HONSHU / SOUTH HONSHU / TOKYO · MOUNT FUJI · KYOTO · OSAKA · HIMEJI · HIROSHIMA · 14 OR 21 DAYS · BY TRAIN

# Start here: your first trip to Japan in 14 or 21 days

Updated October 2026 · Best time: late Mar–May · Oct–Nov
Trip planner · tabi-notes.com/first-trip-to-japan

If this is your first time in Japan, start here. This is the route I'd give a friend: the big four (**Tokyo**, **Mount Fuji**, **Kyoto** and **Osaka**) in an order that never doubles back, with enough nights in each place to see the famous sights early in the morning and still have time for the quiet corners.

The **14-day version** flies into Tokyo and home from Osaka. The **21-day version** carries on west: **Himeji**, Japan's finest original castle, on the way to **Hiroshima** and a night on the sacred island of **Miyajima**, then back to Tokyo by Shinkansen. Below the route you'll find the basics that every first trip runs into: what it really costs, whether the **JR Pass** is still worth it, and how to sort out **mobile data, cash and IC cards**.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **14 or 21**<br>days | **train only**<br>no car needed | **4 or 7**<br>stops | **late Mar–May · Oct–Nov**<br>best time |
| **~¥220k / ~¥370k**<br>per person* | | | |

*Accommodation (sharing a room) and transport, middle version, 14 / 21 days. Flights, food and entrance fees not included; see What a Japan trip costs.

## Start here: which route is yours?

Tabi Notes has a dozen long routes, and most of them go where first-time visitors rarely get to. If you've never been to Japan, this route is the easiest way in. If you already know what you want, one of these is probably a better fit:

| You want | Route | In short |
|---|---|---|
| First trip, 2–3 weeks, the classic sights | **First trip to Japan: start here** | this route |
| First trip, but less obvious | The better Golden Route by train | Kanazawa and Shirakawa-go instead of Fuji |
| Food, onsen and volcanoes | Kyushu & Tokyo in 3 weeks | Kyushu with Tokyo as the finale |
| Autumn colours and ryokans | Southern Tohoku & Niigata road trip | a road trip through Tohoku |
| Art islands, rivers and coast | Shikoku road trip | Shikoku by car |
| Snow and skiing | Hokkaido winter: ski & onsen by train | Hokkaido in winter, by train |
| Beaches and islands, on a second trip | Okinawa road trip for repeat visitors | Tokyo or Osaka plus a week on Okinawa |

BEFORE YOU GO: THE SHORT LIST

Passport valid for your whole stay · travel insurance · hotels booked (Kyoto first) · an eSIM installed on your phone · a card that works abroad without fees, plus some yen · Visit Japan Web filled in for the arrival QR codes · comfortable shoes: you'll walk 15–20 km on some days.

When to go? Late March to May and October to November are the classic months. Cherry blossom and autumn colours are beautiful but also the busiest and most expensive weeks. See **Seasons** for the month-by-month overview.

## The route at a glance

1 **Tokyo**
Nights 1–4

2 **Mount Fuji (Lake Kawaguchi)**
Nights 5–6

3 **Kyoto**
Nights 7–11

4 **Osaka**
Nights 12–13 (21 days: 12–14)

5 **Himeji**
21-day version · half day on the way

6 **Hiroshima & Miyajima**
21-day version · nights 15–17

7 **Tokyo**
21-day version · nights 18–20




By train: Tokyo → Lake Kawaguchi (bus) → Kyoto → Osaka. The 21-day version continues via Himeji to Hiroshima and Miyajima, then back to Tokyo.

Prices are per room for two per night. Ryokan prices include dinner and breakfast. ☆ = famous / worth it · ☆☆ = splurge.

