
Japanese Culture Peculiarities For Tourists To Know

Japan is an Eastern Asian country located in the Pacific Ocean, neighbouring Korea and close by China. In Japan the main language spoken is Japanese which consists of three main alphabets including; Kanji, Katakana and Hiragana. Modern Japanese language was developed in the Edo period from 1603 and 1868. Japanese culture in its early stages was heavily influenced by China, however throughout the Edo period, Japan formed an Isolation policy which limited contact with other countries. In 1868 when this period ended, Japan changed their ways and began practicing different cultures from all over the world. In more recent times, Japan has begun adopting more westernised culture including art, lifestyle and food (Globalization Partners, 2017). Japanese people are very social and enjoy giving back to others. Japanese people believe strong, secure and harmonious relationships are very important to have with everyone. Japanese people are softly spoken, avoid conflict and are extremely polite, especially to their elders.

The main religions in Japan are Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity. Shinto religion follows the main beliefs of the Four Affirmations. These are Traditions and family, Love of nature, ritual purity and Matsuri. It is important for Australians visiting Japan to know and understand that some things are expected of people when visiting different areas as well as understanding that doing certain things may be disrespectful. Ritual Purity is an important part of the Shinto religion. This means, prior to worship, a person must be spiritually and physically cleansed, whether worshipping in a shrine or at home. Therefore people visiting Japanese shrines should respect their beliefs and follow the rituals. Some of these religions require praying at certain times of the day which may impact communication as they may only be able to talk over the phone at certain times. It would be respectful to email and set a time to call that suits both parties if needed.

When communicating with someone from Japan over the phone, it is best to answer the phone saying - 'Hello, this is (name), from (company)'. Speak clearly at a slightly slower pace so they are able to hear and comprehend what you are saying. Don't use slang or jargon and use simple language so they can easily understand what you are trying to say. As Japanese people are softly spoken and very polite, it is important that you do the same when communicating with them. Try not to use a harsh tone or loud voice as this could be interpreted wrong and seen as angry or threatening and could potentially cause conflict. It is respectful to be very polite and well mannered, don't push for answers straight away as this can be rude and cause conflict.

When communicating via email with Japanese businesses, it is respectful to call the person you are emailing by their last name and use -san after, such as Mr. Takahashi-san. Continually using the same thread for different messages is also seen as rude, therefore for each new message, create a new thread and refer to the previous message in a few sentences. When communicating via email, it is also important to use simple language that can be easily understood.

A part of Japanese culture is for people to take off shoes when entering people's homes, schools, most restaurants, shrines and temples, stores and some large commercial buildings. Often slippers are provided in place of shoes at the entrance of these buildings. For Australians visiting Japan, it is important to follow along with Japanese traditions as doing otherwise can be

highly offensive and disrespectful.

Japan is a very clean country and many people focus on hygienic and sanitary ways of doing things. When in Japan, touching people is not acceptable and shaking hands and hugging people is not routine, in place a bow is seen as respectful and normal. When paying for shopping or food at a restaurant, many places will have a container to place the money or card in, as to not touch you and will give the container back with your change or card and receipt. When leaving a restaurant, tipping is not widely accepted, it is more polite to say 'Thank you very much for the meal'.

Blowing your nose in public is also seen as unhygienic and disrespectful, therefore should be avoided. In some public venues, bathrooms are tiled with traditional Japanese flooring. It is expected that visitors remove their shoes and use the provided slippers, however ensure they are removed before leaving the bathroom as this can be seen as very humiliating for a person and is frowned upon. Using a finger to point is considered threatening in Japan, instead use an open hand to gesture. Chewing gum or yawning in public is also seen as disrespectful, hence people visiting from Australia are advised to be mindful and avoid doing these things to avoid offending or disrespecting anyone.

Some other cultural information visitors should be aware of include, tattoos are seen as an association to gangs and people with tattoos may be rejected entry into some shrines, temples or places with cultural significance. When in public, it is best to keep your voice down and not speak too loudly as this can be seen as rude. When eating out, never put chopsticks vertically into a bowl of rice as this is a ritual used at funerals which symbolises death, instead place the chopsticks horizontally over the top of the bowl or place them on the table next to the bowl. Having a shower prior to a bath is common practice as Japanese people believe that baths are dirty and unhygienic otherwise.