

FAQ on how to get around Japan for first-timers for GGF7

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I often find that there are so many misconceptions about Japan, especially for travelers there. Although the web has solved this to some extent, since now there are many websites dedicated to the subject, it is still hard to find a comprehensive guide tailored for techno-geeks like us traveling to conferences held in Tokyo. As such it motivated me to write up a document for such a target audience.

This is an FAQ intended to supplant various web guides on Japan, especially geared towards folks coming to GGF7 in Shinjuku. If you have any recommendations regarding the content, please email matsu@is.titech.ac.jp.

1. Transportation

1.1. *What flights are there to Japan/Tokyo?*

- There are numerous flights directly from all over the world, in particular the major Asia-Pacific, North American, and European cities. In fact flying from West Coast US to Tokyo is closer than flying to Europe.

1.2. *How long do the flights take?*

Depends on the route and the seasonal Jet stream fluctuations, but typically:

- 9-10 hours from San Francisco
- 8-9 hours to San Francisco
- 12-13 hours from Chicago
- 10.5-11.5 hours to Chicago
- 10-11 hours from Frankfurt
- 11.5-12.5 hours to Frankfurt

1.3. *Is it expensive to fly to/from Japan?*

- Not really, esp. during winter and early spring. Here is what I found on Expedia.com for early March, roundtrip.
 - Chicago - \$849 (United Airlines)
 - Los Angeles - \$507.35 (unspecified), \$706 (ANA, recommended)

- London - \$1264 (ANA & JAL, recommended)
- Paris - \$930 (Air France)
- Frankfurt - \$842 (Air France)
- Sydney - \$1178 (Qantas)
- Seoul - \$428 (United)

I am sure people can find better fares than these. Sometimes it takes as much to fly within the U.S. If there were a choice I would recommend flying a Japanese carrier (JAL or ANA) for their extremely courteous service and hospitality.

1.4. Do I need visa to travel to Japan?

Depends on a country-by-country basis, but chances are you do not. Many countries do not require visas due to reciprocal Visa exemption agreement, including U.S., Canada, many EU nations, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and Singapore. Some countries that do require include Brazil, Russia, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, etc. When in doubt check http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/visa/index.html for details.

1.5. I arrived at the Narita Airport. How do I get to the Keio Plaza hotel or nearby hotels in Shinjuku?

- You could take either a bus or a train. Once you get out of the customs into the arrival lobby, you will see a counter with transportation signs. The best one is the counter where they have both trains and busses---look for a counter with orange (airport bus), red and blue (JR and Keisei trains) stripes. There you will be able to make a good decision on which method of transportation to pick. It looks like this:



Airport shuttle busses are by far the easiest, since they go direct to several hotels in the Shinjuku area, including Keio Plaza. However, it could take a long time if it gets stuck in traffic, sometimes more than 2 hours, and is less pleasant. (It is pretty good as an outgoing method TO the airport). The fare should be approximately 3000 yens (about \$25). See <http://www.limousinebus.co.jp/e/> for details, and http://www.limousinebus.co.jp/e/timetable/narita/shinjuku_h.html in particular for timetables for busses to/from Shinjuku. I will recommend a bus especially for people arriving on late flights (from North America. European flights typically arrive in the morning. Flights from Asia-Pacific vary).

If you are more adventurous, or looking for a little bigger seat, I may recommend trains instead.

Personally, I prefer trains since they are more comfortable and usually faster. There are two train lines served by two different companies that serve the Narita Airport, JR (Japan's national railway system) Narita Express, and Keisei (private regional railway company) Skyliner. If you were an expert than you could ride either one, but then you will not need this document. The recommendation is to ride on the Narita Express bound for Shinjuku. It will take a little over 1 hour to get to the Shinjuku Station. You will find the detailed info on the Narita express here: <http://www.jreast.co.jp/nex/index.htm>.

Once you get to Shinjuku, climb up the stairs at the middle of the platform. You get to a gate exit on a bridge, and you will see a taxi stand. Hop on the taxi, and tell the driver to go to the Keio Plaza hotel. It is a fairly short ride with minimum charge of about 660 yens. You could be adventurous and walk. On the map http://www.3deearts.com/tokyo/tokyo/shinjuku/shinjuku_a.gif, The station gate indicated above lands you around the area where it says "Lumine 2" on the Southernmost part of Shinjuku Station Here is what you will see first (the Lumine building):



Keio Plaza hotel is the big brown skyscraper you see in the back, so you could just walk towards that. It should be a 10-15 minutes walk. As you may see on the map there are over 10 skyscrapers in the area, so be sure to study which one is which beforehand on the map.

1.4. OK, I safely got to the hotel. How do I get around town?

There are numerous sites that cover travel within Tokyo, including the links below. Basically, getting around Tokyo with trains and busses is really easy. All stations have English signs, and some even have Korean and Chinese signs.

That said, Tokyo is a very large city, and has probably the most complex train system in the world. Getting from one end of the town to another could take some time, esp. when you have to switch

Those that (1) accept bills, and (2) have some respective button with the marks of IO or PASSNET cards above will only qualify. There should be at least one such machine, perhaps more. When in doubt ask somebody around you.