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## Stop by stop

### 01 Tokyo 東京

Nights 1–4 · Arrive, adjust, and eat very well

PLAN

- **Arrival**: from Haneda it's ~30 min into the city by monorail or Keikyu line; from Narita ~1 h by Narita Express or Keisei Skyliner. Tap in with your IC card from the very first train
- Day 2: Asakusa and Senso-ji early, then Ueno or Akihabara; Tokyo Skytree or the free Tokyo Metropolitan Government observatory at dusk
- Day 3: Meiji Shrine and Harajuku, the Shibuya crossing, then Shinjuku's Omoide Yokocho and Golden Gai in the evening
- Day 4: Tsukiji outer market for breakfast, Ginza, the Imperial Palace gardens, teamLab; or a day trip to Kamakura or Nikko
- Jet lag tip: plan the first day lightly and go to bed late; you'll be up at 5 am anyway, which is perfect for the morning sights

WHERE TO STAY

**Mitsui Garden Hotel Ginza Premier** high floors over Ginza, 5 min to Tokyo Station — ¥30–45k

**Hotel Gracery Shinjuku** the Godzilla hotel, right in Kabukicho — ¥22–35k

☆☆ **The Okura Tokyo** Tokyo's classic grand hotel, rebuilt in 2019 — ¥80k+

> **Good to know** My full shortlist of Tokyo restaurants, bars and neighbourhoods is in the Tokyo city guide. If your flight home leaves from Tokyo, book the same hotel for the last night and leave a suitcase there.

### ALSO WORTH SEEING

**Suga Shrine stairs**
the staircase from the film "Your Name"

**Shimokitazawa**
vintage shops & small cafés

**Cat Street (Harajuku)**
shopping street between Shibuya & Harajuku

**Kappabashi kitchen street**
knives & kitchenware, e.g. JIKKO

**Kabukicho batting centers**
late-night batting cages in Shinjuku

**Capcom Store & Square Enix Garden (Shibuya)**
for gamers

**BrewDog & Bauhaus (Roppongi)**
craft beer, then live rock covers

### WHERE I EAT

**Teppanyaki Keyakizaka · Kisentei Midtown**
teppanyaki & wagyu

**Sushi Banya Ginza · Sushi Satake · Fukube Sushi**
sushi in Ginza

**Sushi Yajima**
omakase sushi

**Tonkatsu Aoki (Daimon)**
tonkatsu

**Matsuo Jingisukan Ginza**
lamb barbecue

**Gyoza Hohei Ginza**
gyoza

**Monja Moheji Ueno**
monjayaki

**Otoko no Omurice Egg Bomb**
omurice

**Perfect Beer Kitchen · stand Bar Joker**
Shimbashi after-work drinks

**Michi Naki Michi · BW Cave**
izakaya in Shibuya

## 02 Mount Fuji (Lake Kawaguchi) 富士山・河口湖

Nights 5–6 · A lake, a pagoda & a ryokan under the mountain

### PLAN

- Day 5: highway bus from Shinjuku Bus Terminal to Kawaguchiko Station (~2 h, reserve seats online), or the direct Fuji Excursion limited express from Shinjuku (~2 h, reserved seats)
- Chureito Pagoda with Fuji behind it (398 steps up, worth every one), then a slow walk or bike ride along the north shore of Lake Kawaguchi
- Day 6: the Oishi Park flower fields, Iyashi no Sato thatched village, or the Mount Kachi Kachi ropeway; a soak in a ryokan bath with a view of the mountain
- **Hakone instead?** Equally good: the loop by mountain railway, ropeway over Owakudani and boat across Lake Ashi. Shinkansen or Romancecar from Tokyo to Odawara, and on to Kyoto from Odawara

### WHERE TO STAY

| | |
|---|---|
| ★ **Kozantei Ubuya** ryokan where every room faces Mount Fuji | ¥60–100k |
| **Fuji View Hotel** classic lakeside hotel from the 1930s, gardens and Fuji views | ¥30–50k |
| **Business hotels at Kawaguchiko Station** simple, close to the buses | ¥12–20k |

**Good to know** Fuji hides in cloud most days from June to September; mornings from late October to February are clearest. Day 7: bus from Kawaguchiko to Mishima Station (~2 h), then the Shinkansen to Kyoto (~2 h).

