

**BEST CAPITALS:** Nara (p. 443), Kyōto (p. 473), and Kamakura (p. 219) all once had a claim to being Japan's *it-city* and have the sites and sights to prove it. Tōkyō (p. 110) takes the honors at present, but what the future holds is still open to debate (p. 158).

**BEST EXPLOSIVES:** The Sumidagawa Hanabi Taikal (p. 201), Tōkyō's biggest pyrotechnic show, lights up the city like nothing else. Aso-san (p. 619) is the world's biggest volcanic caldera, belching poisonous gas over Kyūshū.

**BEST BATHROOMS:** The gold- and platinum-tiled beauties at Kanazawa's Sakuda Gold and Silver Leaf Company (p. 179) are worth a cool ¥30,000,000.

**JUICIEST ATTRACTIONS:** Learn about the wonders of Vitamin C at Okinawa's Nago Pineapple Park (p. 650). Try the *konatsu* in Katsurahama (p. 560)—round like an orange, yellow like a lemon.

## SECOND-BEST PLACE TO SEE

**TRADITIONAL JAPAN:** For those who accept some imitations, Nakamura (p. 562) self-identifies as "Little Kyōto." Kawagoe (p. 252) claims the title "Little Edo"; travelers without time machines will have to take their word for it.

**BEST SUNRISE (DISPUTED):** Dawn at Mt. Fuji's summit is either incredible or pitiful, depending on who you ask (p. 246).

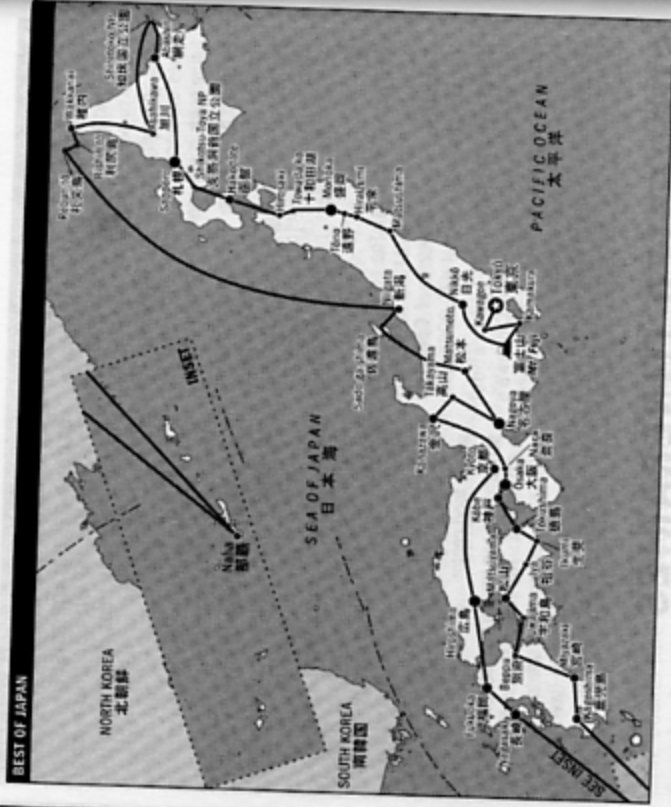
**BEST PLACE TO PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD:** The mealtime gimmicks at Tōkyō's Kagaya (p. 146) include crayon-scrawled menus, choose-your-own international ambiance, and frog costumes. A couple neighborhoods away is Kappa-bashi-dōri (p. 178), plastic food central.

**MUSEUMS MOST LIKELY TO GIVE YOU A COMPLEX:** The Nawa Insect Museum (p. 387) in Gifu encases scads of creepy-crawlies, while Freud would have a field day at Uwajima's Sex Museum (p. 575).

# SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

**BEST OF JAPAN (2 MONTHS):** A full tour of Japan takes you island-hopping from sprawling metropolises to cultural capitals to rural retreats and back again. Start in the thick of things, with a dip into the mind-boggling urban hotpot that is Tōkyō (4 days; p. 110). Once you've caught your breath, daytrip to historic Kawagoe (1 day; p. 252). Next stop Kamakura (1 day; p. 219) for serious temple-sighting, then try your luck (and hiking boots) against iconic Mt. Fuji (2 days; p. 244). Recover from the climb, then start your northward travel with the brilliant shrines at Nikkō (1 day; p. 259). Pass through Sendai (p. 286) to reach seaside Matsushima (p. 293), then trek inland to the majestic sights of little Hirazumi (1 day; p. 301). Dip into folk-tale culture in Tōno (1 day; p. 302) and the surrounding valley for a refresher. Keep moving north, sampling the noodles in Morioka (1 day; p. 304), the volcanic crater lake Towada-ko (1 day; p. 321), and the *samurai* sights of Hirosaki (1 day; p. 314). From Aomori (p. 317), head to Hakodate (1 day; p. 670), your introduction to Hokkaidō. Ride the

rails up the coast, visiting Shikotsu-Toya National Park (1 day; p. 679) along the way, and ending up in cosmopolitan Sapporo (2 days; p. 684). Ship eastward to fishing port Abashiri (1 day; p. 709), then take your time poking around vivid, volcanic Shiretoko National Park (2 days; p. 715). Change trains at Asahikawa (1 day; p. 698) for northerly Wakkanai (1 day; p. 719), which puts you in spitting distance of Russia. Ferry out to idyllic Rishiri-tō and Rebun-tō (2 days; p. 721), then catch the ferry from Otaru or take the train back to Honshū. Either way, end up in Niigata (1 day; p. 274), convenient base for culture-rich Sado-ga-shima (2 days; p. 276). Castle town Matsumoto (1 day; p. 334) is a good first plunge into the Japan Alps. Reemerge at urban Nagoya (1 day; p. 324), then wash off the grime at quaint Takayama (2 days; p. 345) and tradition-speckled Kanazawa (1 day; p. 377). Nara (2 days; p. 443), with its horde of historic sights and giant bronze Buddha, is worth a long, awed look. The contrast of über-modern Ōsaka (2 days; p. 430) and its serious nightlife may be a shocker, but interna-



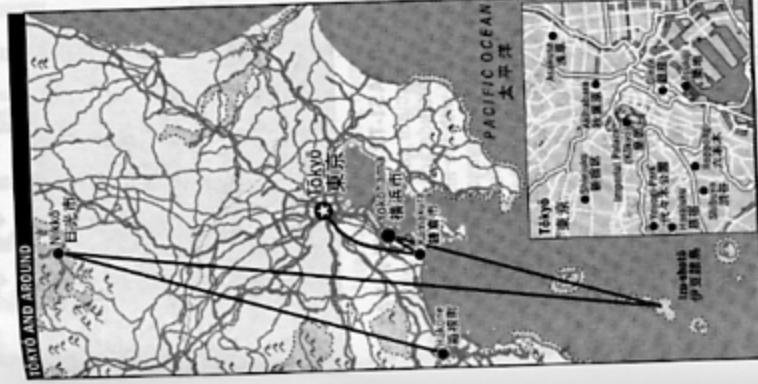
tional **Kôbe** (1 day; p. 476) has a cuisine to soothe every taste. Cross the bridge to Shikoku, where **Tokushima** (1 day; p. 528) awaits; then slide down the southeast coast (p. 536) for sand and surf—**kumil** (1 day; p. 537) gets our pick. Slip through the vine-bridged **Iya Valley** (1 day; p. 549) on your way to literary **Matsuyama** (2 days; p. 565), and end up in compact, coastal **Uwajima** (1 day; p. 575). Catch the ferry to onsen-mad **Beppu** (1 day; p. 635), and continue your tour with a run down to nearly-tropical **Miyazaki** (1 day; p. 635) and a stopover in sunny **Kagoshima** (1 day; p. 619). If you can't get enough paradise, catch a flight or ferry to **Okinawa-hontô** (3 days; p. 636), starting in **Naha** (p. 639). Resume with a stop in **Nagasaki** (2 days; p. 619), and don't leave Kyushu without slurping noodles in **Fukuoka** (1 day; p. 584). The train runs to **Hiroshima** (2 days; p. 494), where thought-provoking memorials stand witness. End your whirlwind tour in **Kyôto** (4 days; p. 473), prime territory for *geisha*-spotting and sleeping in Japanese tradition.