Irrespective of whether you buy a ticket or a card, you stick it in the gate machine to enter the platforms, and again when you exit. Don't forget to pick them up again when you pass through (a ticket will be collected and will not be given back when you exit, while a card will be given back.) A gate also has an LED display on exit that tells you how much you have remaining on the card. If your ticket or your card does not have sufficient amount for the ride, you will be naturally blocked, and bells and whistles will sound. Don't panic---just back away quietly, and look around for a fare adjustment machine near the gates. All you need to do is to stick in the ticket or the card into the machine, press the English button, and it will tell you how much you owe. Insert coins or bills, and you get the adjustment ticket. Go to a gate again and stick in the adjustment ticket and this time the gate should open and away you go. There is no penalty for adjusting the fare later using the adjustment machine. So if you are not sure how much you need, you could buy a minimum ticket and adjust later. Of course it is more convenient to buy a prepaid card as mentioned above.

Also, There are no "controls" on commuter trains, but they may check your tickets on longer rides like the Shinkansen.

Every train, including will have a detailed schedule down to the last minute. They are usually very punctual. However, the last train leaves usually a little past midnight, and do not run until around 5:00AM.

1.6. How about Taxis?

Taxis are convenient but fairly expensive for longer distances, especially in Tokyo due to the size of the city itself; still for short rides, or during real late night hours, and also in smaller cities like Kyoto they may be preferred mode of transportation. Several things to remember---it is always best to show a map, or write something down to instruct the driver. They are usually very courteous, but you don't have to tip them. The rear door on a taxi opens and closes automatically, actually controlled by the driver remotely. Some taxis accept credit cards, but not all of them, so be sure to check before you ride. Empty taxis can be picked up not only in taxi stands but also on the streets. You can tell if they are empty or not by looking at the lamp on the roof---if it is lit then it is empty, otherwise it is not. Also it will display a little red sign on the front window that says "Empty" in Japanese.

1.7. How do I get to Kyoto and other parts of Japan outside the Tokyo area?

For long distance train travels, such as to Kyoto, you would use the JR trains, in particular, the

famed “Shinkansen” or “Bullet Train” Superexpress in English. It travels at maximum 300km/hour. There are three types of Shinkansen Eastbound from Tokyo to Hakata via Kyoto, Osaka, etc., Nozomi (2 hours to Kyoto), Hikari (2.5 hours), and Kodama (4 hours). Nozomi is slightly more expensive but faster. There are open and reserved seats for Hikari and Kodama (All seats on Nozomi are reservation only), but it are recommended that you do make a reservation. First class (the Green Car) is about 30-50% more expensive. There are 3-4 Nozomis per hour, and more Hikari’s. See http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~ev7a-ootk/time/etime_01.htm for a timetable in English. Note that Northbound Shinkansen has different name and types of cars.



Shinkansen and the JR “Midori-no-madoguchi”

To purchase long distance train tickets, go to the JR “Midori-no-madoguchi” or the “Green Ticket Counter”. There should be one at each JR station. You can also buy Shinkansen tickets at a travel agency (you may wait longer though), or from a special vending machine at Shinkansen Stations. Trains for Kyoto leave from Tokyo station, which is 4 stops away from Shinjuku on the Chuo (Orange) JR line. It is approx. 14,000 yens one way from Tokyo to Kyoto on a Nozomi, and 13,000 yens on a Hikari, both with seat reservation.

One note is that it may be favorable to get the JR Japan Rail Pass, which is really a steal deal and only available to foreign tourists (<http://www.japanrailpass.net/>). Note that the “exchange” order must be bought outside Japan and exchanged once you are in Japan (at Narita, for example). Once you are in Japan the exchange pass cannot be obtained, so you must plan ahead. One caveat is that you cannot ride on a Nozomi using the Japan Rail Pass (you can ride on a Hikari or a Kodama).

1.8. What about Flying?

You could also fly, and the plane tickets are fairly inexpensive. Note that the domestic airport for Tokyo is Haneda (TYO) and *not* Narita (NRT). Haneda is much closer to town and as such much more convenient to get to. Refer to the respective web pages of airline companies for detailed flight schedules and prices. There are no flights from Tokyo to Kyoto, however, since it cannot compete with Shinkansen at that distance. The rule of thumb is that if you are going beyond

Osaka it may be worthwhile to fly. All Nippon Airways (ANA) is a Star Alliance partner, while Japan Airlines (JAL) and its partner Japan Air Systems (JAS) are partners with American Airlines, Air France, British Airways, etc.

Japan Airlines <http://www.jal.co.jp/>

All Nippon Airways <http://www.ana.co.jp/>

Japan Air Systems <http://www.jas.co.jp/>

One thing that surprises people is that, for many major domestic routes they employ big planes like the 747, 777, 767 and A310. In fact you may never get to fly on any smaller planes like the 737 from Haneda. One reason for this is that capacity at Haneda is limited, and airlines do not have the option of increasing the # of flights to handle traffic.

To get to Haneda you will either ride a Keikyuu line from Shinagawa, or a dedicated monorail from Hamamatsucho, both Yamanote line stations. Using the Keikyuu line will get you to the airport a little quicker from Shinjuku, but could be a little confusing. As such I recommend the monorail (<http://www.tokyo-monorail.co.jp/english/index.html>) It will be sufficient if you get to the airport 40 minutes before the flight. (For International flights at least 1.5 hours).

1.8. How do I obtain Maps of Tokyo?

The best way is to get one before you travel via an online bookstore. Websites such as <http://www.paperlantern.net/map/index.html> and http://www2.gol.com/users/andrew/tokyo_living_us.html give a list of Tokyo atlas and guidebooks, from which you can even find a link on Amazon.com. This will probably be the cheapest and the most reliable way, and will allow you to study Tokyo beforehand.

