



Tokyo & Kyoto Family Travel Guide

An 11-day, first-hand guide to transportation, family-friendly hotels, teen-approved activities, where to eat, and everything we learned along the way.

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Welcome

Prepare for an exciting mix of neon-lit neighborhoods, peaceful temples, incredible food, efficient transportation, and more walking than you may think humanly possible.

Use this guide to plan an 11-day journey through Tokyo and Kyoto, with day trips to Nara and Kibune. Follow the itinerary exactly or adapt it to fit your schedule, interests, and preferred travel pace.

Start by choosing your route and booking your flights. Then reserve your hotels, transportation, and priority attractions. Use the guide to organize your sightseeing geographically and avoid wasting valuable time traveling back and forth across each city.

This guide is based on our family's trip to Japan with two teenagers. Along the way, we learned how to navigate enormous train stations, reserve popular experiences, manage the summer heat, and slow down when our original plans did not work out.

Take what worked for us, learn from what we would change, and create a trip that works for you.

Happy travels!

Michelle

— Staying Blonde

Is This Guide Right for You?

This guide is for travelers who are:

- Visiting **Tokyo and Kyoto** (with a day trip or two nearby)
- Planning their **first trip to Japan**
- Traveling as a **family — especially with teens**
- Looking for about an **11-day** pace that hits the highlights without rushing
- Wanting a mix of traditional culture, modern city life, great food, and can't-miss attractions

 **Please note:** This guide covers our Tokyo & Kyoto route (plus day trips to Nara and Kibune) — it isn't a whole-country guide.

Japan looks small on a map, which makes it tempting to add a third or fourth city. Resist the urge — changing hotels takes more time and energy than it looks, especially when traveling with kids. Tokyo and Kyoto are a fantastic combination for a first trip: modern neighborhoods, shopping, and futuristic attractions in Tokyo; temples, historic streets, and a slower pace in Kyoto. Day trips (we did Nara) add ground without the repacking.

Although the itinerary is based on our trip with teenagers, adapt it for couples, friends, solo travelers, or families with children of different ages.

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Planning Your Trip

Planning Timeline



6-12 Months Before

- **Choose your travel dates.** Spring (cherry blossoms) and fall (foliage) are the prettiest — and the most crowded and expensive. Summer brings festivals and long days but intense heat and humidity; winter has fewer crowds, lower prices, and skiing up north. Check Japan's holidays too — **Golden Week** (late April into early May) is one of the busiest travel periods.
- **Pick two cities, not six.** Changing hotels takes more time and energy than it looks on a map, especially with kids. For a first trip, Tokyo and Kyoto are a fantastic combination — modern neighborhoods and futuristic attractions in Tokyo, temples and a slower pace in Kyoto — and day trips (we did Nara) cover more ground without the repacking.
- **Compare Tokyo airports and consider open-jaw flights.** Haneda is closer to the city; Narita is farther but sometimes cheaper. An **open-jaw ticket** — into Tokyo, home from Osaka — can save you a backtrack. Compare four things: a standard round-trip through Tokyo, an open-jaw flying into Tokyo and out of Osaka, the same route in reverse, and the total price once you add transfers and any extra train travel.
- **Book family-sized hotel rooms early.** They're often the biggest expense, and the good family options go fast. Look beyond the nightly price: bed count and size, whether kids count toward occupancy, room size, distance to the nearest station, laundry, a fridge or kitchenette, breakfast options, and luggage storage/delivery services.
- Compare the **Japan Rail Pass** against individual Shinkansen tickets — since JR Pass prices went up, individual tickets are often cheaper.



1-3 Months Before

- **Reserve the sell-out attractions the moment booking opens** — teamLab Planets, teamLab Borderless, the Ghibli Museum, the Nintendo Museum, the Pokémon Café, themed cafés, and special restaurants. Build a simple booking calendar: the date reservations open, the time converted to **your own time zone**, whether you need an account set up in advance, a preferred and backup date/time, and each attraction's cancellation policy.
- **Shibuya Sky** tickets go on sale at midnight (local time) **14 days before** — the sunset and evening slots sell out fast. Release times can change, so confirm the exact time on the official Shibuya Sky site.

