agency for Cultural Affairs)
ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet has been designed to assist students of The University of Queensland who are planning to go on exchange to Japan through the UQ Abroad program. It contains practical, cultural and language-related information that is relevant to students.

For ease of reference some information in this booklet has been marked with symbols in highlight boxes:

- **Important tips.**
- **Interesting or unusual facts.**
- **Web links to relevant information.**
- **Glossaries and language information.**
PRACTICAL TIPS

WEATHER
Japan has four distinct seasons, each of which you can observe through clear physical changes in your natural surroundings. Winter in Japan is very cold with scattered snowfall throughout the main island and a greater concentration in Hokkaido to the north. Japan’s summer is hot, humid and notoriously known as the rainy season. There are also often typhoons. The rainy season (tsuyu/梅雨) starts in June and typically lasts until mid-July. It rains very frequently (when it does, it pours), and the weather tends to be overcast. In the event of severe weather (e.g. typhoon/blizzard) be sure to check weather warnings and updates for your safety. From time to time, public transport will be cancelled in interest of commuters’ safety.

TIPPING
Tipping is not a custom in Japan. All taxes and charges are included in the final price of the service or bill at the restaurant.

DRINKING WATER
Tap water in Japan is safe to drink, however if you don’t like the taste, bottled water is readily available. In Japanese restaurants you may be served hot green tea (ocha) without even asking for it. Don’t panic – it’s served for free, just as tap water is in Australia. If you would prefer water, just ask! Water please: omizu kudasai/お水下さい.

MONEY
Australian ATM cards will not work in most Japanese ATMs. For those that do, they must be debit cards and finding ATMs that accept these can be quite tricky. Normal ATM and debit cards can be used at Japanese post office cash machines to withdraw cash; however, this can be uneconomical as transaction fees are high. It is a good idea to either withdraw a large amount of cash each time or to open a Japanese bank account.

As a non-resident, you will require an alien registration card (ARC) in order to open a bank account. These can be issued at your local city hall/office to visitors staying over 90 days in Japan. By law, all foreigners staying longer than 90 days must obtain an ARC.

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR GENERAL FACTS AND INFORMATION ABOUT JAPAN:
- Facts About Japan
- Japan National Tourism Organisation
  www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/attractions/practical/index.html

TIME DIFFERENCE
10am in Brisbane = 9am in Tokyo (-1hr)
Japan uses Japan Standard Time (JST) which is GMT + 9. There is no daylight saving in Japan. Queensland uses Eastern Standard Time (EST), which is GMT +10 and also does not observe daylight saving, therefore it is always one hour earlier in Japan.

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Current weather forecasts and warnings: www.jma.go.jp/jma/indexe.html

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Most ATMs are closed after bank hours (Mon-Fri 9am-3pm) and on weekends. ATMs in convenience stores are available 24/7.

Currency Converter:
www.xe.com

Japan is still a largely cash-based society and EFTPOS/credit facilities are limited. Always carry a sufficient amount of cash with you.

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STUDENT TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

As a student in Japan you are eligible for student discounts on selected transportation systems where they are offered. Many private transport companies (rail and bus) don’t offer student discounts.

JR lines have a “student commuter pass” (tsuugaku teiki - 通学定期) that gives students a discount on rail travel on JR train lines. Passes can be bought for one, three and six months use. In order to be able to obtain this pass you must present your Japanese student ID and a certificate/form issued by your university stating your departure and destination stations.

BULLET TRAIN (Shinkansen - しんかんせん/新幹線)

The bullet train is by far the fastest and most comfortable option of ground transport in Japan, however it is also the most expensive. Bullet train networks connect most major cities in Japan with top speeds of up to 300km/h. JR East special ticket offers including unlimited travel on weekends, daily and five day passes: www.jreast.co.jp/e/pass/index.html

SUBWAYS

The subway is generally the quickest and easiest way to travel around major cities in Japan. There are trains every few minutes and they are almost always on time. Within a rail network there may be several rail providers. Ensure that you have the correct ticket for each line that you use.

TRAMS AND BUSES

Some cities in Japan, such as Hiroshima, have trams. Bus networks are also good, but not as on time as trains and subways as they can be slowed down by traffic jams. If you are travelling long distances and looking for an overnight or cheap option, highway buses (kousoku basu/naito basu - 高速バス/ナイ トバ ス) are good. They are much cheaper than the bullet train and sometimes offer student discounts.

PLANES

Japan has several domestic airports, however the Shinkansen is a more popular option, as it allows commuters to travel directly into the heart of the city and is usually cheaper. However, if you are travelling a long distance, a flight may be a more viable option.

TRAVEL TIPS

Smoking - There are smoking carriages on the Shinkansen. To guarantee a seat in a non-smoking carriage, request this when booking.

Noise - There are silent cars on the Shinkansen. Be aware of this, especially when using portable music devices.

Women only carriages - Subways & trains have a reputation for the occasional groper (ちかん - 痴漢) during rush hour. If you are female, an option to avoid these unpleasant situations is to board one of the “women only” carriages designated for women during certain times.

Bicycle Locks - Although crime rates are low in Japan, ensure you secure your bike at all times. Drunken businessmen have been known to “borrow” bicycles after a few after work drinks.

Claustrophobia - If you get claustrophobic, avoid using subways during rush hour as it can get extremely cramped.

Taxi doors - Be careful when getting into a taxi in Japan – they have automatic doors.

Prepaid touch cards like the “Go card” are available in certain cities in Japan, but are restricted to specific lines. For example, in Tokyo there is the “Suica Card” for JR lines and the “Pasmo Card” for subways.


