USEFUL PHRASES

for your

TRIP TO JAPAN

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It has never been easier for visitors to explore Japan without having to worry (too much) about the language barrier. A series of high-profile events in the last years (the Rugby World cup in 2019, the Olympic Games in 2021 and Expo 2025) along with a booming tourism sector have led to the Japanese government implementing extensive measures to "internationalise" the major cities, the transport systems, etc. Bilingual signage is now widespread and staff in train stations, restaurants, tourist facilities are much more likely to be able to converse in English that was the case even just a few years ago.

Nevertheless, a few polite Japanese words go a long way and that's where Japansophy's mini Japanese phrasebook comes in. We've compiled some of the most useful, common phrases and expressions, grouped by situation, to help you get the most out of your stay, impress the locals and have an altogether more immersive experience.

Have a great trip!

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Greetings and everyday expressions

Let's start with the absolute basics.

- Japanese: こんにちは (Konnichiwa) / おはようございます (Ohayou gozaimasu) / こんばんは (Konbanwa)
  - Pronunciation: Kon-nee-chee-wa / Oh-ha-yoh go-zai-mahs / Kon-ban-wa
  - English: Hello (general, daytime) / Good morning (polite) / Good evening

In general, greetings are used much less in Japan than their English equivalents are elsewhere. You won't use them when going into a shop, for example, when a quick bow of the head is much more common.

- Japanese: ありがとう (Arigatou) / ありがとうございます (Arigatou gozaimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Ah-ree-gah-toh / Ah-ree-gah-toh go-zai-mahs
  - English: Thank you / Thank you very much (more polite)

These often take the prefix "doumo" meaning "very", and in fact doumo is used on its own as a quick "thanks".

- Japanese: すみません (Sumimasen)
  - Pronunciation: Soo-mee-mah-sen
  - English: Excuse me / Sorry / Thank you

If there is one word you should learn before travelling to Japan, it's "sumimasen". Use it to get a waiter's attention, to apologise for bumping into someone, for thanking someone for doing something for you.

- Japanese: お願いします (Onegaishimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahs
  - English: Please (when making a request)

- Japanese: さようなら (Sayounara)
  - Pronunciation: Sah-yoh-nah-rah
  - English: Goodbye (more formal, not used as casually as "bye" in English)
- Japanese: またね (Mata ne) / じゃあね (Jaa ne)
  - Pronunciation: Mah-tah neh / Jah neh
  - English: See you later / Bye (casual)

You'll also hear "bai-bai" a lot, especially among younger people.

In the hotel

Most Japanese hotels these days will have English-speaking staff. Some even have automated check-in services, so you may not need to communicate at all. Just in case, though, here are a few phrases that might prove useful.

- Japanese: チェックインをお願いします (Chekku in o onegaishimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Chek-ku in oh oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahs
  - English: Check-in, please.
- Japanese: チェックアウトをお願いします (Chekku auto o onegaishimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Chek-ku au-toh oh oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahs
  - English: Check-out, please.
- Japanese: 予約があります (Yoyaku ga arimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Yoh-yah-ku gah ah-ree-mahs
  - English: I have a reservation.
- Japanese: [Room number] 号室です ([Room number] goushitsu desu)
  - Pronunciation: [Room number] goh-shitsu dess
  - English: It's room number [Room number]. (Replace with the actual number)
- Japanese: Wi-Fi はありますか (Wi-Fi wa arimasu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: Wai-fai wah ah-ree-mahss kah?
  - English: Do you have Wi-Fi?
- Japanese: Wi-Fi のパスワードは何ですか (Wi-Fi no pasuwaado wa nan desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: Wai-fai noh pah-soo-wah-doh wah nahn dess kah?
  - English: What is the Wi-Fi password?

If this is your first time in Japan, you might be in for a surprise or two when it comes to your accommodation. Check out Japansophy's guide to Japanese hotels before you book!

Getting around

While you won't find an English-speaking taxi driver on every corner in Japan, getting around cities like Tokyo by bus has become much easier, with signs, ticket machines and even announcements in English. The situation in smaller towns can be very different however.