 [Book the Ghibli Museum tour](#)  [Book Nintendo Museum tickets](#)

 [Book a Pokémon Café tour](#)



Before You Fly

- **Set up your digital tools:** an eSIM or pocket Wi-Fi, Google Maps, Google Translate (with Japanese downloaded for offline use), SmartEX for Shinkansen, a Mobile Suica or IC card, offline copies of your reservations, and **Visit Japan Web** — complete your immigration and customs info ahead of time and save a screenshot of each traveler's QR code in case the airport Wi-Fi isn't cooperating. ([Visit Japan Web](#))

- **Check Japan's medication rules well before you pack — this isn't a night-before task.** Japan restricts some common prescription and over-the-counter medications, including certain ADHD, pain, anxiety, and sleep medications; the rules depend on the active ingredient (not the brand name), the quantity, and whether advance permission is required. **Adderall (amphetamine) is prohibited in Japan outright, so don't pack it.** Vyvanse (lisdexamfetamine) can only be brought in with advance permission, and medications such as methylphenidate, zolpidem, and alprazolam have their own quantity limits. In general, up to a one-month supply of many prescription medications is fine without extra paperwork; larger quantities may need an import certificate, and some controlled medications need permission from Japan's Narcotics Control Department before you travel — apply at least 14 days out, though starting earlier is safer. Look up the active ingredient against Japan's current official guidance, keep everything in its original labeled packaging, carry a copy of the prescription and a doctor's letter, pack essential medication in your carry-on, and never mail controlled medication to Japan or ask someone else to carry it.
- Pack comfortable, broken-in walking shoes (see Final Prep).
- Consider Japan's **luggage-forwarding (takkyubin)** services if you'd rather travel hands-free between cities — see Final Prep & Packing for details.

Getting There & Your Route



The Shinkansen



Japan Rail

Getting There & Getting Around

Most families fly into **Tokyo** to start. Once you're in Japan, the trains do the heavy lifting.

- **Tokyo has two airports** — **Haneda** (closer to the city) and **Narita** (farther out, but sometimes cheaper). And it's worth pricing an **open-jaw flight** (into Tokyo, home from Osaka's Kansai) — honestly the one thing we'd change most. We booked round-trip through Tokyo, which broke up our Tokyo time and cost us vacation days retracing our steps; an open-jaw ticket lets you take the bullet train one way and fly home from Osaka. It can save money, too — a round-trip Shinkansen sometimes costs more than a one-way flight. (We *did* enjoy one last night back in Tokyo, so weigh the trade-off.) ([Compare transfers & transport](#))
- **The Shinkansen (bullet train)** connects Tokyo and Kyoto — fast, comfortable, and an experience in itself. Reserve seats if you want to sit together, check which side has **Mount Fuji** views, and grab an **ekiben** (train bento) before boarding. If your suitcase's total dimensions (height + width + depth) are more than 160cm (up to 250cm), the Tokaido and Sanyo Shinkansen require a seat booked with the oversized-baggage area. Reserve it when you buy your ticket, because bringing a large bag on without a reservation costs extra — check the current rule when you book, not on the platform. ([Shinkansen ticket info](#))