POLITICS

Although Japan is a constitutional monarchy, the emperor only serves as a ceremonial figure and has no direct power – similar to the power held by the Queen or King of England as the head of state in Australia. The Japanese government is democratic and is ruled by the parliament (known as the kokkai - こっかい/国会). The kokkai has two houses: the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors. The cabinet consists of the Japanese Prime Minister and other members elected from different prefectures. The main administrative body of the government consists of: the emperor (head of state), the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Ambassador to the U.S. and the Permanent Representative to the UN.

LAW

There are several differences between Japanese and Australian laws. Below are some to be aware of:

• Japanese police can ask for identification. It is a legal requirement for you to carry your “alien registration card” (gaikokujin touroku - 外国人登録) or passport with you at all times.

• When entering Japan, by law, all foreigners are photographed and fingerprinted.

• The legal minimum drinking age for all alcoholic beverages is 20. The legal smoking age is also 20.

• In some parts of Japan, it is illegal to smoke in the street. There are officers designated to patrol for this sole purpose. You must smoke in the designated areas or in the designated glass smoking rooms otherwise you will be issued with an on the spot fine.
  • In Japan there is zero tolerance towards drink driving. The blood alcohol limit is 0%.
  • The minimum driving age in Japan is 18. Foreigners can drive in Japan with a recognised international driving permit for up to one year after entering the country, providing they are over 18. Australian driver’s licence holders are able to obtain a Japanese licence without taking a written or practical exam.

SAFETY

Japan is one of the safest countries in the world and has a relatively low crime rate. There has been an increase in drink spiking at bars and entertainment venues, often resulting in credit card theft and assault. If possible avoid carrying credit cards with you to such venues. Incidents of bag snatching and pickpocketing are infrequent but can occur, especially in crowded areas and on trains.

SAFETY TIPS

Bicycles - if riding a bicycle be aware of distracted motorists, pedestrians and other cyclists. Roads in Japan are quite narrow and accidents can be caused easily. Be especially aware of other cyclists distracted by their mobile phones.

Passports and Tickets - it is a good idea to scan or photocopy your passport, alien registration card and plane tickets and keep these copies in a safe place in case of loss.

Credit Cards - write down your card number and relevant information and keep it in a safe place. If you lose the card, you can cancel it easily.

When Out at Night - if you are in a larger city, consider asking a friend which suburbs and areas to avoid visiting alone. It is generally safe; however, in some areas bouncers out the front of nightclubs may hassle you to come in.

Earthquakes - Japan has a high frequency of earthquakes. Be aware of emergency exits and procedures in the event of an earthquake.

For emergency phone numbers go to page

If you are lost or in trouble, look for a police box marked “Koban”. There are many police boxes throughout the streets of Japan and the officers are friendly and will try to assist you.

PRACTICAL TIPS

PHONING

Dialling Japan from Australia:
0011 + 81 + Area Code (without the 0) + Phone Number

Dialling Australia from Japan:
001 + 61 + State Code (without the 0) + Phone Number

If using a calling card to call Australia from a pay phone, make sure you use one that is designated for international calls – otherwise your call won’t connect.

USING A MOBILE PHONE IN JAPAN

Most Australian phones will not work on the Japanese network as they run on a different bandwidth in Japan. As a general rule, Australian GSM phones won’t work but 3G phones such as the iPhone will. If you choose to use your phone on international roaming, it may become very expensive. You have the following alternative options:

• Rent a Japanese phone and/or SIM card for the duration of your stay (rates are usually expensive)
• Sign up for a Japanese phone on a contract (good option if you are staying for a year or longer)
• Buy a Japanese prepaid phone (usually expensive to top up)

BUY AN AUSTRALIAN PHONE IN JAPAN

Buy an Australian power board and take it with you. This way you only need one adaptor to charge or use several of your Australian appliances at once.

For more information about choosing which option is right for you go to: www.japan-guide.com/e/e2223.html

ELECTRICITY

Japan uses plugs with two flat vertical prongs (same as the USA). You will need to buy an adaptor if you want to use Australian appliances etc. in Japan.

Japanese power outlets emit a lower voltage than Australia (100 V). If you plan on purchasing electronic goods or appliances in Japan, ensure that they are compatible for use with Australian outlets (240 V). You may need to purchase a voltage transformer if you want to use them back in Australia.

There are many free Wi-Fi points in the major cities of Japan. If you have a smart phone that supports the use of Skype (through Wi-Fi), this may be a cheaper option than calling cards when phoning Australia.

If you decide to use your Australian phone with international roaming in Japan, remember to turn off data roaming to avoid excess charges.

If using a calling card to call Australia from a pay phone, make sure you use one that is designated for international calls – otherwise your call won’t connect.

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IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

110 Police
119 Ambulance
119 Fire Brigade
171 Earthquake Assistance
100 Operator
104 National Directory Assistance
0057 International Directory Assistance
03 5232 4111 Australian Embassy Japan

Website of the Australian Embassy, Tokyo: www.australia.or.jp/en/
It is important not to view a person as a stereotype of a culture, but rather as an individual that is influenced by the values of the culture or cultures in which they grew up. If you understand and respect these cultural values, it is easier to avoid misunderstanding and conflict.

Outside of the cities, there are only a few passenger trains in Mexico and these are primarily scenic tourist routes. These trains are a great way to see some of Mexico’s impressive countryside. The Chihuahua Pacific Railway provides a great view of sites along the Copper Canyon.

Cultures often have different values or customs in relation to the following:

- Social hierarchies and authority
- Family and family responsibilities
- The degree of formality/informality required in different social situations
- The importance of the individual as opposed to the group or community
- Gender roles and interaction between people of different genders
- Attitudes to time and the importance of the past, present and future
- The importance of written codes, laws and contracts as opposed to verbal agreements and generally understood practices

Try to recognise the positive intentions of the attitudes and customs of other cultures, rather than dismissing them as ‘backward,’ silly or archaic.

