

# SURVIVAL AND ETIQUETTE GUIDE TO JAPAN

If in doubt in Japan in any situation, just look around and see what everyone else is doing. Japanese people don't expect you to know everything, and they are usually very accommodating with foreigners. Make an effort and you will be welcomed.

## **Food Etiquette**

### **Chopstick Etiquette**

Passing food from your chopsticks directly to someone else's is taboo.

Don't leave your chopsticks standing upright in your food.

Don't point your chopsticks at someone or wave them around.

When you remove food from a communal bowl or plate, use the flat end of your chopsticks - that is the end you don't eat with - to place the food on your plate or bowl.

If your chopsticks come in a paper cover, put them back in the cover when you have finished eating. Otherwise place them back on the chopstick stand.

It's perfectly OK, expected even, to slurp your noodles! Noodles should not be allowed to go soggy - this is an insult to the chef! Do not bite your noodles - slurp, slurp, slurp!

Soup in Japan is not eaten with a spoon - pick up the bowl and drink. Use your chopsticks to pick up any bits of seaweed or tofu out of the bowl.

Sushi is all about the rice - sushi chefs pride themselves on their rice! Never dip the rice in the soy sauce.

It is impolite to drink or eat on the street - consume your food or drink in the place you bought it from. This also applies to food from a vending machine. You can however eat on the Shinkansen (bullet trains).

Don't pour your own drink when you are dining with others - pour for others but allow them to pour for you. This includes water, soft drinks, sake or wine!

Use the wet towel appropriately when sitting down for a meal - wet towels are for cleaning your hands and not your face. Fold the towel and leave it on the side when you have finished.

## **General Etiquette**

It is a legal requirement to have your passport on you at all times. This is also useful when shopping in larger stores to avoid the consumption tax.

Japanese people greet each other by bowing - long and deep bows indicate respect, a shorter bow is informal.

The best Japanese Etiquette? No tipping anywhere, anytime! In fact, leaving money behind can be considered an insult.

Carry your rubbish with you - there are very few rubbish bins in Japan. Take your rubbish back to your hotel room to dispose of.

Tap water is fine to drink.

It is considered impolite to blow your nose in public - go to a restroom. Even sniffing is considered more acceptable than nose-blowing!

Don't hand money to the cashier - always place your cash or credit card on the tray in front of you.

No Pointing - this is considered threatening. Use an open hand if needing directions.

Don't be late – it is polite to arrive 5mins earlier than required, but no more than 10mins.

Don't stare and avoid long eye contact - Japanese people are quite shy.

Respect other peoples' space and try to avoid physical contact.

Try and be as quiet as you can in Japan - talk softly and quietly. Wave if you need to attract someone's attention - never shout.

Always stick to your side of the footpath, escalator (never stand side by side on an escalator) and subway platform. When in doubt look for the signs or just follow the local Japanese.

Always queue quietly.

Don't talk on your phone when you're on public transport or on the street.

Don't wear holey socks - your socks will be on public display often and should be clean and definitely hole free! If wearing sandals, carry a pair of socks in your backpack.

Don't open your taxi door - the doors are either automated or the white-gloved driver will open it for you.

Take your backpack off when boarding a train or subway and carry it in your hands.

Don't make people wet with your umbrella - a plastic sleeve or bag is useful.

### **Helpful Hints**

Carry a plastic bag for your rubbish with you.

Take a photo of your hotel room door, the front of your hotel and the entrance/exit from the subway station.

If taking a taxi, make sure you have your destination's address written down in Japanese to show the driver.