- **JR Pass vs. individual tickets:** since the JR Pass price increase, many travelers save by buying individual Shinkansen tickets. Add up your planned train travel and compare before you buy.
- **Give every traveler their own IC transit card** (Suica, PASMO, or ICOCA, or Mobile Suica) — a rechargeable, contactless smart card that's the easiest way to pay for trains, subways, and buses, plus convenience stores, vending machines, and coin lockers: just tap in and tap out. Mobile cards don't work on every phone, kids' physical cards may need ID at a staffed counter, some rural or specialty routes don't accept them, and they don't replace Shinkansen reservations. **In Kyoto, compare bus and rail routes before you pick one** — buses are often more useful than trains for reaching the popular temples.
- **Google Maps is your best friend** — it nails the route, the line and platform, which car to board, and the right station exit. Pair it with **Google Translate** (Japanese downloaded for offline use). **Save your hotels, restaurants, and must-see attractions to a shared list before you go** — it makes it easy to see what's near what and group your days by neighborhood.
- **Expect to walk — a lot.** We averaged **20,000–30,000 steps a day**. Comfortable, broken-in shoes are essential.
- **You don't need to speak Japanese.** Major stations, airports, and attractions have English signage, translation apps make conversations easy, and locals were incredibly patient and helpful — though a few polite Japanese phrases are always appreciated.

The Itinerary

Our actual route looked like this:



Fly into Tokyo



Tokyo Days 1–4



Shinkansen to Kyoto



Kyoto Days 5–10 (with day trips to Nara & Kibune)



Shinkansen back to Tokyo



Tokyo Days 10–11, one last night before flying home

Days 1–4 • Tokyo

Japan's exciting introduction, where ancient traditions meet futuristic city life.

- Explore Asakusa and Senso-ji Temple, Akihabara, Ikebukuro, and Shinjuku
- Experience Shibuya and Harajuku; animal cafés and Pokémon hotspots.
- Visit DisneySea and teamLab Planets

Days 5–10 • Kyoto

Japan's cultural heart, filled with temples, bamboo forests, and some of the trip's best food.

- Walk through Arashiyama Bamboo Forest and feed the monkeys
- Hike beneath the thousands of torii gates at Fushimi Inari

- Explore Gion, Nishiki Market, and Kiyomizu-dera Temple

Nara Day Trip

A fun day among temples and Japan's famous bowing deer.

- Feed the free-roaming deer in Nara Park
- Visit Todai-ji Temple and the Giant Buddha

Note: We missed Todai-ji because the summer heat wore us down. Make it a priority before everyone becomes too tired.

Kibune & Kifune Shrine Day Trip

A peaceful mountain escape from Kyoto's summer heat.

- Visit the lantern-lined Kifune Shrine
- Relax beside the mountain river

Days 10–11 • Fly Home

One final day to relax before flying home — end your trip somewhere with a pool if you can (we chose the [New Otani Hotel](#) and loved it).

Note: If we did it again, we'd give **Tokyo more time**. Our teens loved its energy, quirky neighborhoods, and themed cafés — and our 4 nights up front plus 1 at the end felt a little rushed. Next time we'd do **five consecutive nights in Tokyo** before Kyoto (without shortening our five wonderful Kyoto nights).

CHAPTER 3

Tokyo Highlights



Sushi Tetsu



Tokyo DisneySea

Tokyo was a whirlwind, in the best possible way. Here's what to prioritize.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Senso-ji Temple | ☐ Meiji Jingu Shrine |
| ☐ Ueno Park | ☐ Takeshita Street |
| ☐ Tokyo Skytree | ☐ Shibuya Crossing |
| ☐ Akihabara | ☐ Shibuya Sky |
| ☐ Tokyo DisneySea | ☐ Pokémon Café |
| ☐ teamLab Planets | ☐ Tokyo Tower |

Asakusa & Senso-ji Temple

A great mix of old and new — Senso-ji offers a glimpse of traditional Japan amid the bustle of Tokyo, and Asakusa is a great spot to take in Tokyo Skytree views and browse one of the best Mega Don Quijotes.

Harajuku & Shibuya

Pair these two — they're close together and easy to combine in one day. Harajuku is all about shopping, crepes, and people-watching; teens especially love the fashion scene on Takeshita Street, so budget extra time (and money) there. In Shibuya, shop more, cross the famous Shibuya Crossing, and snap a photo with the Hachiko statue before a Shibuya Sky reservation.