## 03 Kyoto 京都

Nights 7–11 · Temples, gardens & a day with the deer of Nara

PLAN

- Day 8: Fushimi Inari's torii tunnels at sunrise, Kiyomizu-dera, the lanes of Ninenzaka, and Gion in the evening
- Day 9: Arashiyama: the bamboo grove early, Tenryu-ji, the monkey park; Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion, and Ryoan-ji's rock garden in the afternoon
- Day 10: Nara as a day trip (~45 min): the giant Buddha of Todai-ji, the bowing deer, Kasuga Taisha's lanterns
- Day 11: Nishiki Market, the Philosopher's Path to Ginkaku-ji, a tea ceremony or a kaiseki dinner

WHERE TO STAY

**Mitsui Garden Hotel Kyoto Sanjo** central, walk to Gion and Nishiki Market — ¥20–35k

**Cross Hotel Kyoto** stylish hotel by the Kamo River — ¥25–40k

☆☆ **Hotel The Mitsui Kyoto** built around an Edo-period garden, with its own hot spring — ¥120k+

**Good to know** Kyoto's big sights fill up by 9:00. Do one icon at opening time, and spend the rest of the day in the quieter temples nearby.

WHERE I EAT

**Sushi Kaiseki Kozuki**
sushi kaiseki

## 04 Osaka 大阪

Nights 12–13 (21 days: 12–14) · Street food, neon & a castle

PLAN

- Day 12: 15–30 min from Kyoto. Osaka Castle, then Dotonbori and Shinsekai for takoyaki, okonomiyaki and kushikatsu
- Day 13: Kuromon Market, the Umeda Sky Building at sunset, or a half day in Kobe for Kobe beef
- **14-day version**: day 14, fly home from Kansai Airport (Haruka express ~50 min from Osaka). Flying home from Tokyo? Take the Shinkansen back on day 13 (~2 h 30) and spend the last night there
- **21-day version**: day 14 for Kobe and the old onsen town of Arima, or Universal Studios Japan

WHERE TO STAY

**Cross Hotel Osaka** a few steps from Dotonbori — ¥25–40k

**Hotel Hankyu Respire Osaka** above Osaka Station, easy for every train — ¥18–30k

☆☆ **Conrad Osaka** on the top floors of a tower in Nakanoshima — ¥80k+

**Good to know** Want a ryokan night? Stay one of the three nights in Arima itself. Taketoritei Maruyama and Hyoe Koyokaku are classics (¥50–90k).

WHERE I EAT

**Yakisoba Baby / Okonomiyaki Baby, Dotonbori**
okonomiyaki & yakisoba

**Zeniya Nishinakajima**
kushikatsu

## 05 Himeji 姫路

21-day version · half day on the way · Japan's finest original castle

PLAN

- Day 15: Shinkansen Osaka → Himeji (~30 min). Put your bags in the lockers at Himeji Station
- Walk 15 minutes up the main street to **Himeji Castle**, the 'White Heron': one of only twelve castles with their original keep, and the biggest. Inside, steep wooden stairs lead up six floors
- Koko-en, nine small Edo-style gardens next to the castle, for a quiet tea
- In the afternoon, on to Hiroshima (~1 h by Shinkansen)

**Good to know** Come early or on a weekday: on spring and autumn weekends the queue for the keep can take an hour.

## 06 Hiroshima & Miyajima 広島・宮島

21-day version · nights 15–17 · Peace Park, okonomiyaki & a night on the sacred island

PLAN

- Day 16: Peace Memorial Park, the museum and the Atomic Bomb Dome. Give the museum two hours; it's hard and important. Layered okonomiyaki at Okonomimura in the evening
- Shukkei-en garden and Hiroshima Castle; the tram is the easy way around the city
- Day 17: train and ferry to **Miyajima** (~1 h, the JR ferry is included in the JR Pass). Stay the night: when the day-trippers leave, the great torii is lit up and the deer have the streets
- Early next morning, climb Mount Misen or take the ropeway. Check the tide table: the torii stands in the water at high tide