If you happen to be too busy to do a few clicks online, you could go to one of the Kinokuniya book center stores in Shinjuku, one on the East side of the Station near Studio Alta (as seen on the Shinjuku map), and one at the new Takashimaya times square building South of the Shinjuku station.

There are several online maps of Japan but they all seem to be in Japanese; I have not been able to find any English ones.

1.8. What if I get lost?

Don't worry, you will anyhow. Most smaller streets don't have street names; rather the address system works in blocks for most cities (exceptions are Kyoto and Sapporo that have rectilinear streets like Manhattan and all streets are numbered). So maps are really essential if you really want to walk around, and typically they will have green plaques indicating the block #, or larger plaques that tell you the name of the town and the block #, typically on houses and power poles.

You will still get lost of course however; Then, people will usually be very kind to foreigners who have lost their ways. I have heard of many wonderful stories of people who have gone out of their ways to take lost foreign visitors to stations, etc. The trick is to try to ask younger people, most of which can speak some level of English. Most directions will give you landmarks, so getting around is easy (turn right on the corner of Seven-Eleven...).

1.9. But what if I get lost at night in some strange part of town? Isn't walking around some parts of town dangerous?

Of all the major cities in the world Tokyo is probably one of the safest. This is not to say we have absolutely no crimes whatsoever, but chances are if you are a lowly criminal with rather low IQ you will never want to hassle with foreigners, and they will leave you alone. This will also apply mostly to our Asian friends, since personally I have never felt being endangered walking around anywhere at any time within Tokyo. So, if you are female and walking around past midnight along the streets of Shinjuku there should be absolutely no problem, even within Kabukicho (see the Section on Shinjuku for Kabukicho details). (But don't sue me if you do get mugged : -)

A note about Shinjuku in particular. Shinjuku is one of the areas in Tokyo where you may see a few homeless people, in stations or on streets, sometimes in their cardboard "homes". No cause for alarm---they are quite harmless, law abiding citizens. Getting into any trouble with anyone is their extreme concern, since they will quickly end up in Jail, and/or be secluded from what little sanctuary they have found. In fact rogue teenagers in isolated parks sometimes beat them up so being amongst people is a happy shelter for them. As such, unlike other cities in the world seeing homeless people is not a sign of deterioration of safety.

1.10 Will my Bank Card/Credit Card work with local ATMs?

It should. The last few years all Japanese ATMs have been hooked up to international networks such as Cirrus. are usually located in Banks, Post Offices, and Convenience Stores, but usually not in supermakerts as is in the U.S. Operating hours in Tokyo are usually 8:00-21:00. There are a number of large banks and a large post office near Keio Plaza, so obtaining money should not be a problem. On the other hand, I have never tried one myself, so it is always a good idea to have a little cash. As a last resort there is a Citibank Shinjuku Minamiguchi (South Exit) branch 5 minutes walk from Keio Plaza (Washington Hotel is closer); there is another branch (Shinjuku Higashiguchi branch) in the shopping area near Alta, Kinokuniya bookstore, and the Isetan/Mitsuokoshi/Marui department stores. see <http://www.citibank.co.jp/en/shpatm/top.html#01> for a map.

2. Social Manners

2.1 Do I need to tip in Japan?

- No, not ever. There is no tipping practice anywhere. All courtesy is basically free, including the smile you get at McDonalds (yes, seriously they have that on their menu here.) Some fancy restaurants and bars may add 10% or so of the bill as "Service charge"; it will be indicated on the menu.

2.2 How do I bow to people?

Bowing is the proper way to greet people, especially in Asia. However, bowing customs differ from country to country. It is safer to shake hands, which is more international.

2.3. Is there anything socially inappropriate I should not do?

For most people from outside Asia, one would look obviously different; in such a case, social inappropriateness will usually be forgiven, so don't worry. For Asian folks this may be different, but again it will become obvious by language and as such one need not worry in the long run.

One thing you might not do is to use a cell phone and talk in a loud voice on trains and other rather confined public environments, including the shuttle bus to/from Narita. Technically, cell phones are prohibited on commuter trains, and for long-range trains including the Narita Express, you are supposed to go to the deck area to use the phone. Of course if it is short and/or urgent, people are usually forgiving, but try to speak quietly and you should keep the conversation short. Also, hands-free earplug/microphone is very uncommon, so people may think you have lost your mind since they will think you are speaking loudly to yourself.

2.4. I hear that rushhour trains are pretty bad. Will I survive if I go on trains?

In general big cities in Japan are crowded, especially Tokyo. Despite a massive public transit system, over 10 million people commute every day, and train rush hours could be bad. However, it is not as bad as you may think. When walking in the station and platforms try to follow the people in the "lane" and other people will avoid you in a smooth manner. If you are tall then it will not be uncomfortable since you will be standing out in the crowd. Japanese commuters are quite used to being squeezed, so be like them and try to position yourself in a comfortable fashion. Getting on and off trains are quite orderly; again try to follow the crowd. As they say, "When in Tokyo, do as the Tokyo guys do". Of course by 10AM or so rush hour will be over. Evening rush hour is not very serious unless you are going outbound on a suburban commuter line.

2.5. (Others?)