**TÔKYÔ AND AROUND (3 WEEKS):** Begin your jaunt through the greater Tôkyô area with a swan-dive into **Shinjuku** (1 day; p. 119), the neon-festooned, concrete cyonure of Tôkyô. Sink or swim as you wade through the crashing tide of people at one of the busiest train stations in the world, and later, mingle with city revelers at one of Shinjuku's many *zakaya* (pubs), or, if you're feeling adventurous, at a joint in Kabukichô. Take a day to appreciate the aging Sensô-ji in **Asakusa** (1 day; p. 117) and buy the folks back home Japanese trinkets and candy galore. Conduct a sociological study of Japan's youth on the shop-lined streets of **Harajuku** (p. 117) and, on a Sunday afternoon, the greens of **Yoyogi Park** (1 day; p. 159). Discover the vanguard of Japanese nationalism within the walls of the **Imperial Palace** (1 day; p. 161), and just 24hr. later, feel the throbb of fashion and culture that pulsates through **Shibuya** (1 day; p. 118), the virtual epicenter of Japan. Set your inner electronics guru free at the playground of appliances in **Akihabara** (½ day; p. 119), and when you're ready for a taste of the West, **Roppongi** (½ day; p. 118) serves it up in *gaijin*-oriented



**CLASSICAL JAPAN (17 DAYS):** Though disasters, natural and otherwise, have forced the Japanese to rebuild is very ancient sites from rubble, history is very much alive in the religious and secular edifices remaining from the feudal past. From Kansai Airport, take the train and cable-car up through the clouds to **Koyas-san** (1 day; p. 467), the mountain home of Shingon Buddhism. After spending the night in temple lodgings (*shukubô*), attend morning services and explore ancient monasteries. Make your pilgrimage east to the cedar-shrouded Shintô heartland of **Ise** (1 day; p. 470), then backtrack to ancient capital **Nara** (1 day; p. 443) where some of Japan's oldest temples await. Begin your **Kyôto** caper (3 days; p. 473) with a Spartan stay at Myôren-ji (p. 404), then sweep through centuries of history at Tô-ji, the Kyôto Imperial Palace, and the Tokugawa castle Nijo-jo. Head west to play samurai in feudal fortress **Himeji-jô** (1 day; p. 476), and hop across the inland Sea to pilgrimage town **Kotohira** (1 day; p. 546). Cross Shikoku to see venerable Kôchi Castle and Chikurin-ji in **Kochi** (1 day; p. 546). Mosy over to **Matsuyama** for a look at the beautiful castle and a taste of the city's literary heritage (2 days; p. 565), and soak in the oldest hot spring in Japan at **Dogo** (2 days; p. 573). A ferry will take you to **Kyushû**; use **Beppu** as a jumping-off point for the ancient rock-carved Buddhist images at Usuki and Kunisaki-hantô (2 days; p. 635). To the west are port cities that reflect Japan's multicultural past: take in the Chinese temples and Dutch colonial heritage at **Nagasaki** (1 day; p. 619), and learn about Japanese Christians at **Shimabara Castle** (1 day; p. 604).

**WINTER WONDERLAND (3 WEEKS):** Snowbunnies know that the north of Japan is perfect for cold-weather fun. Warm your toes in **Matsumoto** (2 days; p. 334) before hitting the slopes at **Hakuba** (1 day; p. 339). **Nagano** (1 day; p. 324)



bars, clubs, and restaurants. Rise for an early morning promenade through the fish- and fruit-scented warehouses of **Tsukiji** (1 day; p. 164), and observe the most subtle daily exchange of ¥2.2 billion in the world. Experience a microcosm of Japan's contradictions in **Ginza** (1-2 days; p. 117), through traditional *kabuki* and gold-limited materialism. Head out of Tôkyô to pay respect to the Buddha of Buddhas at **Kamakura** (2 days; p. 219) and wander around the temples and shops. Catch a train to **Yokohama** and fuel your body at a savory Chinese restaurant and crane your neck at Japan's tallest skyscraper, the 296-foot Landmark Tower (2 days; p. 206). Ease out of your city skin and into the serene slip of **Izu-Shoto**, where you can splash on the beaches (3 days; p. 239). Ogle the opulence that laces the temples of **Nikkô** (2-3 days; p. 259) to prepare for the trip's end: relaxation in the onsen and on the slopes of **Hakone** (2 days; p. 229).



---

### 3. Tips for the Traveler

---

#### PLANNING YOUR ITINERARY

If you want to see everything Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku have to offer, plan on spending at least a year traveling about. Barring that, it's obvious you'll have to be selective in planning your itinerary. Decide beforehand what your priorities are.