Animal Cafés

Don't skip [Mipig Café](#) (mini pigs!) and the [Owl Village Café](#), both in Harajuku — a big hit with animal-loving kids. The pigs cuddle right up in your lap, sometimes several at a time. Add on a feeding session at Owl Village for an up-close look at the owls.

Akihabara & Ikebukuro

A dream for anime, gaming, and pop-culture fans — arcades, themed cafés, and quirky shops. Ikebukuro is a little more manageable than Akihabara and just as fun, with a Pokémon Center that includes a Pokémon Go Lab.

Shinjuku

A great home base — spend evenings here trying restaurants, checking out the 3D Cat Billboard, and wandering Omoide Yokocho ("Memory Lane") for irresistible street food.

teamLab Planets

An immersive digital-art exhibit that's mind-blowing and honestly hard to describe — you just have to experience it. A great way to escape the summer heat for a couple of hours.

 **Michelle's Tip:** Wear shorts or pants you can roll up — you wade through some installations. And skip skirts/dresses: many exhibits have mirrored floors.

 [Get teamLab Planets tickets](#)

Shibuya Sky at Sunset

An absolute must-do. The panoramic views of Tokyo as the sun goes down are worth the reservation hassle, and teens especially love the rooftop vibe.

 **Michelle's Tip:** Tickets go on sale at midnight (local time) 14 days before — the sunset and evening slots sell out fast, so book right when they release for that golden-hour view. Confirm the release time on the official Shibuya Sky site before you plan around it.

 [Get Shibuya Sky at Sunset tickets](#)

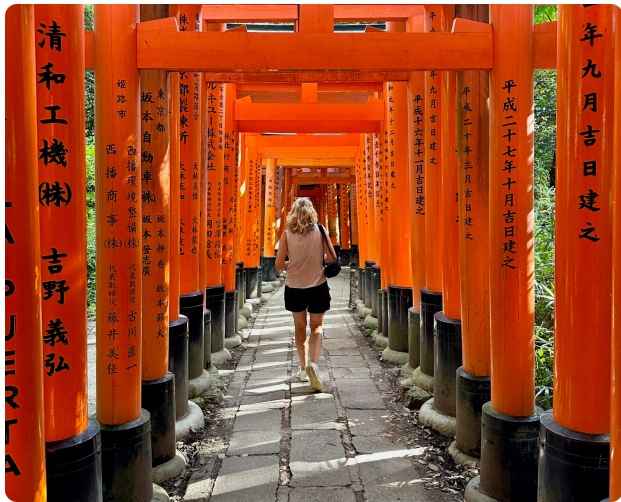
Tokyo DisneySea

Unlike any other Disney park. The reduced summer evening passport is a great budget-friendly option for a shorter visit, but block a full day if you can — it's huge, with incredible theming, rides, and food, and a few hours barely scratches the surface.

 [Get Tokyo DisneySea tickets](#)

CHAPTER 4

Kyoto Highlights



Fushimi Inari Shrine



Arashiyama

After the neon dazzle of Tokyo, Kyoto feels like stepping into a beautifully illustrated storybook — slower-paced, traditional, and rich with history, with plenty to keep kids engaged too.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Arashiyama | ☐ Gion |
| ☐ Fushimi Inari Shrine | ☐ Nishiki Market |
| ☐ Nara Day Trip | ☐ Kibune & Kifune Shrine |
| ☐ Kiyomizu-dera Temple | ☐ Kinkaku-ji |

Arashiyama

Plan a full day here. Start with a customized rickshaw tour through the town and bamboo forest — a fantastic way to see the area, which gets very crowded. Follow it with lunch, ice cream, and a walk up to feed the monkeys at Iwatayama Monkey Park.

 [Book a customized Arashiyama rickshaw tour](#)

Fushimi Inari Shrine

The iconic red torii gates don't disappoint. It's a bit of a hike, but totally worth it — plan for the heat and humidity to slow you down, and know that going about three-quarters of the way up is plenty if you're short on time or energy.