3. Communications and Other Electrical Connectivity

3.1. Does my GSM/CDMA/Tri-Band/etc/ phone work in Japan?

- No, unfortunately. Japan uses mostly NTT's PDC standard, which is a different TDM

system from GSM. AU uses Qualcomm CDMA but you will need a specific phone that allows roaming here. Some 3G phones may work (such as VodaPhone W-CDMA/GSM2), but chances are your phone is an older 2G GSM phone. If in doubt ask your carrier company.

3.2. *OK, then can I rent/purchase a cell phone?*

- By all means, yes. They should have cell phone rental service at the airport. Check the web for good deals. You may also be able to purchase prepaid phones at phone shops and convenience stores. In most cases, unlike in US and Europe, incoming calls are free, i.e., the caller pays the fee only (some rental phones do charge incoming calls). Like in many countries, contracting on a monthly basis is much cheaper but difficult unless you have a Japanese home or business address here.

3.3. *Hmm, that is expensive. Can I just use a public pay phone, or phone from my hotel room?*

- Certainly. Unlike in American or European hotels, most Japanese hotels DO NOT put surcharges on calls from rooms. For calls outside your room, it is best to get a phone card and use a public pay phone. Note that there are two types of phone cards: the more popular magnetic stripe type, and the IC Card type, and they are not compatible. It is best to get the former type for now. You can purchase phone cards at various KIOSKS and convenience stores. They also typically may have vending machines for phone cards besides pay phones. As a last resort most phones accept coins (10 and 100 yens).



3.4. *How about Internet access?*

During GGF7 we plan to provide full wireless Internet access in meeting places. Keio Plaza also has free broadband 10Base-T access in every guest room. In other cases most Internet providers offer some form of roaming service, such as AOL, Compuserve, and GRIC.

3.5. *What electrical/phone plugs, power adapters, and transformers should I bring?*

The electrical plug is essentially identical to those in the U.S., except that there are very few 3-prong wall outlets. So, for laptops with 3 prong plugs, bring a 3 prong to 2 prong adaptor, or you could readily buy one near the big electronics discount stores near Keio Plaza. A better choice is to buy a “flat” plug multiplier they sell everywhere including convenience stores (see photo). The prong will fit very conveniently above the flat surface. For European as well as other plugs you

will have to bring some adaptor.



Electricity is 100Vs across the country. For almost all laptops (and in fact desktop PCs) this should be fine, since adaptors are typically rated at 90(100)V – 240V. Power is VERY stable here, so there is no need of surge suppressors. Most American equipments work fine, since the voltage is lower by only 10-15%. For European and other parts of the world where 240V is the norm, the rule of thumb is that, if the equipment works in North America, it would work in Japan, otherwise it will not. Of course I trust no one will really bring washing machines or vacuum cleaners. If you happen to forget your transformer, again you could buy one at the electronic discount stores near the hotel. See the Shinjuku section for details.

The phone prong is exactly the same as in the U.S. i.e., RJ-11. Modems will work here as well. The TV format is NTSC, so American video tapes will play. However, the TV frequency is different, so it is pretty useless to bring a TV to watch here. You also will have to be proficient in Japanese :-). Most hotels have cables that show American and sometimes European news shows like CNN and BBC. Even if not, they usually have satellites where you get edited versions of news of major countries in the morning, including France, Germany, Russia, as well as Asian countries like Korea, China, Singapore, etc. Such programs are shown in simultaneous two-track audio, so you will have to switch to the non-dubbed track to hear the original audio track of respective languages.

For radio, AM frequencies are the same, but the FM is different: it is 76Mhz – 90Mhz instead of the standard 88-108Mhz. Some international radios offer “wideband” FM where you get 76-108Mhz. Some stations in Tokyo have mostly English DJs, such as as 77.1Mhz. Of course you get Internet radio easily these days, so this should not matter much.

(Below are still draft)

4. Food and Beverage

4.1. It's expensive to dine in Japan, is it not?

It is generally misconceived that eating and dining in Japan is expensive. I claim the contrary; I find dining in Japan generally cheaper than US and Europe (still expensive compared to other Asian countries, though). Such misconceptions were probably generated out of people mostly

dining in top-rate restaurants in large Western hotels, with menus like a big sirloin steak, when it used to be 80 yens to the U.S. dollar. Tokyo has zillions of restaurants and eating places to choose from, and they vary considerably in their price range from being very cheap like the 59 yen hamburger at McDonalds or 120 yen rice balls in convenience stores, to outright expensive if you go to a wrong Sushi place unknowingly and get charged 200 dollars or more. In general, however, if you eat like a Japanese does, it will be quite inexpensive.

4.2. OK, How do I dine cheaply in Tokyo?

<http://www.frommers.com/destinations/tokyo/0085027734.html> and <http://www.tokyoessentials.com/eats.html> has a good summary of eating cheaply in Japan. I would add to that --- vending machines, and convenience stores, that are literally everywhere --- as great sources of inexpensive dining. In fact, a life of a city-dwelling Japanese will not exist without these two wonders of modern lifestyle.

Vending Machines --- vending machines are everywhere. You cannot swing a dead cat without hitting a vending machine (no kidding).

Convenience Stores --- A Sanctuary, usually open 24 hours. They are everywhere in Tokyo, much much so compared to the U.S., and facilitate a variety of quick food. They even have microwaves and heat up a bento box for you. Expect to pay 500 yens (\$4.00) or so on a standard bento box, and you can pick up extra salads and side dishes for a few dollars more. Irrespective of their store brands, most offer essentially identical stuff.