If you're interested in feudal castles, you'll find them in Osaka, Nagoya, Matsue, Matsumoto, Himeji, Kumamoto, Okayama, Hiroshima, and Matsuyama. Japan's most famous gardens are Kenrokuen Garden in Kanazawa, Korakuen Garden in Okayama, and Kairakuen in Mito. Other beautiful gardens are Ritsurin in Takamatsu on the island of Shikoku, and Suizenji in Kumamoto and Iso Garden in Kagoshima, both on the island of Kyushu. Japan's most famous rock garden is probably the one at Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto.

If you're a camera buff, my own personal list of picturesque towns and villages in Japan includes Kyoto, Kamakura, Takayama, Shirakawa-go, Tsumago, Kurashiki, Mount Koya, and the tiny village of Chiran, south of Kagoshima. As for towns with historical significance, nothing can beat Kyoto, Nara, or Kamakura, three ancient capitals of Japan. These three towns are also where you'll find a majority of the country's temples and shrines. Other important Shinto shrines in Japan include the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, Ise Jingu Shrines located in Ise-Shima National Park, and Itsukushima Shrine on Miyajima Island. Mount Koya is the place to head if you're interested in spending the night in a genuine Buddhist temple.



And last but not least, Japan is blessed with a number of hot-spring spas, from its southern to northern tips. In fact, tourism in Japan began when bathing enthusiasts started traveling to hot springs simply for the joys of the bath. There are open-air spas in forests, sand baths, gigantic public baths, mud baths, sulfur baths, and just plain hot tubs. The closest hot springs to Tokyo are in Hakone and Izu Peninsula. Other famous hot springs include Matsuyama's Dogo Spa on Shikoku island; Beppu, Ibusuki, and Unzen on Kyushu; and Noboribetsu, Toyako Spa, Sounkyo, and Akanok Onsen in Hokkaido.

### One- and Two-Week Itineraries

If you have only one week in Japan—what can I say, I feel sorry for you. I suppose if I were faced with such a limited amount of time, I would spend it this way:

*Day 1:* Most likely you'll arrive at Narita airport, from which it's about a two-hour trip to your hotel in Tokyo. Spend the first day recuperating from your flight, settling in, and getting a feel for the city. Top off the day with a meal in a traditional restaurant.

*Day 2:* Because of the difference in time zones, most visitors from the Western Hemisphere find themselves wide awake in the wee hours of the morning. That's the perfect time to get up and head for Tsukiji Fish Market, the largest wholesale fish market in Japan. After a breakfast of fresh sushi at the market, take the Hibiya Line to Ueno, where you'll find the Tokyo National Museum. From Ueno, hop on the Ginza Line for Asakusa and its famous Nakamise Dori lane, with shops selling traditional products and the popular Sensoji Temple (also known as the Asakusa Kannon Temple). If you have time, take a stroll down Ginza's fashionable shopping district or head for Harajuku for its inexpensive clothing boutiques and Oriental Bazaar, one of the best places to shop for Japanese souvenirs. Spend the evening in Shinjuku, Roppongi, or another one of Tokyo's famous nightlife areas.

*Day 3:* Take the three-hour Shinkansen bullet train to Kyoto early in the morning. Spend the afternoon on a self-guided walk from Kiyomizu Temple to Heian Shrine and the Silver Pavilion, followed by shopping at the Kyoto Handicraft Center. Spend the night in one of Kyoto's many traditional Japanese-style inns.

*Day 4:* Take in Nijo Castle, Ryoanji Temple, the Golden Pavilion, and a few other sights of your choosing. If you want to see more temples in one of Japan's ancient capitals, head for Nara, where you'll want to spend at least two to three hours to see the Great Buddha, Nara Park, and Kasuga Shrine.

*Day 5:* From Kyoto there are several destinations good for a one-night trip, but you should leave Kyoto very early in the morning. If you want to spend the night in a Buddhist temple atop Japan's most sacred mountain, take the Kintetsu Railways private line (there are only a couple of departures daily, so plan ahead) to Kintetsu Namba Station, in Osaka, transferring there to the Nankai Koya Line for the two-hour trip to Mount Koya. If you'd rather spend the night in a quaint, picturesque town with some museums, board the Shinkansen for Kurashiki—less than two hours away, although along the way it's worth your while to make a two-hour stopover in Himeji, where you'll find Himeji Castle, considered by many to be the most beautiful feudal castle in Japan. And finally, if all you want to do is relax at a hot-spring resort, take the Shinkansen back toward Tokyo to Odawara, where you should transfer to a local train bound for Hakone.