WHERE TO STAY

**Hilton Hiroshima** new tower close to the Peace Park — ¥30–50k

**Mitsui Garden Hotel Hiroshima** central, good-value high floors — ¥15–25k

☆ **Iwaso (Miyajima)** ryokan since 1854 in the Momijidani maple valley — ¥60–100k

**Miyajima Hotel Makoto** small, modern ryokan near the shrine — ¥40–60k

**Good to know** Day 18: ferry back and the Shinkansen to Tokyo (~4 h). Book seat E, the window on the Mount Fuji side, for the view between Shin-Fuji and Mishima.

## 07 Tokyo 東京

21-day version · nights 18–20 · The neighbourhoods you missed

PLAN

- Shimokitazawa or Kichijoji, Yanaka's old streets, the Ghibli Museum (book weeks ahead)
- A day trip to Kamakura (Great Buddha, temples by the sea) or Nikko (shrines in the cedar forest)
- Last shopping in Ginza or Akihabara; Haneda is ~30 min from the centre, Narita ~1 h

WHERE TO STAY

**Mitsui Garden Hotel Ginza Premier** high floors over Ginza, 5 min to Tokyo Station — ¥30–45k

**Hotel Gracery Shinjuku** the Godzilla hotel, right in Kabukicho — ¥22–35k

### ALSO WORTH SEEING

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the staircase from the film "Your Name"

**Shimokitazawa**
vintage shops & small cafés

**Cat Street (Harajuku)**
shopping street between Shibuya & Harajuku

**Kappabashi kitchen street**
knives & kitchenware, e.g. JIKKO

**Kabukicho batting centers**
late-night batting cages in Shinjuku

**Capcom Store & Square Enix Garden (Shibuya)**
for gamers

**BrewDog & Bauhaus (Roppongi)**
craft beer, then live rock covers

### WHERE I EAT

**Teppanyaki Keyakizaka · Kisentei Midtown**
teppanyaki & wagyu

**Sushi Banya Ginza · Sushi Satake · Fukube Sushi**
sushi in Ginza

**Sushi Yajima**
omakase sushi

**Tonkatsu Aoki (Daimon)**
tonkatsu

**Matsuo Jingisukan Ginza**
lamb barbecue

**Gyoza Hohei Ginza**
gyoza

**Monja Moheji Ueno**
monjayaki

**Otoko no Omurice Egg Bomb**
omurice

**Perfect Beer Kitchen · stand Bar Joker**
Shimbashi after-work drinks

**Michi Naki Michi · BW Cave**
izakaya in Shibuya

## Budget

Estimates for October at ¥150 ≈ US$1 · ¥165 ≈ €1. Ranges, not promises.

| Version | Accommodation (2 people) | + Transport (per person) | Per person |
|---|---|---|---|
| **14 days, value**: business hotels, simple ryokan at Fuji | ≈ ¥240k | ≈ ¥25k | ≈ ¥145k |
| **14 days, middle**: the first hotel at most stops, a Fuji ryokan night | ≈ ¥390k | ≈ ¥25k | ≈ ¥220k |
| **21 days, value** | ≈ ¥360k | ≈ ¥60k | ≈ ¥240k |
| **21 days, middle**: + Miyajima ryokan | ≈ ¥620k | ≈ ¥60k | ≈ ¥370k |
| **+ Splurge**: Kozantei Ubuya, Hotel The Mitsui or Iwaso | + ¥80–150k | | + ¥40–75k |

MY RECOMMENDATION

For a first trip, take the middle version: **about ¥220k per person for 14 days, ¥370k for 21**. Add food (¥6–10k per day), sights and flights for the full picture; see What a Japan trip costs below.