International: Seven-Eleven, Circle-K

Domestic: Thanks, Family-mart, Lawson, (Yamazaki) Daily Store, etc.

Fast and Cheap Dining

Other cheap eats:

American

McDonalds--- Hamburger is 59 yens (about 50 cents), cheaper than a can of Coke.

Kentucky Fried Chicken – The oldest American fast food

Starbucks – they are everywhere now. Prices are comparable to the U.S.

Japanese

Beef Bowl Yoshino-ya

Various Japanese Noodles

Bento

Onigiri – the Riceball, the equivalent of sandwiches

Others (Chinese)

Rah-men (Chinese noodle) --- Chinese noodle shops may not necessarily be Chinese restaurants, but specialized noodle shops.

Department stores --- There are numerous department stores in Shinjuku. The top floors are usually pretty good restaurants that serve food at reasonable prices. They also typically have sample plastic display with prices. The underground floors usually have prepared (and unprepared) foods, esp. (often very good) bento boxes. Expect about 500 yens for cheap ones, while luxurious ones could be 1000-2000 yens.

4.3. How about beverages? Is it safe to drink tap water?

Tap water quality is generally pretty good in Japan; unless otherwise noted, tap water is perfectly OK to drink. Otherwise, you could go to a convenience store, a supermarket, or a vending machine to buy mineral water. Carbonated water are not common, however, and those available at supermarkets are typically imported from Europe (like Perrier), and expensive compared to other beverages.

In restaurants water is free; Some Japanese and Chinese restaurants would serve you free tea, but you could also order water separately.

Beverage on menu in restaurants tends to be generally expensive, however, compared to what you can get in vending machines---they could typically cost 200-500 yens, as opposed to 100-150 yens. If you want to keep you costs low the advice is to stick to free beverage (tea or water) in restaurants. Don' worry; as mentioned earlier there must be more vending machines then people here in Tokyo, and there are numerous convenience stores to supplement them.



A typical Tokyo Scenery---rows of vending machines

By the way, cans and (PET) bottles must be thrown into their own recycle bins. There are usually

bins available near a vending machine.

4.5. How about drinking (alcohol) in Japan?

Legal drinking age in Japan is 20, but are not strictly enforced. Stores need licenses to sell alcohol but often Supermarkets and convenience stores have licenses. Most restaurants do serve beer and sake. Overall, Japan is very lenient to alcohols; although there are lots of people that get drunk in parties and wanders through the nightlife streets of Shinjuku (many of whom I am sure you will encounter), alcoholism is not a big social problem.

Nomi-ya or Izaka-ya (Japanese Bar) – definitely recommended to go, cheap drink, lots of inexpensive little Japanese bar food.

Sake – the most famous Japanese drink, essentially rice wine.

Beer – Japanese beer. Very high quality Pilsner beer, very similar to good German beer due to their origin.

Shochu – Japanese gin/vodka equivalent. Very inexpensive. Typically drunk with on the rock, diluted with either cold or hot water, or mixed with some Juice or soft drinks to create cheap cocktail

You can also find beers and Shochu cocktails in vending machines, but they usually stop selling them by 23:00 by law. (unlike soft drinks which are of course sold 24/7).

4.6. I love Sushi, and really looking forward to having one in Japan. But you warned me that they could be very expensive. How do I find a reasonable Sushi place?

Kaiten-zushi (Rotating Sushi (on a conveyor)). There are all-you-can-eat Sushi places.

There are pretty good chain stores such as Sakae-zushi and Sushi-sei chains, that are not conveyor-belt places, but still inexpensive.

There are all-you-can-eat Sushi places, many in Shinjuku

If there are menus with prices, or prices on the wall, chances are the place is expensive.

Sign of a cheap Sushi place

- There are plates going around in a conveyor belt
- There are signs on the menu with prices
- The sushi chef would write down something when you order
- There is a long waiting line

Sign of an expensive Sushi place

- there is no mention of prices anywhere
- the sushi chef never writes down anything, but seem to memorize anything people order
- there are no waiting lines
- the customers are rich-looking businessmen, and/or women who look well-dressed and rather "professional"
- When in doubt, don't be afraid to ask, and bail out before you start eating.

Even in expensive Sushi places, it is generally cheaper to order a "set" menu, and not individual ones piece by piece. This especially applies to lunch Sushi menus --- at expensive Sushi places, a piece of separately ordered Sushi may cost as much as an entire lunch set menu.

If you are really willing to spend some money (like \$70-\$100) and craving for the best Sushi in town, my recommendation is Fuku-zushi in Roppongi Tel. 03-3402-4116, just behind the Hard Rock Café. It is also one of the most favorite Sushi restaurants for (relatively high-class) foreign residents here in Tokyo. It is advisable that you get a reservation. When you go there you might mention my name.

There are sushi sold in department stores, supermarkets, and convenience stores. The ones in department stores are pretty good.

4.7. I am a Vegetarian. What are my choices?

Depends on how strict a vegetarian you are. If it is simply that you don't eat meat but eat fish, then it is easy, as there are numerous choices, especially in Japanese food. If you don't eat any animals including fish, then your choices are narrowed down considerably, but there is still plenty of Japanese food based on rice, tofu, Japanese noodles, seaweed, vegetables and plants, etc. Since most restaurants don't have special vegetarian menus, it is best to ask your choices, and or ask if a certain ingredient can be removed. See <http://www.jpvs.org/ep/rest.html>, which is run by Japan Vegetarian Society (JPVS), for guides to vegetarian restaurants.