As someone who is influenced by your own culture and upbringing, you will judge behaviour as ‘normal’ or acceptable because of your own cultural values. Self-reflection is one of the best ways to understand cultural differences. Consider what some typical Australian values might be, how your behaviour and attitudes are influenced by these and how these might differ to those of your host culture. You can use the cultural values listed on the opposite page to get ideas.

Here are a few Australian habits that are sometimes misinterpreted by or seem strange to other cultures:

- Using first names and an informal tone even when speaking to figures of authority or strangers
- Directness or frankness when speaking to others
- Laughing at others when they make a mistake or fail at what they are doing (Japanese will be humiliated by this – saving face is very important in Japan)

Don’t stress about memorising long lists of customs and etiquette rules from your host country. You can often observe other people and follow their example. Simply understanding the core values of your host culture will help you judge appropriate behaviour.

When studying abroad, students often experience an initial period of elation and excitement followed by an emotional crash known as ‘culture shock’. The constant challenge of new situations and obstacles can become exhausting and depressing. It is normal to experience this feeling and it usually improves over time once you start to feel more accustomed to the host country.

“What is ‘normal’?”

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“Culture is the lens through which we see the world.”

[Kevin Avruch, John Paul Lederach]
CULTURE & CUSTOMS

SHARING A MEAL

Japanese society is based on a hierarchical structure and rank system. When dining out, it is usually the custom for the most senior or highest rank individual to pick up the bill. If you are the guest, it is polite to offer to pay your share – however you will almost always be denied. If you are out for a meal with friends or fellow classmates, usually everyone will pay for himself or herself. If visiting someone’s home it is customary to bring a small gift such as fruit, Japanese sweets or a local specialty food. In Japan, each region has its own specialty/renowned produce.

GREETINGS

When meeting someone for the first time and in most formal situations in Japan, it is customary to bow when greeting the other party/parties. Men bow with arms extended and hands flat against their thighs and women bow with hands crossed in front, placing the right hand over the left hand. Be careful not to mix these up. A bow may be followed by a handshake in some situations as a sign of the Japanese wanting to show knowledge of Western customs.

Hugging and kissing are not common in Japan as open public displays of affection are discouraged.

When addressing others in formal situations, you should always call the other party by their last name followed by san.

TRADITION & RELIGION

Approximately 95% of the Japanese population are Shinto or Buddhist. Most Japanese families will have a small (or large) shrine to their ancestors in their house where they will make regular offerings of food and drink and also light incense.

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MULTICULTURALISM IN JAPAN

Japan is an island nation and therefore does not share borders with any countries. However, the Japanese embrace the cultures of other nations, particularly in the areas of food and fashion. There are Italian, Chinese, Korean and American style (diners) restaurants in most Japanese cities.

However, regarding laws and regulations, Japan is dominantly a country with protectionist ideologies. An example of this is that foreigners must relinquish citizenship of their home country in order to become Japanese. There are several difficult steps in the process to gaining Japanese citizenship including being a resident in Japan for five years and being proficient in Japanese (assessed by an interview with a Ministry of Justice official). Only Japanese citizens can purchase property. Other laws also restrict what foreigners can do in Japan.

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Japan has had a long and turbulent history with periods of prosperity and war. The Japanese culture is embedded with ideologies of ‘saving face’ and consequently this has been transposed to the way history is taught in some Japanese institutions. Even though many students know about historical aspects such as World War II and Japan’s invasion of Korea, material published in some textbooks is still censored. Many young Japanese will not be as educated as you might expect in regards to historical events.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

There are many widely practised methods of energy conservation and recycling in Japan (listed below). Should you fail to adhere to these accepted practices, you may be gently reminded of them.

- Ensure you correctly use recycle bins. (There are separate bins for different kinds of rubbish, e.g. burnable rubbish, cans, plastics, newspapers etc.)
- Do not pull off labels or put other rubbish inside cans/bottles to be recycled.
- Be sure to switch off lights and electrical appliances when not in use.
- Re-use containers and other items that can be re-used before recycling them, and do not litter.

PUNCTUALITY

Punctuality is very important in Japanese society. It is polite to call ahead and let someone know, even if you will only be five minutes late. With Japan having such a large and dense population, one small hiccup in a timetable (i.e. public transport) can have a domino effect. Japanese people understand this by nature, so it is important that you are aware of such issues.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF KOREA

Japan officially annexed Korea in 1910 and remained in control until the end of WWII in 1945. Japan sought to expand its empire and took over Korea claiming it as its own territory. As a result of this there are many Japanese Koreans living in Japan today. Due to the nature of the annexation of Korea the relationship between the countries is not as amicable as it once was. Many Koreans moved to Japan during this period of occupation and were made to adopt Japanese names, many of which continue to use those today.

WESTERN FEVER

The Japanese have a great interest of all things Western. The English language, American movie stars, Western music (especially pop and hip-hop/R&B), designer clothing and blonde hair are just a few of the things that will grab the attention of most young Japanese. Don’t be alarmed if a stranger wanders up to you for a conversation or requests to take a photo with you – Japanese are just excited to interact with a Westerner and practise English. Everyone gets his or her 10 seconds of fame in Japan at some stage!
NEW YEAR'S DAY
1st January
New Year’s Day (shōgatsu - しょうがつ/正月) is the most important holiday in Japan. January 1st is designated as a national holiday, however many businesses will remain closed until the 4th of January. It is customary in Japan to send New Year’s cards, with some people sending dozens to family, friends and co-workers. It is also common for Japanese to visit a temple or shrine. This is called hatsumōde (はつもうで/初詣) which means “first temple visit of the year”. During this visit people pray for the year ahead and also receive their fortunes (omikuji - おみくじ/お神籤).

