



JAPAN

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Rebecca Milner, Ray Bartlett, Andrew Bender,
Craig McLachlan, Kate Morgan, Simon Richmond, Tom
Spurling, Phillip Tang, Benedict Walker, Wendy Yanagihara

Welcome to Japan

Japan is truly timeless, a place where ancient traditions are fused with modern life as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

There's an intoxicating buzz to Japan's urban centres, with their vibrant street life, glowing streetscapes, 24-hour drinking and dining scenes, architectural wonders that redefine what buildings – and cities – should look like. Leave them behind and you've got a country that is more than two-thirds mountains, with bubbling hot springs at every turn. In the warmer months there is excellent hiking, through cedar groves and fields of wildflowers, up to soaring peaks and ancient shrines (the latter founded by wandering ascetics). In the winter, all this is covered with snow and the skiing is world class. (And if you've never paired hiking or skiing with soaking in an onsen, you don't know what you've been missing.)

Travelling around the country offers numerous opportunities to connect with Japan's traditional culture. Spend the night in a ryokan (traditional Japanese inn), sleeping on futons and tatami mats, and padding through well-worn wooden halls to the bathhouse (or go one step further and sleep in an old farmhouse). Chant with monks or learn how to whisk bitter *matcha* (powdered green tea) into a froth. From the splendour of a Kyoto geisha dance to the spare beauty of a Zen rock garden, Japan has the power to enthrall even the most jaded traveller.

“...a country that is more than two-thirds mountains, with bubbling hot springs at every turn.”

Contents

Plan Your Trip

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|----|---------------------|----|--------------------|----|
| Japan's Top 12 | 4 | Local Life..... | 20 | Itineraries | 26 |
| Need to Know | 16 | Month by Month..... | 22 | Family Travel..... | 32 |
| Hot Spots For..... | 18 | Get Inspired..... | 25 | | |

| | |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Tokyo | 34 |
| ...at a glance | 36 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Shopping in Harajuku..... | 38 |
| Tokyo National Museum..... | 40 |
| Meiji-jingū | 46 |
| Pop Culture in Akihabara | 48 |
| Sensō-ji..... | 50 |
| Day Trip to Nikkō..... | 54 |

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Sights..... | 60 |
| Activities..... | 69 |
| Tours | 73 |
| Shopping | 73 |
| Eating..... | 79 |
| Drinking & Nightlife..... | 88 |
| Entertainment..... | 93 |
| Where to Stay..... | 99 |

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Kyoto | 100 |
| ...at a glance | 102 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Fushimi Inari-Taisha..... | 104 |
| Kyoto's Geisha Culture..... | 106 |
| Kinkaku-ji | 110 |
| Sights..... | 114 |

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Activities | 126 |
| Shopping | 127 |
| Eating..... | 128 |
| Drinking & Nightlife.... | 133 |
| Entertainment..... | 135 |
| Where to Stay | 139 |

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Nara | 140 |
| ...at a glance | 142 |

| | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Tōdai-ji..... | 144 |
| Sights..... | 150 |
| Tours | 151 |
| Shopping | 152 |
| Eating & Drinking | 152 |

| | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Japan Alps | 154 |
| ...at a glance | 156 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Shirakawa-gō | 158 |
| Tsumago-Magome Hike..... | 160 |
| Takayama | 162 |
| Matsumoto..... | 164 |

| | |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Fuji Five Lakes | 166 |
| ...at a glance | 168 |

| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| Mt Fuji..... | 170 |
|---------------------|------------|

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Kawaguchi-ko..... | 174 |
| Fuji-Yoshida..... | 176 |
| Motosu-ko | 177 |

| | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Hiroshima | 178 |
| ...at a glance | 180 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Peace Memorial Park..... | 182 |
| Day Trip to Miyajima | 186 |
| Sights..... | 188 |
| Eating & Drinking | 188 |
| Entertainment..... | 190 |

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Osaka | 192 |
| ...at a glance | 194 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Eating Out in Osaka ... | 196 |
| Day Trip to Himeji-jō | 200 |
| Sights..... | 202 |
| Activities..... | 205 |
| Tours | 205 |
| Shopping | 206 |
| Eating..... | 207 |
| Drinking & Nightlife... | 208 |
| Entertainment..... | 209 |





| | |
|-----------------|------------|
| Naoshima | 212 |
| ...at a glance | 214 |

| | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Benesse Art Site | |
| Naoshima | 216 |
| Activities | 218 |
| Eating | 218 |

| | |
|-----------------|------------|
| Hokkaidō | 220 |
| ...at a glance | 222 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Skiing & | |
| Snowsports | 224 |
| Shikotsu-Tōya National Park | 228 |
| Sapporo | 232 |
| Niseko | 233 |

| | |
|------------------|------------|
| Kagoshima | 236 |
| ...at a glance | 238 |

| | |
|------------------|------------|
| Hiking on | |
| Yakushima | 240 |
| Kagoshima | 242 |
| Yakushima | 243 |
| Ibusuki | 245 |

