

Survival Tips

Tech

Can I use my iThingie in Japan?

Should I bring a laptop?

Will it spit flames and melt into a heap of bubbling plastic slag if I plug it in?

Yes, maybe and no.

But in what order?

Read on and find out.

Electricity

- Generally, no worries
 - 100 volt in Japan vs 110 in US
 - 50 Hertz in Tokyo, Hakone
 - 60 Hertz in Tajimi, Kyoto (same as US)
 - Hair dryers will run slower at 50hz. Shouldn't affect much else.
- Two-prong plugs are same as ours
 - No adapter necessary except 3-to-2 prong
- Purchasing electronics? Get stuff made for oversea tourists.

You can plug pretty much anything you bring into any outlet you find in Japan. The voltage is a bit lower but not enough to matter.

The frequency is a bit lower in the north/west of the country (Tokyo, Hakone). There it's 50hz vs the 60hz we're used to here in the states). In the south/west (Tajimi, Kyoto), it's the same 60hz as here in the US.

What does that mean in practical terms? Anything with a motor will run a bit slower your hair dryer for example. Otherwise, you'll probably never notice any difference.

The outlets are all for two-prong plugs. If your gadgets have a third round grounding plug, you'll want to bring an adapter. You can find them for under a buck at any hardware store or probably even at Kroger.

The rooms we stay in won't have many outlets, so a small triple-outlet adapter will be useful, especially if you've got more than one or two gadgets. Remember, your roomie might need to recharge too.

If you're planning on buying any electronics in Japan, make sure it's intended for use in the US. FM radios, for example, are a bit different; ours don't work there. Theirs don't work here.

Internet

- Most hotels have wireless in lobby if not wireless or wired access in rooms
- Homestay families may or may not have internet service
- The temple will almost certainly not have wireless

Other than our overnight stay at Ninnaji Temple in Kyoto, most places will have a public computer in the lobby, either free or inexpensive to use.

Be warned: Japanese keyboards are WEIRD.

There's often wireless or wired service in the lobby, if not in individual rooms.

Tokyo: New Izu Hotel had a computer in the lobby, along with wireless. Some of the rooms had wired service and we're pretty sure they were extending that to all rooms gradually.

Hakone: we're staying in a different set of buildings than we're used to, so we don't know exactly what's available. There's wireless in the "living room" of the building with the baths, though it was touchy to connect to.

Tajimi: You'll be staying in private homes, so we can't predict what will be available. Internet access in Japan is fairly cheap and fast by our standards, so you'll probably have access.

Kyoto: We're staying in a new (to us) hotel, but it should have at least lobby access, if not in each room.

Photography

- Anybody using film?
- SD / CF cards widely available but better to bring your own
- Standard AA batteries widely available
- How many will bring computers?
 - Partner with roomie, help each other xfer pics to CD, USB stick, USB external drive, etc.
- I'll have a card reader that can handle SD and CF (compact flash) memory cards.

Film availability is about the same as here; so-so at best and shrinking all the time.

Cards for digital cameras are widely available but prices may be higher than here. I'd suggest bringing at least two.

Standard AA batteries are available everywhere (even in vending machines sometimes).

Don't forget the charger for your camera, and consider bringing an extra battery for it.

If you're considering bringing a computer, think about pairing up with someone else; one of you can carry the computer, the other can bring e.g. an external USB drive or CD/DVD burner so you can both back up/transfer your photos.

I will have a computer and a reader that can handle SD and CF cards, and will be able to help you transfer photos off your camera to some other medium in an emergency.

Photo storage

- Learn size of average picture on your camera and how many pictures you can store per GB
- Storage options
 - Computer
 - CD/DVD
 - Lots of cards
 - Thumb drive(s)
 - External HDD
 - iPod with adapter

How much storage do you need for your photos?

Check the size of an average photo at the settings you plan to use, then work out how many photos your camera's card can hold.

Hint: Nowhere NEAR as many as you'll want to take. Most people are amazed at how many photos they take per day.

You do NOT want to run out of storage space a few days into the trip, or even halfway through the day.

So bring extra cards and work out how you'll back up the photos from the first filled up card while you're filling up the second (third, fourth ...) cards.

Should I bring a computer?

- For occasional net access, no.
- A small one can be handy. A big one is probably too much to carry.