COMING OF AGE
2nd Monday of January
Coming of Age Day (Seijin no hi - せいじんの日/成人の日) is celebrated nationwide each year and is marked by a national holiday. The coming of age ceremony is attended and celebrated by all young Japanese who will turn 20 during the given year. In Japan, 20 is considered the beginning of adulthood and is also the legal age for voting, drinking and smoking.

BEGINNING OF SPRING (Setsubun)
3rd February
The traditional Setsubun festival (せつぶん/節分) is celebrated nationwide in temples and shrines to mark the beginning of spring. The most common Setsubun ritual is the throwing of roasted beans around one’s home or at a temple/shrine whilst shouting, “Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!” (“devils out, happiness in”). It is custom to pick up and eat the number of beans that is equivalent to your age.

CHERRY BLOSSOM VIEWING (Hanami)
January to May
Cherry blossom viewing festivals (Hanami - はなみ/花見) are popular in Japan. People go to parks and temples to enjoy the beauty of the cherry blossoms.

GLOSSARY
Festival - Matsuri (まつり/祭り)
Happy Birthday - Tanjyoubi omedetou (たんじょうびおめでとう)
Happy New Year - Akemashite omedetou (あけましておめでとう)
Holiday - Yasumi (やすみ/休み)
New Year’s Card - Nengajyou (ねんがじょう/年賀状)
Throwing of roasted soy beans - Mamemaki (まめまき/豆まき)

Birthdays aren’t as important in Japan as they are in Australia. However a small gift for a friend on a birthday will be much appreciated.
Hanami parties consist of friends, family and co-workers gathering under cherry blossom trees in parks for fun, eating, drinking and singing. Cherry blossoms flower at different times in Japan starting in Okinawa (southern Japan) in January, on Honshu (the main island) in March/April and on Hokkaido (in the north) in May.

GOLDEN WEEK (Go-ruden ui-ku -ゴールデンウィーク) occurs in late April/early May each year. It consists of a series of four national holidays that fall within one week. The four holidays are Showa Day (April 29th), Constitution Day (May 3rd), Greenery Day (May 4th) and Children’s Day (May 5th). During golden week transport and tourist areas are very busy, with accommodation becoming booked out well in advance. If possible, avoid travel during this period or plan early to avoid disappointment.

STAR FESTIVAL (Tanabata) 7th July
The Tanabata festival (たなばた/七夕) celebrates the annual meeting of lovers Orihime and Hikoboshi. Legend states that the Milky Way is a river made from stars that crosses the sky and separates the two lovers. They are allowed to meet only once a year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month of the lunisolar calendar. The celebration is held at night once the stars are visible. One of the main customs of the festival is for people to write wishes on small pieces of paper (tanzaku - たんざく/短冊) and tie or hang them on bamboo. These bamboo decorations are often set adrift on a river or burned after the festival.

OBON FESTIVAL Mid July or Mid August
The Obon festival (おぼん/お盆) is one of the most important Japanese traditions and is celebrated in most regions around Japan in mid-August each year (celebrated in Tokyo in mid-July). It is believed that ancestors’ spirits come back to their homes during Obon to be reunited with their family. Obon is a time where many will return to their hometown to be with their family. Ancestor worship is a central theme in Japanese culture, and there are many ways to honor one’s ancestors during this time. Temples and shrines are busy with offerings and prayers, and families will often light incense and candles to pay their respects. Formalities such as filial piety and other customary practices are observed to show reverence for one’s ancestors.

GLOSSARY

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CULTURE & CUSTOMS

花見 are held all over Japan in spring. Hanami parties consist of friends, family and co-workers gathering under cherry blossom trees in parks for fun, eating, drinking and singing. Cherry blossoms flower at different times in Japan starting in Okinawa (southern Japan) in January, on Honshu (the main island) in March/April and on Hokkaido (in the north) in May.

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their families so roads and public transport can be quite packed. It is a ritual for Japanese to clean their homes and to place a range of food offerings (e.g. fruit and vegetables) for the spirits of their ancestors in front of small Buddhist altars (butsudan - 仏壇) in their home. Lanterns and flower arrangements are also usually placed beside the altar.

EMPEROR’S BIRTHDAY (Tenno Tanjyoubi) 23rd December

The birthday of the emperor (天皇誕生) is a national holiday. When the emperor changes the holiday will also change. Emperor Akihito is the current emperor, thus the national holiday falls on the 23rd of December.

CHRISTMAS DAY 25th December

Christmas Day is not a national holiday in Japan as only around 1% of the population is Christian. Many Christmas customs and traditions have been adopted by the Japanese, however it is mainly a commercial event. Christmas Day is not a national holiday in Japan as only around 1% of the population is Christian. Many Christmas customs and traditions have been adopted by the Japanese, however it is mainly a commercial event.

NEW YEAR’S EVE 30th December

On New Year’s Eve (Oomisoka - 大晦日) many families gather to watch the music program “kohaku uta gassen” (こうはく うたがっせん/紅白歌合戦) on TV. It features some of Japan’s most famous J-Pop and Enka (old style Japanese songs) singers in extravagant performances.

It is custom for toshikoshi soba (buckwheat noodles - としこしそば/年越し蕎麦) to be served for dinner as this dish symbolises longevity.

As it approaches midnight on New Year’s Eve, most Japanese will flock to a nearby temple or shrine to pray and receive their fortune for the New Year.

Type “kohaku uta gassen” into the search bar on www.youtube.com to see examples of past acts that have performed on New Year’s Eve.