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Okinawa | 246 |
| ...at a glance | 248 |

| | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Yaeyama Islands | 250 |
| Okinawan Cuisine | 254 |
| Naha | 256 |
| Ishigaki | 258 |

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Kii Peninsula | 260 |
| ...at a glance | 262 |

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Walking the | |
| Kumano Kodō | 264 |
| Kōya-san | 266 |
| Tanabe | 268 |
| Hongū | 268 |



| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| In Focus | 271 |
| Japan Today | 272 |
| History | 274 |
| The People of Japan | 282 |
| Food & Drink | 286 |
| Arts & Architecture | 292 |
| Onsen | 297 |
| Ryokan | 299 |

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Survival Guide | 301 |
| Directory A–Z | 302 |
| Transport | 309 |
| Language | 315 |
| Index | 317 |
| Symbols & Map Key | 322 |

The Daibutsu (Great Buddha) in Nara's Tōdai-ji temple (p144)

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Plan Your Trip

Japan's Top 12



Tokyo

The city that has it all

Tokyo is one of the world's reigning cities of superlatives – the dining, drinking and shopping are all top class. It's a city always in flux, which is one of its enduring charms, forever sending up breathtaking new structures and dreaming up new culinary delights. It truly has something for everyone, whether your ideal afternoon is spent in an art museum or racing through the streets of Akihabara in a go-kart. From left: Kabukichō (p59); 21_21 Design Sight (p64)

1



Naoshima

Island of contemporary art

Naoshima is Japan's top destination for contemporary art and architecture. An island in the Inland Sea, it functions as one big open-air museum, with buildings and installations from leading international creators – all designed to enhance the glorious natural scenery. Much of what visitors find so compelling, however, is the blend of avant-garde and rural Japan: there are villages here that remain a vital part of the island's artistic renaissance.



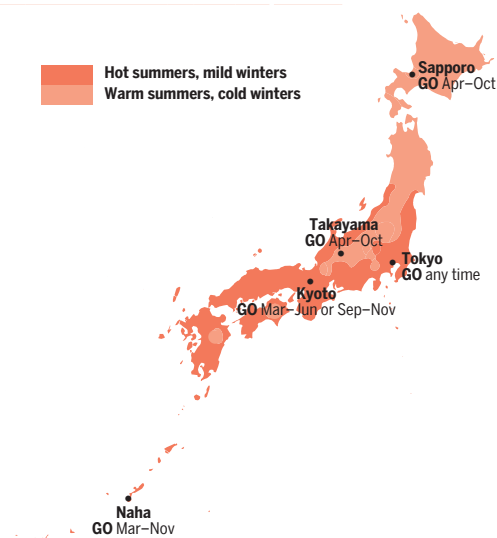
Plan Your Trip

Need to Know



When to Go

Hot summers, mild winters
Warm summers, cold winters



High Season (Apr & May, Aug)

- Weather in April and May is generally fantastic; August is hot and humid but the season for summer festivals.
- Accommodation is pricey and hard to find during cherry-blossom season (late March to early April), Golden Week (early May) and O-Bon (mid-August).

Shoulder (Jun & Jul, Sep–Dec)

- June and July fall in the rainy season (except Hokkaidō); typhoons roll through in September.
- Prices and crowds increase in resort areas during autumn foliage season (November).

Low Season (Jan–Mar)

- Cold days and snowy mountains make this peak ski season, but affordable and uncrowded elsewhere.
- Many businesses close over the New Year period (end December to early January).

Currency

Yen (¥)

Language

Japanese

Visas

Visas are issued on arrival for most nationalities for stays of up to 90 days.

Money

Post offices and some convenience stores have international ATMs. Most hotels and department stores, but only some restaurants and ryokan, accept credit cards.

Mobile Phones

Purchase prepaid data-only SIM cards (for unlocked smartphones only) online, at airport kiosks or at electronics stores. For voice calls, rent a pay-as-you-go mobile.

Time

Japan Standard Time (GMT/UTC plus nine hours)