🚗 Transport, 14 days: airport train, Tokyo subway, highway buses to and from Lake Kawaguchi, Shinkansen Mishima → Kyoto, local trains in Kansai, Haruka to Kansai Airport. 21 days adds Osaka → Himeji → Hiroshima, the Miyajima ferry and the Shinkansen Hiroshima → Tokyo.

NOT INCLUDED

- International flights
- Food and drinks
- Entrance fees, ropeways, the Fuji and Hakone passes
- Late March to early April and November: up to +50% in Kyoto and Tokyo

## Booking & practical tips

JR PASS?

Not for this route: the train journeys are too short and too far apart. All the details, and when it does pay off, in the JR Pass section below.

LUGGAGE

Send big suitcases ahead by takkyubin from your hotel (~¥2,500, next-day delivery), especially Tokyo → Kyoto when you go via Fuji. On the Tokaido Shinkansen, suitcases over 160 cm (length + width + height) need a seat with luggage space, booked in advance.

BOOK EARLY

Kyoto hotels in spring and autumn, Fuji-view ryokan rooms and Miyajima inns sell out months ahead. Ghibli Museum tickets go on sale on the 10th of the month before.

RUSH HOUR

Avoid Tokyo's trains between 7:30 and 9:30 on weekdays, especially with luggage.

ETIQUETTE IN 30 SECONDS

Queue on the platform markings, keep phone calls off the train, take shoes off where you see a step up, and carry your rubbish (bins are rare). Onsen rules are in my road-trip & ryokan essentials.

VISIT JAPAN WEB

Fill it in online before you fly. It gives you QR codes for immigration and customs and saves time at the airport.

## Pick your version

14 DAYS · FLY INTO TOKYO, OUT OF OSAKA

1. Tokyo (4 nights)
2. Lake Kawaguchi or Hakone (2)
3. Kyoto (5), with a Nara day trip
4. Osaka (2)
5. Fly home from Kansai Airport

14 DAYS · ROUND TRIP FROM TOKYO

1. Tokyo (3 nights)
2. Lake Kawaguchi or Hakone (2)
3. Kyoto (5), with a Nara day trip
4. Osaka (2)
5. Tokyo (1)

21 DAYS · THE FULL FIRST TRIP

1. Tokyo (4 nights)
2. Lake Kawaguchi or Hakone (2)
3. Kyoto (5)
4. Osaka (3)
5. Himeji on the way
6. Hiroshima (2) + Miyajima (1)
7. Tokyo (3)

## What a Japan trip costs

Japan is cheaper than most people expect, especially since the yen got weak: a good business hotel costs less than in Paris or London, and a superb lunch costs ¥1,000–1,500 in most places. The two things that add up are **accommodation** and **long train journeys**. Here's the full picture for this route, per person, with two people sharing a room:

| Per person | 14 days | 21 days |
|---|---|---|
| Accommodation (middle) | ≈ ¥195k | ≈ ¥310k |
| Transport in Japan | ≈ ¥25k | ≈ ¥60k |
| Food (¥6–10k a day) | ≈ ¥85–140k | ≈ ¥125–210k |
| Sights, passes, ropeways, souvenirs | ≈ ¥30–50k | ≈ ¥45–75k |
| eSIM, IC card top-ups, lockers | ≈ ¥5k | ≈ ¥7k |
| **Total in Japan** | **≈ ¥340–410k** | **≈ ¥545–660k** |
| + Flights from Europe (economy) | ≈ ¥130–220k | ≈ ¥130–220k |

- **Food**: ¥6k a day is konbini breakfast, a ramen or udon lunch and an izakaya dinner. ¥10k a day adds a sushi counter or a wagyu dinner now and then. Ryokan stays include dinner and breakfast
- **Cheapest months**: January to early March (apart from New Year) and June. **Most expensive**: cherry blossom season, Golden Week and November in Kyoto
- **Saving tips**: business hotel chains (Dormy Inn, Mitsui Garden, Sotetsu Fresa, Daiwa Roynet) are clean and central; eat your big meal at lunch, when set menus are half the dinner price; buy breakfast at the konbini