For more information on Japanese public holidays:

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

1st Jan - New Year’s Day / Shogatsu (正月)
2nd Mon in Jan - Coming of Age Day / Seijin no hi (成人の日)
11th Feb - National Foundation Day / Kenkoku kinenbi (建国記念)
29th April - Showa Day / Showa no hi (昭和記念)
3rd May - Constitution Day / Kenpo kinenbi (憲法記念)
4th May - Greenery Day / Midori no hi (みどりの日)
5th May - Children’s Day / Kodomo no hi (子供の日)
3rd Mon in July - Ocean Day / Umi no hi (海の日)
3rd Mon in Sept - Respect for the Aged Day / Keirou no hi (敬老の日)
23rd Sept - Autumn Equinox / Shunbun no hi (春分の日)
3rd Nov - Culture Day / Bunka no hi (文化の日)
23rd Nov - Labour Thanksgiving Day / Kinro kansha no hi (勤労感謝の日)
23rd Dec - Emperor’s Birthday / Tenno tanyoubi (天皇誕生日)
THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

The Japanese degree system is similar to the Australian system in that there are three main degree levels:

• Bachelor’s / Undergraduate Degree (Gakushigou がくしゅうごう/学士号)
• Master’s Degree (Shuushigou しゅうしゅうごう/修士号)
• Doctorate (Hakasegou はかせごう/博士号)

Undergraduate degrees are four-year programs and students are allowed generally up to six years to complete their degree (some universities will allow longer). Master’s programs are taken over two years and doctoral programs over three years.

THE ACADEMIC YEAR

The Japanese academic year begins in April and is similar to the Australian academic year in that there are two semesters (Winter Semester and Summer Semester)

Apr - Academic year begins (Summer Semester)
End Apr/Start May - Golden Week holidays (1 week)
July - Summer Semester ends
Aug/Sep - Summer holidays (approx. 2 months)
Oct - Winter Semester begins
Dec/Jan - Winter holidays (2 weeks)

Feb/Mar - Final exams of Winter Semester / spring holidays start
Mar - Graduations / academic year ends

Communication in lectures in Japan is usually one-way - lecturers speak, students listen and don’t ask questions.

When addressing lecturers simply call them Sensei (せんせい/先生) which literally means teacher.

UNIVERSITY CLASSES

Studying in Japan can involve completing any of the following types of classes or course components:

• Lectures (Kougi こうぎ/講義)
• Seminars (Semina セミナー)
• Practical classes (exercises) (Enshuu えんしゅう/演習)
• Internships (Inta-nshippu インターンシップ)
• Field trips (Fi-rudotorippu フィールドトリップ)

University classes don’t usually exist in Japan with the exception of some subjects such as engineering, which have classes that go through exercises.

Tutorial style classes don’t usually exist in Japan but there are some degree programs which go through exercises.

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FACULTIES AND SUBJECTS:

- Arts (じんぶんかがく/人文科学)
- Chemistry (かがく/化学)
- Culture (ぶんか/文化)
- Economics/Business/Finance (けいざい/経済)
- Education (きょういく/教育)
- Engineering (こうがく/工学)
- Fine Arts (びじゅつ/美術)
- Foreign Languages (がいこくご/外国語)
- Information Technology (じょうほうテクノロジー/情報テクノロジー)
- Law (ほうりつ/法律)
- Mathematics (すうがく/数学)
- Medicine (いがく/医学)
- Philosophy (てつがく/哲学)
- Physics (ぶつり/物理)
- Psychology (しんりがく/心理学)
- Social Science (しゃかいかがく/社会科学)
- Theology (しんがく/神学)

EXAMS AND STUDY LOADS

In Japan you need to acquire a certain amount of credit points in order to be able to graduate with a degree (Bachelor’s: 120 to 150, Master’s: 30 to 50).

Most national Japanese universities use the four-scale grading system as follows:

- A (80-100%) - Very good
- B (70-79%) - Good
- C (60-69%) - Average/pass
- F (0-59%) - Unacceptable/fail

DIFFERENT TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

There are different types of higher education providers in Japan, and choosing the right one often depends on your field of study and learning preferences.

- Daigaku (だいがく/大学) - Traditional university.
- Daigakuin (だいがくいん/大学院) - University established school offering postgraduate courses.
- Tankidaigaku (たんきだいかく/短期大学) - Junior college where in-depth research in specialized disciplines is conducted to help develop skills needed for employment and everyday life. Graduates are awarded an associate degree.
- Koutousenmongaakou (こうとうせんもんがっこう/高等専門学校) - Technical college where students learn specialized skills for employment. Technical colleges admit graduates of lower secondary school, whereas junior colleges and universities do not.

FOREIGN STUDENTS

Japanese universities are becoming increasingly popular with international students, particularly students from China, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, the U.S. and Indonesia.

SIGN UP!

STUDENT SOCIETIES

Japanese universities have a variety of clubs that students can join. The main ones are: baseball, soccer, volleyball, dance, English, karate, Kendo (けんどう/剣道 - like a form of traditional fencing) and calligraphy (しゅどう).
WHAT DO JAPANESE STUDENTS DO WITH THEIR FREE TIME?

STUDENT JOBS

The majority of Japanese students work while they are studying with the most popular jobs being cram school tutor (tutor at an after-hours extra study school for high school students), waiter/waitress, shop assistant, bartender and convenience store attendant.

International students are permitted to work only after obtaining permission from their university and a permit for extra-status activities from the Immigration Bureau. Permission will only be granted if it is clear that working will not affect your studies, and you will only be allowed to work up to 28 hours per week (research students only up to 14 hours per week).

Japanese university students. As the legal age for drinking in Japan is 20, many students aren’t able to go out drinking or to go into nightclubs.

Some of the typical leisure activities enjoyed by Japanese university students include shopping, going to the movies, playing sports, going to gaming arcades/playing console games, visiting local festivals and going to karaoke.