*Day 6:* Spend the day sightseeing, departing by late afternoon for Tokyo. If your plane leaves early the next morning, you may wish to spend the night at Narita.

*Day 7:* Departure.

If you have two weeks, I would expand the above schedule as follows:

*Day 1:* Arrival at Narita airport, settling into your hotel and becoming acclimated to Tokyo.

*Day 2:* Same as in the one-week itinerary.

*Day 3:* If you'd like to spend another day in Tokyo, refer to the Tokyo chapter. If you'd rather make an excursion to one of the sites outside Tokyo, foremost on the

list are day trips to either Kamakura, with its many temples, or Nikko, which is famous for the colorful mausoleum of Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa.

*Day 4:* Tokyo to Takayama. Early in the morning, take the Shinkansen to Nagoya (about two hours), from which it's a three-hour train ride to Takayama, in the Japan Alps. Take time to explore the picturesque, narrow streets of this old castle town.

*Day 5:* Takayama to Shirakawa-go. Before departing Takayama, be sure to visit the morning market by the river. Take the 2½-hour bus ride along a winding mountain road to Shirakawa-go, a tiny village of rice paddies and thatched farmhouses. Spend the night in one of these farmhouses.

*Day 6:* Shirakawa-go to Kyoto. Since Shirakawa-go is rather remote, it takes the better part of a day to reach Kyoto. Luckily, the scenery is magnificent. From Shirakawa-go you can take a bus either back to Takayama or to Nagoya. In any case, you must afterward transfer to a train for the rest of the journey to Kyoto.

*Days 7 and 8:* Same as those spent in Kyoto in the one-week itinerary above.

*Day 9:* Kyoto to Mount Koya. Early in the morning, set out for Nara, visiting the Great Buddha, Nara Park, and Kasuga Shrine. From Nara you can take the Kintetsu Railways private line (departing from Nara Kintetsu Station) to Kintetsu Namba Station in Osaka, transferring there to the Nankai Koya Line bound for Mount Koya. If you have a rail pass, you can take JR trains to Hashimoto, there transferring to the private Nankai Koya Line. Spend the night on Mount Koya, one of Japan's most sacred Buddhist retreats, in a Buddhist temple.

*Day 10:* Mount Koya to Kurashiki. After paying your respects at Okunoin, the burial grounds of Kobo Daishi, return to Osaka and transfer to the Shinkansen bullet train at Shin-Osaka Station or a JR train at Osaka Station bound for Kurashiki. It's worth your while to make a two-hour stopover in Himeji along the way to see the beautiful Himeji Castle. Spend the night in one of Kurashiki's varied accommodations and take an evening stroll along the canal.

*Day 11:* Take in Kurashiki's sights, including its many museums. Leave for Hiroshima late in the day (about an hour away by Shinkansen).

*Day 12:* Hiroshima to Beppu. Spend the morning at Peace Memorial Park, with its museum and statues erected in memory of those who lost their lives when an atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. In the afternoon, take an excursion to the tiny island of Miyajima, with its famous Itsukushima Shrine. Take the overnight ferry from Hiroshima to Beppu.

*Day 13:* Spend a relaxing day in the hot-spring resort of Beppu, where you can visit the huge baths of Suginoi Palace or take a sand bath at Takegawara Bathhouse. Visit the Hells, boiling ponds created by volcanic activity.

*Day 14:* Beppu to Tokyo. Take an early-morning flight from nearby Oita (¥27,000, or \$216) airport to Haneda Airport in Tokyo, transferring to Narita Airport for the flight home.

Needless to say, this is something of a whirlwind trip, but it allows you to take in some of the best that Honshu island has to offer. If you want to get off the beaten track or have more time, refer to the chapters on Shikoku, Kyushu, and northern Japan for more ideas in planning your itinerary.

### THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Without a doubt the hardest part of traveling in Japan is the language barrier. Suddenly you find yourself transported to a crowded land of 120 million people where you can neither speak nor read the language. To make matters worse, few Japanese speak English, and outside the major cities the signs are usually only in Japanese. Menus, signs at train stations, and shop names are often only in Japanese.

