

Gateway to Japan (Kodansha Guide)

By June Kinoshita, Nicholas Palevsky

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When friends want to know where to go in Japan, I always ask, "What are you interested in?" One friend spent every day at the Kabuki theater in Tokyo. Another ventured north to savor the culinary traditions of Tohoku. We know people who adore Tokyo, exulting in the energy of the world's most futuristic megapolis. Others loath it and flee to tranquil Kyoto, the former imperial city that epitomizes the refinement of traditional culture. Still others visit both cities and marvel at the extremes represented by these opposing poles of the Japanese experience. The diversity of cultural and geographic offerings can be intimidating. The two sections of this book, History and Culture and Japan by Region, are designed to make them more manageable. History and Culture focuses on specific topics and recommends where to go. Japan by Region gives the practical information you need to make the trip.

History and Culture
"A Brief History" introduces the major historical periods and includes a list of the most important figures in Japanese history and culture; their names appear in uppercase letters throughout the book. The chapters that follow provide both an overview and a practical reference on various subjects. For example, "Cuisine" contains bilingual "menus" from which you can order food in restaurants. Most of the chapters conclude with a list of recommendations. Any place that is mentioned in both the main text and the list appears in uppercase.

Japan by Region
The ten regional chapters appear in geographic order, from north to south (see map on p. vi). The largest of Japan's four main islands, Honshu, and the smallest, Shikoku, together make up seven chapters. The remaining three chapters are devoted to Hokkaido, Kyushu, and the Okinawan archipelago. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction and lists the best attractions, special interests, and seasonal events.

Transit Diagrams
The transit diagram at the beginning of each regional chapter shows the main trunk line (usually the bullet train) traversing the region, together with other train and bus lines that branch off. The main junctions on the trunk line are assigned roman numerals and treated as jumping-off points from which to explore side routes; the stations along the side routes are assigned arabic numerals. The text describes in numerical order each main junction, followed by the side routes; their direction is denoted by the letters "N" for north, "E" for east, and so forth.

For example, suppose you want to visit Dewa Sanzan (transit key number IV:W3) in Tohoku. To see how to get there, turn to the Tohoku transit diagram (p.152); go down the trunk line to the fourth city, Sendai, then go west three notches. The text follows the same organization and is, in effect, a series of mini-itineraries.

Dining, Lodgings, and Local Maps
Dining and lodging facilities are listed at the end of each town or locale. Telephone area codes are usually listed beside the lodgings heading. Shops, restaurants, and hotels will appear on local maps according to a number-key system. (See inside front cover for a key to symbols.) Ratings are awarded on a scale of from one to three stars based on quality, service, and atmosphere. Credit-card information is supplied for every establishment for which the information was available.

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Editorial Review

Review

"We've tried very hard to find something ... left out of their wide-ranging guide, but we've failed...." -Traveler's Bookstore

"It is the guide I wish I had to help me know what I was seeing. This is truly a comprehensive guide to read in advance, use during a trip, and to refer to back home." -*The Explorers Journal*

"... excellent bilingual maps.... If I could take only one guide with me, this would be the one." -*Book World*

"The fire and flavor of Japan pour from these pages...." -*Knight-Ridder* News Service

"Filled with history and pop culture, the book presents both the zany and the zen of Japan..." -*Newsweek* International Edition

"Even if you're not inclined to travel, get the book for the front essays on art, castles, history, matsuri, and my favorite chapter title: 'One-hour Japanese'" -*Tokyo Journal*

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[Here is the beginning of the section giving practical advice, preceded by a list of the topics to be taken up.]

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Before You Go

There's no better way to get to know a country than to make your own travel arrangements. Japan, with perhaps the most varied culture in the world today, presents astounding and delightful choices: whether to stay in a temple or a computer-controlled hotel room, to see Noh or Buto, to dine on nouvelle Japonaise or slurp noodles in a 500-year-old shop. Expenses. With the rise of the mighty yen, Japan has undoubtedly become an expensive travel destination. It is not necessary to impoverish yourself, however. If you are willing to rely on the superb public transportation system and to try the accommodations and restaurants that the average Japanese themselves use, you will be able to stretch your budget considerably further than if you were to stick to international hotels and fancy French restaurants. What's more, you will have a much more interesting experience. Minshuku, which are Japanese-style "bed-and-breakfasts," cost about $60 to $90 including dinner and breakfast and will give you an opportunity to see how ordinary people live. Food can be shockingly expensive, but it is possible to dine cheaply. Commuter railway stations and shopping districts abound with inexpensive restaurants where you can get a nourishing meal for about $10. The huge food marts in department store basements sell beautiful and inexpensive bento (lunch boxes), perfect for picnics or for taking back to your room. Restaurant lunch specials are often a bargain. Railway travel in Japan operates with clockwork efficiency, but it is expensive. Sometimes it is cheaper to fly--especially if you count in the time savings. Note that during peak vacation periods (Mar. 21-Apr. 15, Apr. 28-May 6, July 21-Aug. 31, Dec. 25-Jan. 10) JR and many hotels charge higher rates. The Japan Rail Pass can be a money saver depending on your itinerary. A one-week pass costs about the same as the round-trip bullet-train fare from Tokyo to Kyoto. Here are two entirely realistic possibilities for daily expenses:....

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rebecca Burks:

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James Fletcher:

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Douglas Moskowitz:

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