LEISURE

Generally Japanese students are quite active, with many either playing or following some kind of sport. The national sport of Japan is Sumo wrestling and many tournaments are still being held today. However baseball and soccer are by far the most popular sports in terms of both participants and spectators. Other popular sports played in Japan are volleyball, tennis and basketball. The Japanese are generally competitive when it comes to sports, especially in matches with neighbouring countries.

Compared to Australia, there isn’t so much of a partying, clubbing and drinking culture amongst Japanese university students. As the legal age for drinking in Japan is 20, many students aren’t able to go out drinking or to go into nightclubs.

Some of the typical leisure activities enjoyed by Japanese university students include shopping, going to the movies, playing sports, going to gaming arcades/playing console games, visiting local festivals and going to karaoke.

As learning English in Japan is extremely popular, many English speaking international students take up tutoring English as a part time job.

The Japanese part time job wage level is much lower than in Australia with the average being around 900 yen per hour (some jobs as low as 600 yen!).

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FREEBIES & DISCOUNTS!

Student Discounts are not as common in Japan as they are in Australia. Below are the few to watch out for and take advantage of. Be sure to present your student card and/or your alien registration card to obtain these offers.

• A discounted rate at the cinemas. This is quite good as movies are very expensive in Japan (up to 3 times more than Australia).
• Cheaper fares on public transport.
• 10% off at university and selected book stores.
• Find out about cultural events in your city. There are often free festivals, concerts and entertainment events.
• Explore temples, shrines, parks, gardens and the older cultural parts of town. Temples and shrines are usually free to enter (unless they are one of the main tourist attractions of the area).
• Consider going outside the cities. Japan has many beautiful mountains, forests, rivers and lakes. Go for walks, cycle and swim… you don’t need a lot of money to have fun!

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

STUDENT DORMITORY (Ryou - りょう/寮)
Student dormitories are one of the best forms of accommodation for foreign exchange students. If you are wanting to meet other international students this is a good option as share houses do not really exist in Japan. Student dorms are usually furnished and consist of a range of room types e.g. with own en suite (toilet & bath/shower), own toilet (shared shower room) or room only (shared toilet/shower room). Depending on the dorm, different sections of the building may be divided into male and female quarters/wings. Student dorms are generally close to the university campus (within riding distance). There are both privately and university owned dorms - contact the university as your first point of reference as it will be easier to organise accommodation through them directly.

LIVING ALONE (Hitori gurashi - ひとりぐらし/一人暮らし)
Some students living away from home (students whose families live in other parts of the country) will often rent a one-bedroom apartment. This is a more costly option than a dorm and the contracts are difficult to organise for a short period (such as a study abroad semester).

HOME STAY (Ho-musutei - ホームステイ)
If you want to experience Japanese family life and improve your Japanese skills rapidly, home stay is the best option for you. Home stay families usually provide a furnished private room and two meals a day for hosted students. Some universities have a home stay office and if not, they may be able to point you in the right direction.

CAMPUS FACILITIES

University campuses in Japan are a little different from those we are used to in Australia. Common features of Japanese campuses are: ATMs, a student cafeteria (gakushoku - がくしょく/学食), vending machines, health facilities, sports facilities (depending on the campus), bookstores and co-op stores. Co-op stores supply items such as books, stationary and computers.

For lunch many Japanese students will buy food from the convenience store, bring their own onigiri box or dine out at cheap restaurants such as ramen stalls.
JAPANESE FOOD - NOT JUST SUSHI!

“Japanese only eat sushi and rice...” this is definitely not true! There are a great variety of foods that you will be able to sample in Japan. Many restaurants and families adapt their diet in accordance with the change of season. As the seasons change you will notice the different types of fresh produce that become available. Traditionally Japanese have rice with every meal (even breakfast) however this is slowly changing as more international food options are introduced. Some international restaurants attempt to put a Japanese spin on dishes, providing some interesting options for you to try.

Typically Japanese dishes include rice or noodles as the staple, accompanied by a variety of smaller dishes such as grilled fish or meat, Japanese style vegetables, pickles and sometimes tofu. The Japanese style of eating usually consists of a medium sized main dish accompanied with many smaller side dishes, with the idea being to eat them all together, rather than in succession.

A typical traditional Japanese breakfast consists of rice, miso soup, grilled fish and fruit.

SPECIALTY DISHES

Each region in Japan has its own specialty dish. It is said that the given dish will always taste better in that region. These dishes, with the ingredients slightly modified, are generally available all over Japan. A selection has been listed on the following page.

EATING OUT

When going out for a coffee or a meal with friends, you will never be short of choices. There are plenty of reasonably priced restaurants with wide varieties of food.

Some Typical Dishes

- Edamame (えだまめ/枝豆): Boiled green soybeans
- Gyoza (ぎょうざ/餃子): Dumplings (usually filled with pork mince)
- Gyudon (ぎゅうどん/牛丼): Meat and vegetables on rice
- Karaage (からあげ/揚げ物): Fried chicken pieces
- Kare (カレー): Japanese style curry
- Katsudon (カツ丼): Meat and vegetables on rice
- Miso (みそ/味噌): Soy paste soup
- Nabemono (なべもの/鍋物): Stew
- Oden (おでん): Various ingredients boiled in soy-flavoured stock
- Okonomiyaki (お好み焼き): Savoury pancake
- Omuraisu (オムライス): Fried rice wrapped in an omelette

There are many customs to keep in mind when in Japan. To find out more go to: factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=609&catid=18