However, millions of foreign visitors before you who didn't speak a word of Japanese have traveled throughout Japan on their own with great success. In fact, I've talked to foreign tourists who told me they thought it was actually quite easy getting around in Japan. Much of the anxiety travelers have in other countries is eliminated

stockinged feet, save yourself embarrassment by packing socks and hose without holes.

As for traveling around Japan, you'll want to have a folding umbrella. It's also good to carry a supply of pocket tissues, since most public rest rooms don't have toilet paper. You can pick up pocket tissues at newspaper stands near and in train stations. In the summer when the weather is hot and extremely humid, you'll see women walking around with wet cotton handkerchiefs that they use to wipe their faces. Try it; it helps keep you cooler.

Although most hotels and Japanese-style inns provide guests with towels, soap, washcloths, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and a cotton kimono called a *yukata*, some of the budget-priced inns do not. If you're traveling on a budget, therefore, carry these items with you. Many hotels and inns also provide a thermos of hot water or a water heater as well as some tea bags. If you're a coffee addict, you can save money by buying instant coffee and drinking your morning cup in your hotel room.

And at the risk of sounding perverse, I also recommend traveling with your own portable cassette player and headphones. Buy them once you get to Japan—they're inexpensive, and they may help preserve your sanity. Many of the buses traveling scenic routes (and tourist boats as well) run continuous commentaries in Japanese at a pitch so high it drives me crazy. I'd much rather look at the scenery to the accompaniment of my own choice of noise. And if you're staying in budget accommodations, chances are there won't be a radio, but only a TV with programs in Japanese. You can buy all kinds of attachments for portable cassette players, including tiny speakers and even a cord with outlets for two headphones so that both you and your companion can listen to the music.

Although it might seem superfluous to say this, pack lightly. Struggling through crowded train stations with big bags is no fun, and stations often consist of multitudes of stairways and overhead and underground passageways. In addition, trains in Japan do not have large overhead racks.

While traveling, you'll probably pick up souvenirs, gifts, and other items. I deal with this problem of accumulation by mailing boxes home to myself every two weeks or so while I'm on the road. All international post offices in Japan sell three sizes of cardboard boxes that come with everything you need for mailing packages abroad, which makes sending packages a snap. I simply show up with my bag, empty it of all unneeded items, buy a box, and leave the post office feeling pounds lighter. And, believe me, traveling with a lighter bag is almost like getting a new lease on life.

## BAGGAGE TRANSFER SERVICES

If you find yourself encumbered with luggage too heavy to handle, or you simply prefer to travel without bothering with bags, consider sending your luggage on ahead to your next destination through the services of a baggage transfer company. For assistance and information, ask your hotel porter or stop by one of numerous outlets throughout major cities. Among the companies providing this service are the **Kuroneko** company and the **Perikan-bin** company. The cost of transferring a bag from Tokyo to Kyoto is ¥1,240 (\$9.92) for luggage weighing 5 to 10 kilos (11 to 22 pounds) and ¥1,450 (\$11.60) for bags weighing 10 to 20 kilos (22 to 44 pounds).

## POSTCARDS

Unless you have a photographic memory and can remember places, names, and how to spell them, chances are all those snapshots of temples, shrines, and gardens will look distressingly alike once you get your film developed. My mother's solution: buy postcards of every place you visit. That way you can match snapshots with postcards, many of which may have such useful information as name, location, and

in Japan because the country is so safe and the people are so kind and helpful to foreigners. In addition, the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) does a superb job of publishing brochures, leaflets, and maps on various aspects of Japan.

### A Note on Japanese Characters

Many hotels, restaurants, and other establishments in Japan do not have signs showing their names in English letters. Appendix II lists the Japanese symbols for all such places appearing in this guide. Each establishment name in Japanese symbols is numbered, and the same number appears in ovals in the text following the boldfaced establishment name. For example, in the text Osaka's **Hotel Hokke Club** (169) is number 164 in the Japanese symbol list in Appendix II.