- Japanese: [Destination] までお願いします ([Destination] made onegaishimasu)
  - Pronunciation: [Destination] mah-deh oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahs
  - English: To [Destination], please. (for taxis)

- Japanese: ここまでお願いします (Koko made onegaishimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Koh-koh mah-deh oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahs
  - English: Here, please. (for taxis)

- Japanese: [Station name] までいくらですか ([Station name] made ikura desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: [Station name] mah-deh ee-koo-rah dess kah?
  - English: How much is it to [Station name]?

- Japanese: [Station name] 行きの電車はどれですか ([Station name] yuki no densha wa dore desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: [Station name] yoo-kee noh den-shah wah doh-reh dess kah?
  - English: Which train goes to [Station name]?

- Japanese: [Place] はどこですか ([Place] wa doko desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: [Place] wah doh-koh dess kah?
  - English: Where is [Place]?

- Japanese: [Place] はどちらですか ([Place] wa dochira desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: [Place] wah doh-chee-rah dess kah?
  - English: Which way is the [place]?

Japansophy.com has several articles on public transport and taxis in Japan. Read up before you go, so you can travel around with confidence.

Shopping

Japan's big department stores and shopping centres usually have information desks with English-speaking staff. Convenience stores in the cities are often staffed these days by young (non-Japanese) students, who usually also have at least a smattering of English. You may encounter communication problems in smaller shops outside the major conurbations, though.

- Japanese: これは何ですか (Kore wa nan desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: Koh-reh wah nahn dess kah?
  - English: What is this?

- Japanese: いくらですか (Ikura desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: Ee-koo-rah dess kah?
  - English: How much is it?

- Japanese: これをください (Kore o kudasai)
  - Pronunciation: Koh-reh oh koo-dah-sai
  - English: I'll take this, please.

- Japanese: もう少し安いのはありますか (Mou sukoshi yasui no wa arimasu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: Moh soo-koh-shee yah-soo-ee noh wah ah-ree-mahss kah?
  - English: Do you have anything a little cheaper?

- Japanese: クレジットカードは使えますか (Kurejitto kaado wa tsukaemasu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: Koo-reh-jee-toh kah-doh wah tsoo-kah-eh-mahss kah?
  - English: Can I use a credit card?

- Japanese: 袋をください (Fukuro o kudasai)
  - Pronunciation: Foo-koo-roh oh koo-dah-sai
  - English: Can I have a bag, please?

- Japanese: これを試着してもいいですか (kore o shichakushite mo ii desuka?)
  - Pronunciation: Koh-re oh shee-chaku shtay mo ee dess kah?
  - English: Can I try this on, please?

In the restaurant

Many of the big restaurant chains have English menus these days and fast-food places even have English menu cards at the counter, so you just have to point at your order. You mightn't have the same luck in smaller restaurants outside the cities, but that's all part of the adventure, right?

- Japanese: [Number] 人です ([Number] nin desu)
  - Pronunciation: [Number] dess
  - English: [Number] people. (e.g., "two people" - futari)

Japanese numbers are notoriously complicated with different suffixes added depending on the object being counted. See our "Japanese numbers" section for more details.

- Japanese: 予約をしています (Yoyaku o shite imasu)
  - Pronunciation: Yoh-yah-koo oh sh-teh ee-mahss
  - English: I have a reservation.
- Japanese: メニューをお願いします (Menyuu o onegaishimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Meh-nyuu oh oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahs
  - English: Menu, please.
- Japanese: おすすめは何ですか (Osusume wa nan desu ka?)
  - Pronunciation: Oh-soo-soo-meh wah nahn dess kah?
  - English: What do you recommend?
- Japanese: これをください (Kore o kudasai)
  - Pronunciation: Koh-reh oh koo-dah-sai
  - English: I'll have this, please. (pointing at the menu)
- Japanese: 美味しいです (Oishii desu)
  - Pronunciation: Oh-ee-shee dess
  - English: It's delicious.
- Japanese: いただきます (Itadakimasu)
  - Pronunciation: Ee-tah-dah-kee-mahss
  - English: Thank you for the meal (said before eating).
- Japanese: ごちそうさまでした (Gochisousama deshita)
  - Pronunciation: Goh-chee-soh-sah-mah deh-sh-tah
  - English: Thank you for the meal (said after eating)

Japanese numbers

The Japanese number system is quite complicated and requires a lot of practice. Nevertheless, you can learn a few basics to help smooth your journey through Japan.

