

Welcome to Japan

Japan is a world apart – a cultural Galápagos where a unique civilisation blossomed, and today thrives in delicious contrasts of traditional and modern. Its spirit is strong, warm and welcoming.

Culture

Standing at the far-eastern end of the Silk Road and drawing influences from the entire continent, the Japanese have spent millennia taking in and refining the cultural bounties of Asia to produce something distinctly Japanese. From the splendour of a Kyoto geisha dance to the spare beauty of a Zen rock garden, Japan has the power to enthral even the most jaded traveller. And traditional culture is only half the story: emerging from Tokyo's Shibuya Station and soaking up the energy, lights and sounds of the city is like stepping out of a time capsule into a future world.

Accessible Exoticism

Since the Jesuits first visited Japan in the 17th century, travellers to Japan have found themselves entranced by a culture that is by turns beautiful, unfathomable and downright odd. Staying in a ryokan (traditional Japanese inn) is utterly different from staying in a hotel. Sitting in a robe on tatami (woven floor matting) eating raw fish and mountain vegetables is probably not how you dine back home. And getting naked with a bunch of strangers to soak in an onsen (hot spring) might seem strange at first, but try it and you'll find it's relaxing.

Food

Savouring the delights of Japanese cuisine on its home turf is half the reason to come to Japan, and you can easily build an itinerary around regional specialities and sublime restaurants. Eat just one meal in a top-flight Tokyo sushi restaurant and you'll see what all the fuss is about. The Japanese attention to detail, genius for presentation and insistence on the finest ingredients results in food that can literally change your idea of what is possible in the culinary arena.

Outdoors

The wonders of Japan's natural world are a well-kept secret. The hiking in the Japan Alps and Hokkaidō is world class, and with an extensive hut system you can do multi-day hikes with nothing more than a knapsack on your back. Down south, the coral reefs of Okinawa will have you wondering if you've somehow been transported to Thailand. And you never have to travel far in Japan to get out into nature: from cities such as Kyoto, just a few minutes of travel will get you into forested mountains.



Why I Love Japan

By Chris Rowthorn, Author

I've spent most of my adult life in Japan and now it feels like home to me. I love the food: it's incredibly varied and nourishing and there seems to be no end to the culinary discoveries one can make. I love the combination of a hike in the mountains followed by a long soak in an onsen. But, most of all, I love the meticulous and careful nature of the Japanese people, reflected in every aspect of Japanese life, from trains that run right on time to sublime works of art. Put it all together and you come away with a country that still intrigues me even after almost 20 years of living there.

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