If you need to ask directions of a stranger in Japan, your best bet is to ask younger people. They have all studied English in school and are most likely to be able to help you. Japanese businessmen also often know some English. And as strange as it sounds, if you're having problems communicating with someone, write it down so that he or she can read it. The emphasis in schools tends to be written rather than oral, with the result that Japanese who can't understand a word you say may know all the subtleties of syntax and English grammar. If you still have problems communicating, you can always call the Travel-Phone, a toll-free nationwide helpline set up by JNTO to help foreigners in distress or in need of information. (Information on the Travel-Phone is given in the following section, "The ABCs of Japan.")

If you're heading out for a particular restaurant, shop, or sight, it helps to have your destination written out in Japanese. Have someone at your hotel do that for you. If you get lost along the way, look for a police box. Called *koban*, these are spread throughout neighborhoods virtually everywhere in Japan. They have maps of the district and can pinpoint exactly where you want to go if you have the address with you. Remember, too, that train stations in major cities and tourist resort areas have tourist information offices (*kaniko annaijo*), which can help you with everything from directions to hotel reservations. The staff may not speak any English, but I don't think you'll have trouble communicating your needs.

For specific words and phrases in Japanese, refer to Appendix I at the back of this book. In addition, *The Tourist's Handbook*, distributed free by JNTO, lists phrases in both English and Japanese for situations that may arise, from eating at a restaurant to staying in a Japanese inn.

## WHAT TO BRING

A friend and I once spent the better part of an hour trying to list items travelers may need that they wouldn't be able to find in Japan. We finally gave up. With the exception of perhaps some medicines, we decided that virtually everything is available in Japan—the problem lies in choosing the brand. Even bleach to make your hair blond is available in this nation of black-haired people. It doesn't make sense, therefore, to pack king-size supplies of toothpaste, shampoo, and other daily necessities. If you run out of something, you'll have no problem finding it in Japan.

One item you should absolutely bring with you is a pair of good walking shoes. Shoe sizes in Japan are much smaller than in the West and chances are you won't be able to find Japanese shoes that fit. Keep in mind, too, that because you have to remove your shoes to enter Japanese homes, inns, shrines, and temples, you should bring a pair that's easy to slip on and off. And since you may be walking around in

correct spelling of the object in question. And if your pictures don't turn out, well, you always have those postcards.

### DATES TO AVOID

The Japanese have a passion for travel, and generally they all travel at the same time. Trains and hotels are jam-packed at these times. Refer to the section in Chapter II on festivals and annual events for dates you should avoid. The worst times of year are the New Year's period, from December 28 to January 4; the so-called Golden Week, from April 29 to May 5; and the Obon Festival time, in mid-August—avoid traveling at all costs on these dates.

### CUTTING EXPENSES

During your first few days in Japan—particularly if you're in Tokyo—money will seem to flow out of your pockets like water. In fact, money has a tendency to disappear so quickly that many people become convinced they must have *lost* some of it somehow. At this point almost everyone panics (I've seen it happen again and again), but then slowly comes the realization that values are different here and that all it takes is a bit of readjustment in thinking and habits. Coffee, for example, is something of a luxury, and some Japanese are astonished at the thought of drinking four or five cups a day. By following the advice here, you'll be able to cut down on needless expenses, saving your money for those splurges that are really worth it.

If you're on a budget, avoid eating breakfast at your hotel. Coffeshops offer what is called "morning service" until about 10 a.m., which generally consists of a cup of coffee, a small salad, a boiled egg, and toast for about ¥400 (\$3.20). That's a real bargain when you consider the fact that just one cup of coffee usually costs ¥300 (\$2.40) to ¥500 (\$4). If you're addicted to coffee in the morning, you can save money by purchasing instant coffee and drinking it in your hotel room. Many hotels and inns in Japan provide a thermos of hot water or a water heater. Since jars of instant coffee tend to be heavy and bulky, you might want to buy individual packets of coffee, which come complete with powdered cream and sugar and are available at all large Japanese grocery stores. Called "coffee sticks," popular brands are Astoria and UCC.

Eat your biggest meal at lunch. Many restaurants offer a daily set lunch, called a *teishokku*, at a fraction of what their set dinners might be. Usually ranging in price from ¥700 (\$5.60) to ¥1,500 (\$12), they're generally available from 11 or 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. A Japanese *teishoku* will often include the main course (such as *tempura*, grilled fish, or the specialty of the house), soup, pickled vegetables, rice, and *tea*, while the set menu in a Western-style restaurant usually consists of an entrée, salad, bread, and coffee. Places to look for inexpensive restaurants include department stores (often one whole floor will be devoted to various kinds of restaurants), underground shopping arcades, around train and subway stations, and in nightlife districts. Some of the cheapest establishments for a night out on the town are the countless *yakitori-ya* across the nation, which are drinking establishments that also sell skewered meats and vegetables.