**All my routes at a glance.** Every itinerary on Tabi Notes has its own budget. These are the per-person prices from each route's facts box (accommodation and transport, middle version, flights not included):

| Route | Days | Travel | Per person* |
|---|---|---|---|
| First trip to Japan: start here | 14 or 21 | by train | ~¥220k / ~¥370k |
| Southern Tohoku & Niigata road trip | 18 | road trip | from ~¥355k |
| Shikoku road trip | 16 | road trip | from ~¥265k |
| Kyushu & Tokyo in 3 weeks | 16–21 | by train | ~¥205k |
| Kyushu loop with Kagoshima & Yakushima | 18 | by train | ~¥280k |
| Kyushu countryside road trip | 15 | road trip | from ~¥230k |
| Northern Tohoku camper van loop | 19 | camper van | ~¥420k–595k |
| The better Golden Route by train | 18–21 | by train | ~¥290k |
| South Honshu: Hiroshima & the San'in coast | 17 | train or car | ~¥320k |
| Hokkaido summer & autumn road trip | 14 | road trip | from ~¥240k |
| Hokkaido winter: ski & onsen by train | 13 | by train & bus | from ~¥245k |
| Okinawa road trip for repeat visitors | 13 | flights & car | ~¥265k |

*Accommodation (sharing a room) and transport, middle version. Food, sights and flights come on top.

## Is the JR Pass still worth it?

The nationwide **Japan Rail Pass** gives you unlimited JR trains, including almost all Shinkansen, for 7, 14 or 21 days in a row. Since October 2023, when the price went up by about 70%, it rarely pays off for a classic first trip.

| Ordinary class, adult | 7 days | 14 days | 21 days |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bought on the official website | ¥50,000 | ¥80,000 | ¥100,000 |
| Bought from a travel agency abroad (since Oct 2026) | ¥53,000 | ¥84,000 | ¥105,000 |

Prices from the official Japan Rail Pass website, October 2026. Green Car (first class) costs about 40% more.

THE RULE OF THUMB

It all comes down to **how many long Shinkansen journeys you take within the pass's 7, 14 or 21 days**. Add up the single tickets you'd buy in that period. If the total is more than the pass, buy the pass. If you move only every few days and stay in one region, single tickets win.

| Typical Shinkansen leg | Reserved seat, one way |
|---|---|
| Tokyo → Kyoto / Shin-Osaka | ~¥14,000–14,500 |
| Mishima (Mount Fuji) → Kyoto | ~¥11,000 |
| Shin-Osaka → Himeji | ~¥5,000 |
| Himeji → Hiroshima | ~¥8,500 |
| Hiroshima → Tokyo | ~¥19,500 |
| Tokyo → Kanazawa | ~¥14,000 |

**This route, 14 days**: the only long train ride is Mishima → Kyoto. With the airport trains and local lines you spend about **¥20–25k** on trains, far less than even the 7-day pass. **No pass.**

**This route, 21 days**: Osaka → Himeji → Hiroshima → Tokyo all fall within four days (days 15–18), about **¥35–40k** with the Miyajima ferry and local trains. Still less than the ¥50,000 for a 7-day pass. **No pass**, unless you add more.

**When it does pay off**: if you move every second day over long distances. For example, within one week: Tokyo → Kyoto → Himeji → Hiroshima → Tokyo (~¥47,000) plus the Narita Express and a few local JR rides is already about break-even with the 7-day pass. Add Kanazawa, Nikko or Sendai in the same week and the pass wins. The same applies if you go back and forth between Tokyo and Kansai several times.

CHECK YOUR OWN ROUTE

Type your stops into the **Japan Rail Pass calculator on japan-guide.com**. It compares the pass with single tickets for your exact itinerary.

Also look at regional passes (Kansai, JR West, JR East, Kyushu): they cover smaller areas but cost a fraction. More in my Shinkansen guide and regular trains guide.