In practice, there are very few vegetarians in Japan, although in the old feudal days 150 years ago people did not eat four-legged animals due to Buddhist beliefs. Even now people do not eat as much beef or pork as Westerners, so there is less motivation for health reasons.

At GGF7, we plan to serve most meals buffet style so you get to choose, but recommendations are still welcome.

4.8. I can't read Japanese. How do I order something?

The best strategy is to go where there are food samples on display. They are especially available for restaurants in department stores. Some restaurants have English menus, but not often. The so-called “Family Restaurants” typically have photo menus. Generally, Japanese like to see what food they are ordering; not having any photo samples is one sign (although not always) of being an expensive place, although cheaper places may not as well for a different reason (because food samples cost money and space), so it is not a 100% criteria.

4.9. I am in a Japanese restaurant. But what's that weird thing on my plate? I have never seen that in a Japanese restaurant back home.

Although there are exceptions, most Japanese restaurants abroad serve limited type of food that is either 1) popular amongst the residents there and well established, 2) have affinity with local/international cuisine, 3) could be made with ingredients available locally. A real Japanese cuisine is much more broader, and will contain a lot of stuff familiar to a local like myself but not commonly served outside the country. Still, it is most likely to be edible. Unless you have dietary or religious restrictions, be adventurous and munch away, and then ask some Japanese around you. Rest assured that you would probably not get poisoned in any way.

5. Shinjuku

<http://www.japantips.net/english/tokyosubway/114s4.html>

<http://www.tokyoessentials.com/shinjuku.html>

Department Stores

The three best department stores are Isetan, Takashimaya, and Mitsukoshi. They evolved from clothing merchants dating back 300 years ago, and would be equivalent to Harrods of London, or Saks Fifth Avenue.

The lesser high-class ones are just by the station, Odakyu and Keio, both run by railway companies. They are more akin to Macy's in the U.S. There is also a Mylord and Marui, which are geared for younger, people, mostly teens and 20s.

Nishi-Shinjuku (the Skyscraper Area)

Most of Nishi-Shinjuku is skyscraper area, Keio Plaza is bordering the area between skyscrapers and the station, an area which is primarily discount shopping and cheap bars and restaurants and other shops. You will find gigantic discount camera/electronics/computer stores such as Yodobashi-camera, Sakura-ya, Bic Camera Sofmap, etc. (They are all like Fry's) Also you will find Starbucks (to which Mary Spada @ GGF had commuted every day

on her visits), as well as McDonalds, along with various Japanese fast food places such as Yoshino-ya, convenience stores, etc.

Shinjuku 3-chome (The shopping area)

This is where you will find extensive array of stores from various discount stores such as , International bookstore Kinokuni-ya, and exclusive department stores such as Isetan, Mitsukoshi, and Barney's New York.

Kabuki-cho (Nightlife (Red-light) District)

Note that although Kabukicho is typically referred to as a Red-light district, it is very different from those in the U.S. or Europe where sometimes you may have a fear of your property or well being. Rather, it is a combination of bars, restaurants, movie and play theaters, large gaming arcades, well as a variety of you-know-what primarily in the back streets, but most are not prostitute joints but rather offer more mild "services". In fact I have been frequenting Kabukicho since high school because they have a concentration of excellent movie theaters. Again, it is a fun and perfectly safe place especially for foreign visitors to walk around, even past midnight.

6. Places to go

6.1. *What parts of Tokyo would be interesting for me to go, besides Shinjuku?*

Well Tokyo is a big city with a long history, so there are lots of places to visit, both new and old. It takes days to visit everything, so don't try to do everything if this is your first visit. You can find various guides to scenic areas as well as modern popular locations such as shopping areas, so consult them for details. <http://www.japantips.net/english/tokyosubway/tokyosubway.html> gives a good overview of interesting locations on each subway line.

Here I will give an addendum especially geared towards techno-geeks like ourselves:

- Akihabara – by far the world's biggest electronics geek town. If you are familiar with Fry's in the U.S., think about putting Fry's in a 10-story building, and replicating it 100 times into an entire town. Akihabara is like a Disneyland for geeks where many of us Japanese scientists have grown up in our childhood.

Although there are various online sites specialized to introduce the latest and the greatest in various gadgetry in Japanese (such as <http://watch.impress.co.jp/akiba/> and <http://db.ascii24.com/buyer/akiba/>), unfortunately there are not too many of those in English. For an "official" map refer to <http://www.akiba.or.jp/english/> but actually the most interesting

computer shops are located around the North-West section of the map, and even more North, way beyond the Myojin street. http://www.tnt-audio.com/tours/akihabara_e.html gives a pretty good overview but it is mostly intended for audio fans and not computer mania. It also recommends you to go on a weekday but I would rather recommend weekends, especially Sunday, since they will block off the road, and the entire town becomes bustling with all kinds of non-standard people, such as an army of young mushy Japanese Animation geeks, a fleet of young girls wearing company livery giving out various promotional goods, street peddlers selling software in various legal as well as slightly non-legal manner, etc.

To get to Akihabara from Shinjuku, hop on the JR Chuo Line (the Orange commuter line) bound for Tokyo Station. Two stops from there is Ochanomizu station, where you will get off and change to the JR Sobu line (Yellow) train on the other side of the platform. Akihabara is just one stop beyond. You will find yourself on a platform about 30 meters from the ground. Be sure to climb down the stairs near the *center* of the platform, and not at the end, as the latter will take you to the perimeter of the town instead of the center, and you may lose your way.