SOME TYPICAL DISHES

- Ramen (ラーメン): Noodles with meat in broth
- Sashimi (さしみ/刺身): Raw fish slices
- Shabu-shabu (しゃぶしゃぶ): Thinly sliced meat boiled quickly with vegetables and dipped in sauce.
- Soba (そば): Buckwheat noodles
- Sukiyaki (すき焼き/すき焼き): Thin slices of beef, vegetables & noodles boiled in broth
- Takoyaki (たこ焼き): Octopus dumplings
- Tempura (天ぷら/天ぷら): Deep fried prawns and vegetables
- Tonkatsu (とんかつ): Crumbed pork cutlet
- Tsukemono (つけもの/漬け物): Pickled vegetables
- Udon (うどん): Wheat noodles
- Yakisoba (焼きそば): Fried soba noodles with vegetables
- Yakitori (やきとり/焼き鳥): Grilled chicken skewers
of food available. One major difference you will notice between Australian and Japanese restaurants is the speed of service – do not be surprised if your meal is on the table less than 5 minutes after you order. American diners (Family restaurants: 'Famili-resutoran' - ファミリーレストラン) and ramen stalls are very popular amongst students, especially as they are a fast, cheap and convenient option. At festivals ('matsuri' - まつり/祭り) and markets you will find stalls selling many kinds of easily prepared Japanese foods such as okonomiyaki and yakisoba. In large cities you will also find affordable international food and take away.

THINGS TO DO

Local cinemas, concerts, theatres, gaming arcades and sporting events are fun places to spend an evening. By far the most popular recreational activity for young Japanese is karaoke (カラオケ).

During the day you can visit places such as local temples and shrines, museums, art galleries, parks, shopping districts and markets. Alternatively, get involved in local sports and outdoor activities. Each city should have a local event guide online that will give you tips on what to see and do in the area.

SOME JAPANESE SWEETS & DESSERTS

• Anko (あんこ/餡子): Sweet red bean paste used in desserts
• Daifuku (だいふく/大福): Rice cake filled with red bean jam
• Dango (だんご/団子): Sweet dumplings on a skewer
• Dorayaki (どらやき/どら焼き): Japanese cake filled with red bean jam
• Kakigoori (かきごおり/かき氷): Shaved ice dessert flavoured with syrup
• Kure-pu (クレープ): Crepe
• Macha aisu (まっちゃアイス/抹茶アイス): Green tea ice-cream
• Manjyuu (まんじゅう/饅頭): Steam yeast bun with filling
• Mochi (もち/餅): Sticky rice cake
• Shiratama (しらたま/白玉): Rice flour dumpling
• Shirakuma (しろくま/白熊): Rice flour dumpling
• Shiruko (しろく/汁粉): Sweet red bean soup with mochi

DRINKING IN JAPAN

Traditionally the drink of choice in Japan is sake (clear rice wine) however due to the influence of the West, this has changed. Now the most popular alcoholic beverage in Japan is in fact beer, followed by whiskey. Japan is home to many well known beer manufacturers including Asahi, Kirin and Sapporo.

SAKE OR SAKE?

One thing to be aware of is the difference between Westerners perception of sake and the Japanese perception. If you ask for sake at a bar in Japan, the staff may look confused as generally sake means “alcohol”. If you are after rice wine, be sure to ask for Nihonshu (にほんしゅ/日本酒).

Some Japanese keep their own bottle of whiskey behind the bar at their favourite restaurant.

For more information about the social scene, bars, dining and what’s on, check out Metropolis magazine: http://metropolis.co.jp/
overly strict but as the Japanese are usually dressed nicely and fashionably you will rarely feel overdressed. To be on the safe side, dress up!

IZAKAYA & TACHINOMI BARS

In Japan there are two popular types of casual bars where Japanese go to eat and drink. Izakaya (いざかや/居酒屋) is where food is served to accompany drinks – the food is generally more substantial than that offered in normal bars. In many izakayas there are specials that allow you to eat and drink all you want for a set price within a stipulated time limit.

Tachinomi (たちのみ/立飲み) are bars with no tables – patrons must stand and drink, allowing more people to fit in. Nibbles and small food items are also available for purchase.

I CAN’T BELIEVE IT’S NOT BEER

In a bid to lower prices, a recent creation by Japanese brewing companies is Happoshu (はっぽうしゅ/発泡酒). Literally meaning sparkling alcohol (aka low-malt beer), the drink is made with less malt than beer however the flavour and alcohol content is quite similar. The main difference is the price and a slightly lighter taste. This price of Happoshu is lower than normal beer as it has less malt and is therefore subject to a lower tax rate.

There is also another beer alternative called “Third Beer” (daisan no bi-ru - だいさんのビール) which contains pea, soya or wheat spirits instead of malt. This is cheaper than Happoshu.

BARS AND CLUBS

If you feel like going clubbing there are many options to suit all tastes in music and atmosphere (in larger cities). The larger and more popular clubs with famous and special guest DJs will almost always have a cover charge. Many famous international artists tour Japan and play in nightclubs – be sure to keep an eye out for these gigs.

Japanese bar dress restrictions are pretty relaxed. However, if you are going to a nightclub it is always preferable to be smartly dressed. The dress code isn’t There may not be ATM / EFTPOS facilities inside clubs, so be sure to take enough cash when clubbing.

There are no casinos in Japan as gambling is outlawed. There are, however, some exceptions to this law; such as the lottery, betting on horse racing and on certain motor sports.