And if you really want to save money, you can avoid restaurants altogether. Japan is one of the most accomplished countries in the world when it comes to the preparation, packaging, and selling of pre-prepared foods. The *obento*, or box lunch, is a complete meal usually costing between ¥600 (\$4.80) and ¥1,000 (\$8) and commonly sold on express trains, at train stations, and in tiny neighborhood shops throughout Japan. In the basements of department stores you'll find counter after counter of pre-prepared foods, including grilled meats, salads, sushi, and desserts. More information on inexpensive meals is given in the food section in Chapter II.

Another way to cut costs is to cut short your time spent in Tokyo. Accommoda-

tions in Kyushu, for example, are much more reasonably priced than they are in the capital. Your best bet is to stay in a *minshuku*, a private home that offers rooms—usually Japanese style—to tourists. These average ¥5,000 (\$40) to ¥6,000 (\$48) per person and include both breakfast and dinner. And as for your travels in Japan, avoid taxis when possible and purchase a Japan Rail Pass if you plan on covering long distances.

### ORGANIZED CITY TOURS

With the exception of Tokyo and Kyoto, few city tours are conducted in English. This book is designed for the individual traveler who prefers sightseeing on his or her own, but if you're pressed for time or don't want to deal with public transportation to sights that may be spread throughout a city, consider joining a Japanese tour. It's certainly the easiest way to get to the various attractions, and perhaps there will even be a Japanese along who won't mind providing some translations.

### TOURIST BROCHURES

The Tourist Information Centers in Tokyo and Kyoto have a number of leaflets available on destinations throughout Japan, along with information on train, bus, and ferry schedules. Unfortunately, such leaflets are almost never available at the destination itself, so you must pick them up at the T.I.C. before leaving Tokyo or Kyoto. Below is a partial list of leaflets available:

<i>Sapporo and Vicinity</i>	<i>Nagoya and Vicinity</i>
<i>Southern Hokkaido</i>	<i>Ise-Shima</i>
<i>Moroka and Rikuchū Katigan</i>	<i>Tokyo, Walking Tour Courses</i>
<i>(Coast) National Park</i>	<i>Kyoto, Walking Tour Courses</i>
<i>Sendai and Matsushima</i>	<i>Nara, Walking Tour Courses</i>
<i>Nikko</i>	<i>Obayama and Kurashiki</i>
<i>Narita</i>	<i>Matsue and Izumo-Taisha</i>
<i>Hakone and Kamakura</i>	<i>Hiroshima and Miyajima</i>
<i>Mt. Fuji and Fuji Lakes</i>	<i>Fukuoka</i>
<i>Izu Peninsula</i>	<i>Beppu and Vicinity</i>
<i>Matsumoto and Kanikochi</i>	<i>Nagasaki and Unzen</i>
<i>Kanazawa and the Noto</i>	<i>Kumamoto and Mt. Aso</i>
<i>Peninsula</i>	<i>Miyazaki and Vicinity</i>
<i>Takayama and Vicinity</i>	<i>Kobe, Himeji, and</i>
<i>The Inland Sea and Shikoku</i>	<i>Takamatsuka</i>

## 4. The ABCs of Japan

Arriving in Japan for the first time can be rather overwhelming, primarily because of the language barrier. Just for starters: assuming that you don't know any Japanese, you won't be able to read any of the signs, which means that in the beginning you won't be able to tell the difference between even a post office and a bank, much less read the hours and days of the week they're open. In addition, few Japanese speak fluent English; therefore, if you make what's intended to be a quick and casual telephone inquiry, it's likely to turn into moments of pure frustration. In other words, finding information in Japan is sometimes a true test of ingenuity. To make your stay in Japan as problem-free as possible, this section is designed to answer some questions you might have before and during your trip with regard to such items as visa requirements, whether you should tip, business hours, and electric voltage of the country. For information pertaining to a particular city, be sure to check under the individual chapter headings. "The ABCs of Tokyo," for example, tells you