Should you bring a computer?

If you just need occasional internet access, no. If you rely on being connected for whatever reason, you may want to bring your computer.

If you have a great big hulking 17" laptop, I wouldn't.

A netbook or iPad could be very handy.

If you plan on typing your journal as you go (not a bad idea, really) a computer (or some type of device) would be good to have.

Share with a friend, perhaps.

Cel phones

- US cel phones do not work in Japan
- We will rent two Japanese cel phones
- We'll know the numbers in advance and provide dialing instrux for your families
- Emergencies only
- Inbound only

Our cel phones, with very few exceptions, simply don't work in Japan. Including so-called "world" phones, which work all over the world ... except in Japan, Taiwan and Korea.

Helen, Steve and Jen will share two rented Japanese phones.

We'll have the phone numbers a week or so before we leave and will make sure you have them. Give them to your families so they can reach you in case of emergencies.

And please, ask them not to call unless it's really an emergency, and to remember the time difference.

You will not be able to call home using these phones.

For non-emergency calls, you and your family can use hotel phones (you'll be able to give your family the phone numbers of our hotels before we leave).

Or consider using Skype. If you buy a few dollars worth of Skype credit before you leave, you can call from your computer, iPad, iPod Touch or other wireless device to landline/cel phones. Inexpensively.

While you won't be able to make calls on your cel phone, if it has wireless or apps, they should work fine, so you may still want to bring it along.

ATMs / Cash machines

- Bring \$ traveler's checks, convert to Yen at airport
- Cards aren't widely accepted
- ATMs
 - Few have English menus
 - Not all accept foreign cards



We **STRONGLY** suggest that you bring traveler's checks (AMEX are most widely accepted) or cash and convert to Yen at the airport right after we arrive.

We allow time for this and will help you with it.

Credit cards aren't nearly as widely accepted in Japan as they are in the US, so you **WILL** need cash. In Yen. It's illegal to use other currency. But that's ok, because nobody will accept anything but Yen anyhow.

You won't be able to use US currency or any type of traveler's checks except at currency exchanges.

Exchanging currency at banks is a long, drawn-out process that we won't have time for during banking hours, so don't plan on it.

ATMs? There are fewer of them than there are here, they may not have English menus, and they may not accept foreign cards.

But ...

Bring a card anyhow, just in case

- Post offices and some convenience stores (7-Eleven)
- VISA more widely accepted than others
- Before leaving home
 - Notify your bank
 - Make sure your card can be used abroad
 - Check on fees and daily/monthly withdrawal limits
 - Memorize your PIN

If you have a credit card/ATM card, you may want to bring it as a backup.

Most post offices and 7-Eleven stores have ATMs that accept major foreign cards and have English menus. While we won't have time to find and use a bank branch with an exchange desk, post offices and 7-Elevens are easier to find and faster to use.

VISA is probably the most widely accepted.

Before you leave, check things out with your bank or credit card company.

Let them know that you'll be in Japan and give them the dates. Allow a few days at the end for safety. Otherwise the bank might assume that charges in Japan are fakes and refuse to accept them.

Make sure you can use your card there. Some banks don't allow transactions abroad, or at least forbid them in some countries.

Ask about fees and daily withdrawal limits. And remember that a "day" means "24 hours" not "That was Monday (night), this is Tuesday (morning)".

Memorize your PIN, and make sure it's a numbers-only one. Foreign PIN keypads often don't have letter keys. If you can't enter your PIN, you don't get any money!

Summing it up

- Electronic gadgets: no worries
- Internet: usually available
- Camera: extra cards, extra batteries
- Cel phones: yours won't work, we'll have two that will
- Money: traveler's checks/cash, ATM as backup

Most electric and electronic gadgets will work ok.

Internet will be available in most places we stay; it might be wireless, wired, or computer in lobby.

Bring extra storage cards and extra battery/batteries for your camera. You'll probably be taking more pictures per day than ever before in your life.

Your cel phone probably won't work in Japan, even if you have a world phone/multi-band phone. If it's a smartphone, you'll want to bring it anyway. The apps and camera can be handy, and you can probably make calls via Skype when wireless is available.

ATMs? Don't rely on them. Bring cash or traveler's checks and exchange it all for Yen at the airport.