SOME TYPICAL JAPANESE DRINKS

• Akawain (あかワイン/赤ワイン): Red wine
• Amazake (あまざけ/甘酒): Traditional sweet, low-alcohol drink made from fermented rice
• Bi-ru (ビール): Beer
• Chuhai (ちゅはい): Carbonated fruit flavoured alcoholic drinks (mixed with shochu)
• Daisan no bi-ru (だいさんのビール/第三のビール): Third Beer (no malt, beer-like beverage)
• Happoshu (はっぽうしゅ/発泡酒): Low-malt beer
• Nihonshu (にほんしゅ/日本酒): Rice wine (sake)
• Shioiwain (しろワイン/白ワイン): White wine
• Shochu (しょうちゅう/焼酎): A popular liquor in Japan distilled from barley, sweet potatoes or rice. Shochu is Japan’s answer to vodka as it can be mixed with soda, juice, soft drinks and iced tea or drunk on the rocks.
• Usuki (ウィスキ): Whiskey
• Umeshu (うめしゅ/梅酒): Plum wine

Beer, whiskey, sake and other alcohols are available in vending machines that line the streets of Japan. In a bid to combat underage drinking, most machines close before 11pm and require ID to be scanned.
SOUVENIRS
If you are looking for a gift to bring back home for family and friends, try the 100-yen variety stores. Everything in the store is 100 yen (+5% tax) and you will be able to pick up cheap souvenirs as well as some quirky/funny presents. Another idea is boxed sweets/treats. Each city has its own special type of sweet or food product (e.g. Tokyo has small banana shaped cakes – “Tokyo Banana”). They are usually sealed and safe to bring through customs.

CONVENIENCE STORES
You will hardly go a block without seeing a convenience store in Japan. The main chains are: 7-Eleven, Lawson, Family Mart, Circle K Sunkus, Daily Yamazaki, Ministop and AM/PM. Convenience stores stock basic grocery and household supplies, Obento boxes (lunch boxes), microwaveable meals and fast food; as well as providing courier & postal services, photocopying & fax service, ATMs, payment facilities for utilities, ticket service for concerts, theme parks and airlines etc.

FOOD IN DEPARTMENT STORES
Don’t feel like cooking but don’t want fast food? Go to the basement of any main department store and you will enter a world of delicious gourmet food. You will be able to buy anything from fresh fruit and croissants to raw fish and prepared meals, all designed for takeaway. Department stores include: Tokyo, Isetan, Seibu, Mitsukoshi, Matsuzakaya and Hankyu.

APPLIANCES: For electrical appliances try: Yamada Denki, Kojima, Bic camera or Yodobashi kamera

STATIONARY: Good places to look for stationary supplies are convenience stores, department stores and supermarkets.

SHOPPING
Most stores are open from 10am till 7 or 8pm and will have one day off a week (not necessarily Sunday). Local shops usually open slightly earlier or later than the above times. Below is an approximate guide to opening hours by store type:

- **Banks**: Mon-Fri 9am to 3pm (some open Sat morning)
- **Supermarkets**: 10am till 10pm/1am (some 24/7)
- **Shopping malls**: Usually 10am to 7:30/8pm
- **Pharmacies**: Usually Mon-Fri 8:30am-7pm/9pm (some open until later). Some open Sat & Sun (9am/12 noon to 7pm)
- **Petrol Stations**: 24/7 (in country areas: Mon- Fri till 6pm, closed weekends)
- **Fast Food Outlets**: Often 24/7 or until late
- **Post office**: Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm (central post offices open until 7pm, Sat 9am to 5pm and Sun 9am to 12:30pm)
The official language of Japan is Japanese. There is a great interest in the English language in Japan especially amongst the younger generations. English lessons are compulsory in junior and senior high schools and, as of April 2011, are also compulsory in primary schools. Most people speak at least some English in Japan, and many will take any opportunity to strike up a conversation and practise their English – don’t be afraid, they are just being friendly.

**DIALECTS**

Throughout Japan there are many dialects. Most regions, cities and even some suburbs have their own special way of speaking. Someone from the north of Japan could be speaking to someone in the south and have no idea what he or she is trying to say. The accepted standard form of Japanese and most widely understood dialect is the Tokyo form. If people are having trouble understanding one another, they will usually revert to the Tokyo form. Japanese dialects are differentiated by the use of different words (nouns, adjectives and verbs), the changing endings of sentences and verbs and by adapting existing words. If possible avoid learning a dialect as it may limit your ability to communicate within Japan.

**SLANG**

Japanese use a lot of slang by abbreviating words, importing foreign words into their language and also by creating new words. The Japanese are also renowned for widely using onomatopoeia within their language.

### JAPANESE SLANG & COLLOQUIALISMS

- Annoying - *Uzai* (うざい)
- Can I ask you something quickly? - *Chotto i?* (ちょっといい？)
- Casual job - *Baito* (バイ ト)
- Convenience store - *Konbini* (コンビニ)
- Cool - *Kakkoi* (かっこいい)
- Cute - *Kawaii* (かわいい)
- Delicious! - *Oishii!* (おいしい!)
- Dumb / stupid - *Aho / baka* (あほ/ばか)
- Funny - *Ukeru* (うける)
- Handsome man / hot guy - *Ikemen* (イケメン)
- Huh? / What?? - *E?* (え?)
- Just as you would expect - *Sasuga* (さすが)
- Keep going / hang in there! - *Faito!* (ファイト !)
- Mobile phone - *Keitai* (ケイタイ)
- No way (something undesirable) - *Yada!* (やだ！)
- Oh no! / I blew it / I’m in trouble - *Yabai!* (やばい！)
- Please give me - *Choudai* (ちょうだい)
- Popular - *Moteru* (もてる)
- Seel - *Horai*! (ほらい！)
- Terrible / horrible - *Hitto* (ひどい)
- That guy / that girl (informal) - *Aitsu* (あいつ)
- The worst / the pits - *Saiti* (さいてい)
- The best / coolest - *Saikou* (さいこう)
- To cut class / skip class - *Saboru* (サボる)
- To try and pick up someone - *Nanpa suru* (ナンパする)
- Uncool - *Dasai* (ださい)
- Very, really, soooo - *Cho-/ Mecha* (チョー/めちゃ)
- Wow / awesome - *Sugoi / Sugei* (すごい！/すげー！)

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