- With the pass you can ride the fastest **Nozomi** trains for a supplement (about ¥4,960 Tokyo → Shin-Osaka), or the Hikari for free; it's only ~15 minutes slower
- Seat reservations are free with the pass; book them at a ticket machine or online as soon as you've activated it
- Without a pass, book Shinkansen online with smartEX or at any JR ticket machine with a passport. Fares are fixed (smartEX has small early-booking discounts), so there's no rush, except in Golden Week, Obon and New Year

## eSIM, cash and IC cards

Three things to sort out before or right after landing: **mobile data** for maps and translation, a bit of **cash**, and an **IC card** for every train, subway and bus.

### ESIM: DATA FROM THE MOMENT YOU LAND

If your phone supports eSIM (most iPhones since the XS and recent Android phones), buy a **Japan data eSIM** online before you go, from providers like Airalo, Ubigi, Saily or Holafly. Expect about US$10–25 for 10–20 GB over two to three weeks. Install it at home on Wi-Fi; it switches on when you land. Keep your home SIM on for texts, with roaming off.

### NO ESIM?

Rent a **pocket Wi-Fi** router (good for groups; pick it up at the airport post office or counter) or buy a **physical data SIM** at the airport. Data-only plans give you no Japanese phone number; use WhatsApp or LINE to call.

### CASH: LESS THAN IT USED TO BE

Cards and phones work in hotels, chains, konbini and most city restaurants. But temples, shrines, small restaurants, rural buses and many countryside ryokans are **cash only**. Carry ¥10–20k and refill as you go.

### GETTING YEN

**7-Eleven ATMs** (in every 7-Eleven, open 24 h) and Japan Post ATMs take foreign cards, in English. A card without foreign fees is ideal. Always choose to be charged **in yen**, never in your home currency. Bring a small coin purse: you'll collect a lot of ¥100 and ¥500 coins.

### IC CARD: TAP AND GO

**Suica**, **PASMO** and **ICOCA** work on trains, subways and buses in all big cities, plus konbini, vending machines and lockers. On an **iPhone**, add Suica or PASMO to Apple Wallet, or use JR East's **Welcome Suica Mobile** app, and top up with your own card. No iPhone? Get a **Welcome Suica** card at Haneda, Narita or a big JR East station (no deposit, valid 28 days), or a regular IC card from a station ticket machine.

### WHAT IC CARDS DON'T COVER

Shinkansen and limited express tickets (buy separately or link them in the JR app), some highway buses and many rural lines. Top up IC cards with cash at any ticket machine or konbini. Android phones from outside Japan usually can't use mobile Suica.

**Tipping**: don't. Good service is the norm, and leaving money on the table usually means someone runs after you to give it back.

## Frequently asked questions

**Is 14 days enough for a first trip?** −

Yes. Two weeks is enough for Tokyo, Mount Fuji, Kyoto, Nara and Osaka without rushing. The 21-day version adds Himeji, Hiroshima and Miyajima and a few slower days, which is ideal if you can take the time.

**Do I need to speak Japanese?** –

No. Stations, trains and most restaurants in the big cities have English signs or picture menus, and a translation app covers the rest. Learning arigatou (thank you) and sumimasen (excuse me) is still worth it.

**Should I buy the JR Pass for this route?** –

No, neither for 14 nor for 21 days. The long train rides are few and far apart, so single tickets cost much less than the pass. It only pays off if you take several long Shinkansen journeys within one week.

**Fuji or Hakone?** –

Lake Kawaguchi has the closer, bigger views of Mount Fuji itself; Hakone has the better day out (mountain railway, ropeway, boat) and more ryokans. On a clear day both are wonderful. Pick Kawaguchiko if seeing Fuji matters most.

**Where should I fly in and out?** –

For 14 days, fly into Tokyo and home from Osaka (Kansai Airport): it saves a day of backtracking. For 21 days, a return flight to Tokyo works well, because the route comes back there anyway.