The basic (abstract) numbers are:

- 1: いち (ichi) - ee-chee
- 2: に (ni) - nee
- 3: さん (san) - san
- 4: よん (yon) / し (shi) - yon / shee
- 5: ご (go) - goh
- 6: ろく (roku) - roh-koo
- 7: なな (nana) / しち (shichi) - nah-nah / shee-chee
- 8: はち (hachi) - hah-chee
- 9: きゅう (kyuu) / く (ku) - kyuu / koo
- 10: じゅう (juu) - joo

Use these when quoting a telephone number or your room number.
But when referring to a number of things/people, a specific counter is added to the number depending on the object and which (...it gets worse...) can turn the number into a completely different word!

Although different counters are used for animals, flat objects, cylindrical objects, large objects, etc., there is a catch-all suffix that you can use when ordering food, for example:

1. ひとつ hitotsu – hee-tot-su
2. ふたつ futatsu – foo-tat-su
3. みっつ mittsu – meet-su
4. よっつ yottsu – yott-su
5. いつつ itsutsu – eat-soot-su
6. むっつ muttsu – moot-su
7. ななつ nanatsu – nanat-su
8. やっつ yattsu – yatt-su
9. ここのつ kokonotsu – koko-not-su
10. とお tou – tow

And the following are used to count people. Put this in front of “dess” when you go into a restaurant to indicate how many are in your party, e.g. “futari dess”:

1 person: 一人 (hitori) – hee-to-ree
2 people: 二人 (futari) – foo-tah-ree
3 people: 三人 (sannin) – san-neen
4 people: 四人 (yonin) – yo-neen
5 people: 五人 (gonin) – go-neen
6 people: 六人 (rokunin) – rock-oo-neen
7 people: 七人 (nananin/shichinin) – nana-neen/she-chee-neen
8 people: 八人 (hachinin) – hatch-ee-neen
9 people: 九人 (kyuunin) – kyoo-neen
10 people: 十人 (juunin) – joo-neen

Commonly seen Japanese words and characters

Finally, spend some time before you go to Japan familiarising yourself with the following words and characters. You don't have to be able to read them, but being able to recognise them may help you navigate or avoid some sticky situations.

- 男 (Otoko) - Male (often on men's restrooms)
- 女 (Onna) - Female (often on women's restrooms)
- 入口 (Iriguchi) - Entrance
- 出口 (Deguchi) - Exit
- 駅 (Eki) - Station
- 北 (Kita) - North
- 南 (Minami) - South
- 東 (Higashi) - East
- 西 (Nishi) - West
- 交番 (Kouban) - Police box (small, local police station)
- トイレ (Toire) - Toilet (written in katakana, often seen in more modern or casual settings)
- お手洗い (Otearai) - Restroom, washroom (more polite way to say toilet, often seen as well)
- 非常口 (Hijouguchi) - Emergency exit
- 禁煙 (Kin'en) - No smoking
- 喫煙所 (Kitsuenjo) - Smoking area
- 優先席 (Yuusenseki) - Priority seating (on trains and buses)
- 割引 (Waribiki) - Discount
- 無料 (Muryou) - Free (no charge)
- 営業中 (Eigyou-chuu) - Open for business

Explore even more of Japan!

We hope this little phrasebook helps you on your journey through Japan! For even more in-depth travel guides, hidden gem discoveries, cultural insights, and practical tips to plan your perfect trip, be sure to visit us online at **www.japansophy.com.**

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