Once you buy something there, will it work in your respective countries? It depends, and the rule of thumb is usually the same as bringing electronic stuff in. Anything with an AC adaptor will be OK (sans radio frequencies and such) if used directly in 100-120V regions, or with transformers if they are not rated at 240Vs. Heating devices or devices with large motors may be problematic. For duty free shops in Akihabara, they usually have export models, or at least English guides to how to use them outside Japan.

For most Europeans Akihabara prices should be a bargain, since the VAT is only 5% here, and prices tend to be lower in any case. For Americans it varies--one thing people buy often is the SONY noise canceling stereo earphone, which seems to be much more expensive in the U.S. Also, Mini-Disks and Digital Cameras are often good buys.

Finally it is traditional in Akihabara to bargain or "haggle". Sometimes they may refuse but that means you are getting a best deal anyhow in that case. Expert haggling is an art that you acquire as you spend your childhood and adolescence there, but it is still worth a try even if it is your first try (You can't haggle CDs and videos, though). Also, shop around for the best price, since there are zillions of stores.

- Various companies have interesting company showrooms and museums. SONY has a large showroom building in Ginza, the oldest and the highest-class shopping area near the Imperial Palace. Honda has a large company showroom in Aoyama where they display their cars and motorcycles as well as their racing machines such as the BAR Formula 1 car. Toyota has a gigantic showroom called Amlux <http://www.amlux.jp/Tokyo/english/index.html> in the Bayside shopping area where not only they have essentially all the models they produce on display,

but have VR rides as well as a real ride on their dedicated course of about 1km (but I am not sure whether they will let people who do not have a Japanese license drive.) Nearby that there is a National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation (Mirai-Kagaku Kan) <http://www.miraikan.jst.go.jp/en/index.html> where they have Honda's two-legged robot as well as have a floor dedicated to IT. The most interesting I found was a display machinery where they simulate the Internet with black and white billiard balls; a mechanical "router" makes routing decisions based on a simplified form of an IP address encoded as black and white balls in the network packet, which again is a series of balls traveling along a rail.



Simulated Internet

6.2. Can I visit XXX? (No)

Here I will enlist some places where you may think you could go but cannot

- The Imperial Palace: you cannot go inside. However, there are parks just outside the palace you could go see the inner mort. The palace is actually 5 km in circumference, surrounded by the Uchibori-dori (The inner mort road), which is a major road and also a good jogging course.
- Mt. Fuji: You can only climb partially during March till where the cars can go. Beyond that it is closed until May.
- Sumo: Not in Tokyo. The professional Sumo tournament (which is held 6 time a year) will be held in Osaka during March 9-23. So you could travel to Osaka right after GGF to see it if you have time, especially if you combine it with a trip to Kyoto close by.
- The Earth Simulator: general tour is not available.
- Golf: Japanese golf courses are usually prohibitively expensive unless you know someone in the club.

6.3. OK, then do you have any recommendations?

Again, the best recommendations are in the various links and guidebooks. They will usually recommend places such as the Asakusa and Meiji Shrine for Japanese history, the Tsukiji fish market and Kappabashi (cooking merchants town) for amusement, and for shopping Harajuku/Shibuya (for young folks), Ginza (for rich folks), as well as glamorous nightlife in Roppongi Various museums such as all the National Museums in Ueno as well as the Edo (Old

Tokyo) museum in Ryogoku are very pleasant places to go. These plus the places I mentioned above for geeks are great places to go. The website <http://gojapan.about.com/> lists a lot of interesting places you could go to, inside as well as near Tokyo.

Here are some alternatives:

Inside Tokyo

- Bus tour of Tokyo – There are English bus tours available that will take you to famous places. It is surprising how some people have never done this---In fact I have never taken one myself :-)) but I have taken an English bus tour of Kyoto on a recent occasion, and it was actually very enjoyable, since the guide educated us considerably on various historical aspects of Kyoto. In any case Hato (Pigeon) Bus (<http://www.hatobus.co.jp/english>) would be the most famous, but you could probably find other tours on the Web and also at Hotels.
- River cruise – there are river cruise tours along the bayside area as well as Sumida river. You will get to see the real downtown Tokyo area along the river basin. It is different from Shinjuku, since Shinjuku is in the Western part of Tokyo, which is the plateau area. See <http://gojapan.about.com/library/weekly/aa022601a.htm> for details.
- Kabuki – The Kabuki Theater near Ginza offers translated shows for foreign guests.

Outside Tokyo

- Tokyo Disney Sea – A part of Tokyo Disneyland Resort. Unlike Tokyo Disneyland, which is pretty, much equivalent to the Magic Kingdom Parks in Anaheim and Orlando, Tokyo Disney Sea is unique in its attractions, and is much more adult oriented. Also you might get a kick out of Mickey speaking Japanese. Located along the Tokyo Bay near Maihama, it is easily accessible by a train ride from Tokyo Station. http://www.tokyodisneyresort.co.jp/tds/e_index.html. It is much less crowded than when it first opened about a year ago.
- Nikko – You might go to Kyoto for obvious reasons, but there are also other good alternatives such as Nikko if you prefer the nature.
- Hakone – This is the mountain/hot springs/ryokan (Japanese-style inn) area closest to Tokyo travel there is easy since there is a direct scenic express (Called the “Romance Car”) being run by the Odakyu Railways Company leaving from Shinjuku. It may be a good to purchase the Hakone Freepass <http://www.odakyu-group.co.jp/english/freepass/index.htm> at the Shinjuku station, allowing you to get free rides on all transportations in the Hakone area (except taxis). It is about 80 minutes to the foothills of Hakone, which is already a hot-springs area. You could go up the mountains on a train, and again there are