 **Michelle's Tip:** Hike at least halfway up the path. The crowds thin out the farther you go, leaving you with a much more peaceful experience — and there are places to buy water along the way.

Kiyomizu-dera Temple

Stunning views over the city and a lovely walk through charming streets filled with shops and snacks. Don't skip it even if the kids are "temped out" by this point in the trip — it's one of the most beautiful temples in Kyoto, with sweeping views overlooking the city.

Gion

Wandering the historic streets of Gion feels like stepping back in time. Geisha sightings aren't guaranteed, but the atmosphere alone is worth the wander — a hotel on the edge of Gion makes it easy to spend evenings there.

Nishiki Market

"Kyoto's Kitchen" — find just about everything here, from fresh mochi to matcha soft serve. It's a fun place to wander, but prices run noticeably higher than other areas. The adjacent pedestrian arcade has plenty of souvenir and fashion shops too — worth a look for gifts.

Kibune & Kifune Shrine

A peaceful mountain escape from Kyoto's summer heat, with the lantern-lined shrine and a scenic river. Hirobun's flowing-noodle experience is popular enough to mean a 3+ hour wait in summer — if that's too long, a riverside café for drinks and sweets is a great backup plan.

 **Please note:** Kibune has a fairytale-like, off-the-beaten-path feel, but it can get more crowded in summer than you'd expect.

CHAPTER 5

Where to Eat



Kibune



Kyo Baum

We kept most meals casual and teen-approved — egg sandwiches, strawberry sandwiches, and smoothies from 7-Eleven became a go-to for convenience (and were surprisingly tasty). But we also had a few sit-down meals that stood out:

- ☐ Yakiniku Honma (Akasaka, Tokyo)
- ☐ Hananoi (Gion, Kyoto)
- ☐ Gion Tanto (Gion, Kyoto)
- ☐ A Happy Pancake (Kyoto)
- ☐ Sushi Tetsu (Pontocho Alley, Kyoto)
- ☐ Curry Udon (Shinjuku, Tokyo)
- ☐ Di Punto (Shinjuku, Tokyo)
- ☐ Denny's
- ☐ Kyo Baum (Arashiyama, Kyoto)

Yakiniku Honma (Akasaka, Tokyo)

A fun and flavorful Japanese BBQ experience. Great for families and very interactive.

[🔗 Learn more about Yakiniku Honma](#)

Hananoi (Gion, Kyoto)

Hands down the best sushi we've ever had. We did a kaiseki meal (chef's choice) and it was beyond exceptional — fresh, beautifully presented, and an experience in itself. Every course felt like a work of art, and it was a highlight of our stay in Kyoto.

Gion Tanto (Gion, Kyoto)

A charming little spot in the historic district, offering a mix of traditional Kyoto dishes.

Please note: There are only five tables, so there will most likely be a long wait — but trust me, it's well worth it.

A Happy Pancake (Kyoto)

Fluffy, melt-in-your-mouth pancakes that were totally worth the wait.

Sushi Tetsu (Pontocho Alley, Kyoto)

Fresh, delicious sushi in a cozy but lively setting. Great value and very family-friendly — there will most likely be a long wait to get in, but trust me, it's worth it.

Curry Udon (Shinjuku, Tokyo)

Rich, comforting, and perfect after a long day of exploring.

Di Punto (Shinjuku, Tokyo)

A laid-back wine bar with great pizza and small plates. A fun spot for a more grown-up vibe after the kids had their fill of arcades and Pokémon centers.

Denny's

Yep, the same Denny's as back in the States, but with a welcome twist of Japanese flair. The menu features a variety of comfort dishes from back home as well as traditional Japanese cuisine, and everything we had was delicious. Denny's ended up being our daughter's favorite place to eat on the whole trip.

Kyo Baum (Arashiyama, Kyoto)

Our rickshaw guide recommended this spot and it delivered — the matcha soft serve was hands-down the best we had all trip: rich, creamy, and not too sweet. The perfect treat after the bamboo forest.