many hot-springs hotels and ryokans along the way. On the top of the mountains there is a lake (Ashino-ko) and various scenic highways as well as lake cruise, as well as a semi-active volcanic area. It also has a very good car museums filled with Ferraris and Porches--the "Ferrari Museum of Art" <http://www.ferrari-museum.co.jp/>, definitely recommended if you love racing cars. There are lots of other very good museums in Hakone, such as the Open Air Museum _

<http://www.odakyu-group.co.jp/english/sightsee/hakone/arts/Echokbi.htm>

that feature a large collection of Picasso sculpture in a 17-acre garden, etc. Overall, it is a very well developed tourist and scenic area, but with sufficient nature and diversity that it is an enjoyable place to spend the weekend.

- Skiing- In the Japanese Alps, and more so in Hokkaido (the Northern Island) during springtime, skiing is an interesting option.

7. Health and Sanitation

- Pharmacy

Derek Simmel recommends "If people need prescriptions filled or perhaps need to pick up some cold medicine or something like that while they're in town, it may be helpful to give them some kind of pointers to what to look for in a drug store. You could also point them to the American Pharmacy in American Yurakucho (03-3239-7604)".

In fact Shinjuku has lots of discount pharmacies near the hotel, and they should be able to give you directions. Some Japanese tips: Cold (disease) = "Kaze", Cold (temperature condition) = "Samui", Cough = "Seki", Fever = "Netsu", Stuffy Nose = "Hana-Zumari", Headache = "Zutsuu", Stomach Ache = "Fukutsuu", General Pain = "Itami" (or "Itai" for "I have pain"), Itch = "Kayumi", Nausea = "Memai", Diarrhea = "Geri", Constipation = "Benpi". Injury = "Kega", Antiseptic = "Shoudoku", Band-Aid = "Bando-Eido", Vitamins = "Bitamin".

Also, most hotels should have in-house doctors. Japanese medical bills are much less expensive than those in the U.S., but are not free like Denmark. Moreover, since travelers are not covered with national insurance systems like ourselves, they will have to pay the full price. So, it is best if you have any insurance coverage that will reimburse you later.

A useful link would be Tokyo Weekender Health Services Index:

<http://www.weekender.co.jp/new/health-fitness/medical-services.html>

- Toilets

There are two style of toilets in Japan, the Western style and the Japanese style. The Western style is becoming increasingly dominant, but in some cases you may encounter a Japanese

style, which is designed to be performed in a crouching style. In such a case, they usually have a mixture of both, so look for a western one. If you can't find one, and the situation is critical, then you might be adventurous to try it. In such a case the advice is to crouch down looking forward and not backwards towards the frontal cover area. Observe the directions of the slippers in the photo.



- For western-style toilets, hotels increasingly automated vides (in other words, toilet cleaning shower after you perform the intended actions) attached to the toilet bowl itself. This is quite sanitary, and a boon especially for people with certain anal conditions. In fact most homes have one nowathesedays, including all the toilets in my house. The only problem may be that, although some machines have pictographic buttons, in some cases they are written in Kanji and difficult to tell without instructions. Still, it will probably pay to be adventurous---hey, we never read manuals when we use our Windows applications, do we?

Baths

Japanese Baths are traditionally narrow and deep instead of wide and shallow. This is because the baths are intended to be taken sitting down warming yourself instead of washing your body inside. For most hotels showers are western-style and designed to be taken inside the baths, but in homes it is designed to be taken outside. This is why most Japanese homes have separate toilets.

If you go to a hot springs place they will usually have a pool-size shared baths, and may or may not have individual baths assigned to a room. The proper manner is to wash your body outside the pool, where they will facilitate a series of shower equipments. After then you can go into the pool. Some pools are outside the building, and designed to be quite scenic. For most pool baths men and women are separate, but there are some cases where they have “kon-yoku” or “mixed bathing”. Even in such cases you still bathe in nude and do not wear swimsuits.

8. Websites for Reference

Tokyo Metro website:

<http://www.chijihonbu.metro.tokyo.jp/english/index.htm>

see Visiting Tokyo and Guide for Foreign Residents tabs)

Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau:

http://www.tcvb.or.jp/en/index_en.htm

Japan Travel Bureau:

<http://www.jtbusa.com/enhome/>

<http://www.jtb.co.jp/eng/> <-- includes links for meeting planners

Online Travel Guides regarding Tokyo:

<http://www.tokyoclassic.com/>

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/north_east_asia/tokyo/index.htm

<http://www.frommers.com/destinations/tokyo/http://www.fodors.com/miniguides/mgresults.cfm?destination=tokyo@156>

Metropolis On-line Magazine:

<http://metropolis.japantoday.com/default.asp>

Metropolis Visitor's Guide:

<http://metropolis.japantoday.com/worldcup/defaultwc.asp>

Tokyo Journal Online:

<http://www.tokyo.to/>

Another great resource for foreigners in Japan: The Tokyo Weekender

<http://www.weekender.co.jp/index.html>