CHAPTER 6

Where to Stay



Mimaru Suites Shinjuku West



Hilton DoubleTree Kyoto

Book family-sized rooms early — the best family options go fast. Look beyond the nightly price at bed count and size, whether kids count toward occupancy, room size, distance to the nearest station, laundry, and a fridge or kitchenette.

For each city, here's where we stayed plus a luxury and a best-value alternative — pick what fits your trip.

Tokyo

WHERE WE STAYED

Mimaru Suites Shinjuku West

Tokyo • 4 nights

Our favorite family hotel in Tokyo. Spacious apartment-style suites with a kitchen, dining table, refrigerator, and bunk beds gave us room to spread out after busy days — and the Shinjuku location made exploring easy.

[Check availability at](#)
 [Mimaru Suites Shinjuku West](#)

LUXURY

Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo

Its large family room truly accommodates up to five instead of merely allowing children.

 [Check availability at the Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo](#)

BEST VALUE

Monday Apart Premium Ueno

The kitchen, dining area, and washer-dryer are genuinely helpful for families.

[Check availability at](#)
 [Monday Apart Premium Ueno](#)

Kyoto

WHERE WE STAYED

Hilton DoubleTree Kyoto Higashiyama

Kyoto • 5 nights

It doesn't have rooms that accommodate a family of four — since our kids are older, we booked two rooms, and it worked out wonderfully. It's in a great location, with a wonderful onsen and a delicious breakfast buffet.

[Check availability at the](#)
[Hilton DoubleTree Kyoto Higashiyama](#)

LUXURY

Four Seasons Hotel Kyoto

Its connecting rooms and residences solve the family-space problem beautifully.

[Check availability at the](#)
[Four Seasons Hotel Kyoto](#)

BEST VALUE

M's Inn Higashiyama

Excellent verified reviews, useful family layouts, and a location that complements your itinerary.

[Check availability at M's](#)
[Inn Higashiyama](#)

ALSO STAYED

Hotel New Otani

Tokyo • 1 night, end of trip

The perfect place to end our trip. We chose the New Otani for its beautiful outdoor pool, and it didn't disappoint. In the quieter Akasaka district, it was a relaxing place to recharge before our flight home, with exceptional amenities and one of Tokyo's most beautiful hotel grounds.

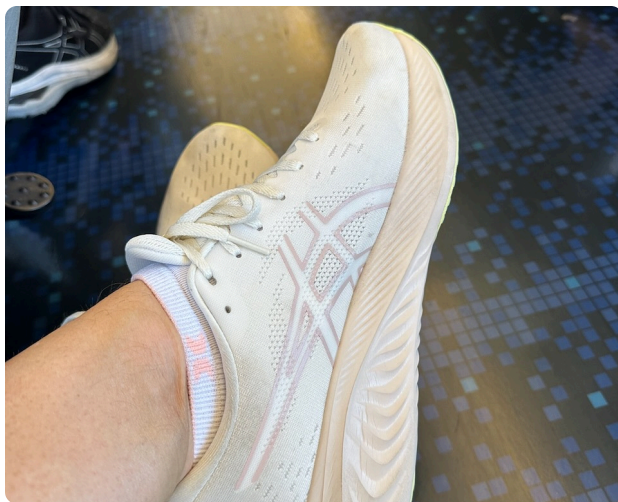
[Check availability at the New Otani](#)

CHAPTER 7

Final Prep & Packing



Final Prep & Packing



Final Prep & Packing

Japan in summer is *hot* — and it's a lot of walking, stairs, and crowded trains — so pack a light, breathable **carry-on capsule** with room for the shopping you'll inevitably do. (We have a **free printable Japan summer packing checklist** — see *Helpful Resources*.)

Luggage-Forwarding (Takkyubin)

Japan has excellent luggage-forwarding services, often called *takkyubin* or "hands-free travel," that move your bags between airports, hotels, and other participating locations — a great option if you'd rather not drag suitcases through crowded stations. Most hotels can arrange the shipment from the front desk, but delivery isn't always same-day, so keep medications, travel documents, electronics, and a change of clothes with you. Even with luggage forwarding, pack light: you'll still deal with stairs, busy platforms, compact hotel rooms, and trains with limited storage — and you'll want the extra room for shopping on the way home. A packable duffel bag is a lifesaver for the trip back.

Clothing — a summer capsule

- ☐ 2–3 lightweight dresses (breathable — skip anything tight or heavy)
- ☐ 2 flowy, wrinkle-resistant skirts
- ☐ 1 pair of lightweight linen pants (cool evenings, chilly AC, temples, teamLab, mosquito cover)
- ☐ 2 pairs of comfortable shorts
- ☐ 5–6 lightweight tops (tanks, tees, a linen button-down for layering, sun, and temples)
- ☐ Underwear, 2 bras, light pajamas, and plenty of socks (many indoor spaces are shoes-off)

Shoes — comfort is non-negotiable

- ☐ 1 pair of broken-in walking shoes (you'll hit 20,000–30,000 steps — wear your bulkiest pair on the plane)
- ☐ 1 pair of supportive walking sandals (sightseeing to dinner)

Accessories & Japan-summer essentials

- ☐ Packable sun hat (a magnetic hat clip helps) + UV sunglasses
- ☐ A crossbody or belt bag (phone, wallet, IC card)
- ☐ A lightweight layer for heavy AC (cardigan, wrap, or linen shirt)
- ☐ A small hand towel (some restrooms have no paper towels; also great for the heat)
- ☐ A portable fan, a cooling towel, and a **UV umbrella** (a summer lifesaver)
- ☐ A refillable water bottle
- ☐ A few gallon zip-top bags (public trash cans are scarce)
- ☐ A packable duffel for souvenirs, plus packing cubes to stay organized

Toiletries & health

- ☐ Travel-size toiletries (toothbrush + paste, skincare, deodorant, razor, hairbrush + ties)
- ☐ Sunscreen, insect repellent, and blister bandages
- ☐ Feminine products; laundry sheets or a little detergent
- ☐ Any medication in its **original labeled packaging**, with a prescription copy and doctor's letter (see Planning Timeline)

Tech

- ☐ eSIM or pocket Wi-Fi, chargers, a power adapter/converter, and a portable battery
- ☐ Noise-canceling headphones

In your personal item (carry-on)

- ☐ Passport, wallet, phone + charger + battery
- ☐ Prescription meds, offline copies of your reservations, and travel-insurance info
- ☐ A neck pillow, a lightweight layer, and a pen (for landing/customs forms)

Tips, Resources & FAQ

Michelle's Tips

- 💡 • Don't try to see everything — Japan rewards travelers who slow down enough to wander neighborhoods, duck into tiny restaurants, and enjoy the moment. Some of our favorite memories weren't on the itinerary at all.
- Book the sell-out attractions early — teamLab Planets, Ghibli Museum, Nintendo Museum, themed cafés, and special restaurants.
- Grab Shibuya Sky tickets right when they release (14 days out) for a sunset slot.
- Do the math on the JR Pass vs. individual Shinkansen tickets — individual tickets are often cheaper now.

- 💡 • Pack comfortable walking shoes — this is a high-step-count trip.
- At teamLab Planets, wear roll-up pants (not skirts or dresses) as some of the rooms have mirrors on the floor as part of the experience.
- Book **open-jaw flights** (into Tokyo, home from Osaka) to save a backtrack — but price it against a round-trip first.

- 💡 • **Leave breathing room:** one major attraction per half-day, grouped by neighborhood, with a flexible block in each city, a café or pool break built in, and at least one slot where each family member picks the priority.
- **Reserve sell-out attractions the moment booking opens** — and note the release time in *your* time zone.
- Give each traveler their **own IC transit card**.



- **Pack light** — you'll walk 20,000–30,000 steps a day and want room for shopping.
- For the summer heat: **cooling wipes, a portable fan, a UV umbrella, and lots of water.**
- Consider **luggage forwarding (takkyubin)** if you'd rather not drag suitcases through stations — see Final Prep & Packing.

Helpful Resources

- [Japan Travel Mistakes: What We'd Do Differently Next Time](#)
- [The Ultimate Japan Summer Packing List \(free printable checklist\)](#)
- [12 Essential Japan Travel Tips to Know Before You Go](#)
- [Shinkansen ticket info \(SmartEX\)](#)
- [Visit Japan Web](#)
- [Yakiniku Honma](#)

For more travel inspiration, visit [StayingBlonde.com](#). Traveling somewhere else? Explore our many [travel articles](#) and our [travel guides](#)!

Frequently Asked Questions

Is 11 days enough time to visit Japan with teenagers?

-  Ten to twelve days is comfortable for a first trip, and our 11-day itinerary sits right in that range — enough to experience Tokyo, Kyoto, riding the Shinkansen, ancient temples, immersive museums, and some of the country's best food without constantly rushing.

How far in advance should I book a trip to Japan?

-  For popular spring and fall dates, start researching about nine to twelve months out. Booking flights and family-sized hotel rooms six to nine months ahead gives you more choices, and attraction booking windows vary — check each experience's official site.

Q Is Japan a good destination for families with teens?

A One of the best in the world. It blends history, modern tech, amazing food, shopping, anime, gaming, and unique cultural experiences that appeal to parents and teens alike — and giving teens input when building the itinerary helps keep everyone engaged.

Q Which cities should first-time visitors include?

A For an 11-day trip, focus on Tokyo and Kyoto with nearby day trips — the perfect mix of traditional culture, city life, food, and attractions without too many hotel changes.

Q Is Japan expensive for families?

A It can be more affordable than expected. Hotels are usually the biggest cost, but transit is efficient, convenience-store meals are surprisingly good, and many of the best experiences (temples, parks, neighborhoods) cost little or nothing.

Q Do I need cash in Japan?

A Credit cards and cashless payments are common in major cities, but smaller restaurants, temples, markets, and rural businesses may still require cash. Carry some yen and use ATMs at places like 7-Eleven or Japan Post when you need to top up.

Q Should I buy a Japan Rail Pass?

A Not always. Since JR Pass prices increased, many travelers save with individual Shinkansen tickets — travelers visiting only Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka often find individual tickets more economical. Compare the cost of your planned travel against the current pass price.

Q Is Japan easy if you don't speak Japanese?

A Yes. Major stations, airports, and attractions have English signage, translation apps help, and locals were incredibly patient and helpful — though a few polite Japanese phrases are always appreciated.

Q How much walking should I expect?

A A lot — 20,000 to 30,000 steps most days. Comfortable shoes are one of the most important things to pack.

Q What should I book first?

A Start with flights and accommodations, especially if you need a room for four or more people. Next, lock in limited-entry attractions and themed cafés. Reserve intercity trains and restaurants once the main structure of your itinerary is settled.

Q What should I book before arriving in Japan?

A Popular attractions sell out weeks ahead — reserve teamLab Planets, Ghibli Museum, Nintendo Museum, themed cafés, and special restaurants as early as you can.

Q What is the best time of year to visit Japan?

A Spring and fall are most popular (cherry blossoms in spring, foliage in autumn). Summer has fun festivals but can be hot and humid.

Q What's the biggest piece of advice you'd give first-time visitors?

A Don't try to see everything. Slow down enough to wander, and let some of the best moments happen off the itinerary.

See You in Japan!

Japan was one of the most memorable trips our family has ever taken, and I hope this guide makes planning yours a little easier. Whether it's your teens' first temple, first bowl of ramen, or first bullet train, I hope Japan surprises and delights your family the way it did ours.

Happy travels!

Michelle

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