

Visiting Japan without Japanese? Fear not.

Travelling and dining out in Japan needn't reduce you to tears of frustration.

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It's a question so common, I'd genuinely be worried if I didn't receive it on any given day; "Can I visit Japan without knowing Japanese?"

The answer is of course, no.

Should you arrive at Narita Airport without being able to first demonstrate your ability to say "This is a pen" in fluent Japanese, you'll subsequently be targeted for termination by wave after wave of seemingly indestructible weaponised ASIMO robots.

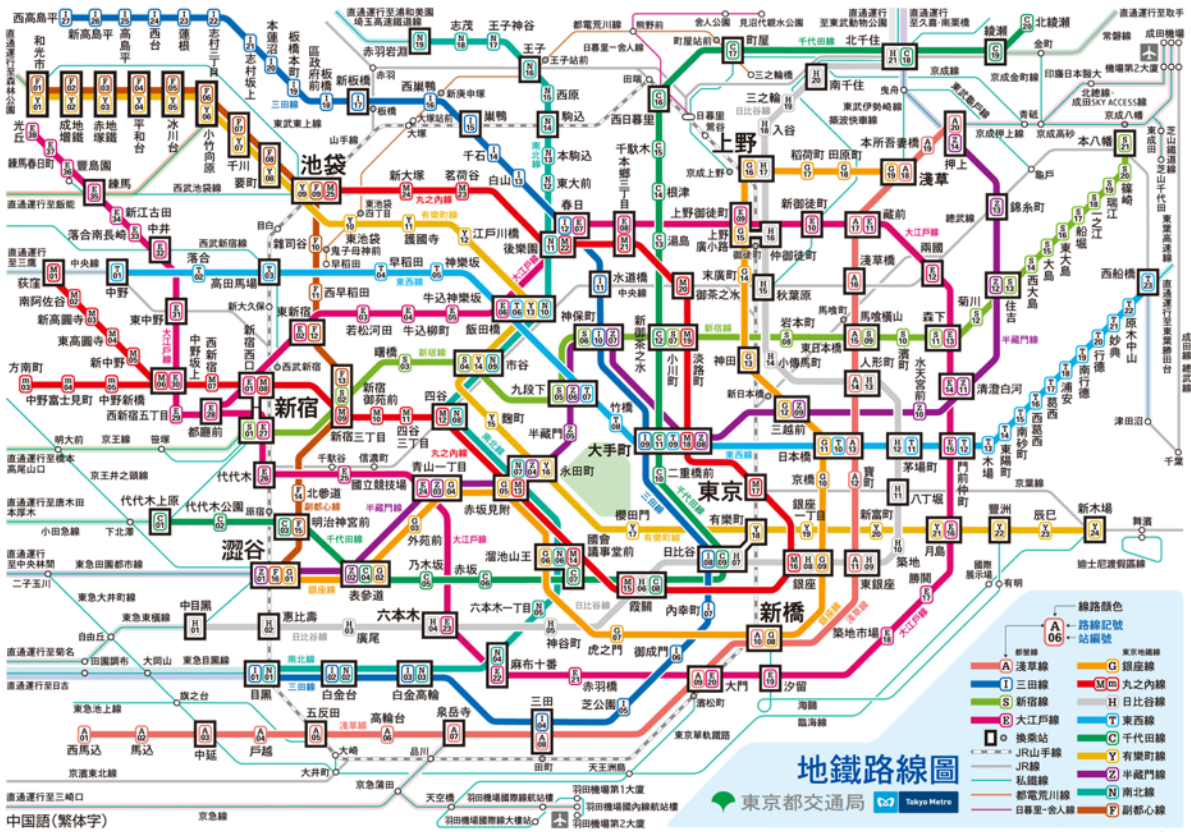
Or perhaps I'm getting confused with my own idealistic vision of a utopian kingdom again.

Truthfully though, the language barrier isn't quite the issue you would expect it to be. You could quite comfortably arrive in the Land of the Rising Sun, whilst jet-lagged on

If you're venturing outside of cities and popular tourist spots in particular, I'd highly recommend doing some research online, so you know exactly what it is you want to eat, see or do. It could be the difference between eating a delicious dish in a mystic temple, or being lost down a forest footpath eating cheap mints.

As for travelling around the country, getting around would be an utter nightmare if it wasn't for the fact that we live in the future, able to navigate via satellite photos from a pocket-sized high resolution touch screen.

Simply put, to come to Japan without Google maps, is to go into a fistfight without fingers. A scarcely imaginable and ill advised feat. The Tokyo metro is about the size of Spain, with a map that resembles some kind of nightmarish multi-coloured snake pit. Many small stations in Tokyo don't even have English available.



The Tokyo Metro could reduce even a Bond villain to tears.

Luckily, Google maps will be your best friend through these dark times, giving you not only the fastest route from A to B, but telling you how much of your pocket money you'll need to spend in the process.

I wouldn't dream of travelling Japan without it and most people living here would testify that it ranks high on the Japan survival list. If you need a sim card, be sure to grab

one at the airport upon arrival. They cost around ¥3,000 for 1gb of data and you'll find it's the greatest investment you'll ever make whilst you're in Japan.

Another popular concern is ATM's. Again - no need to worry, you'll be delighted to learn that most have an English language option. ATM's at Seven Eleven stores are *by far* the most reliable as well, as ATM's in many other stores can't be used 24 hours a day and sometimes reject foreign cards. There are few things worse than these racist ATM's.

Perhaps best of all though, because Japanese people are the kindest, most courteous and helpful people on Earth, they will really go out of their way to help you. In less touristy areas and outside major cities, you'll find Japanese people are usually perplexed upon sighting a foreigner trundling down the street. You may get stared at frequently, but don't worry, this will be born out of surprise and curiosity as opposed to abject horror and revulsion (unless your dress sense is as shit as mine, in which case, expect abject horror).

But you'll often find if a passerby notices you're having an issue, they'll take on the role of good Samaritan, regardless of their English ability. If you're lost you'll find strangers will spend half an hour drawing you a bespoke and often unnecessary map to a location a mere two minutes away. I've even had a stranger come up to me in an airport, and without a word, pull a price sticker off of my brand new shirt, which I'd forgotten to remove. He placed the price sticker in my hand and gave me a friendly nod as if he'd just made the world a better place, before hastily riding off into the sunset.

On his feet.

Finally, if you're still worried about visiting Japan without knowing Japanese, consider this your anxiety vaccination; throughout my time working in Japan, I knew dozens of people around the country, that lived, worked and thrived in the country without being able to say a single sentence.

This included me during my first year; it took me three frustrating months to work out how to say "*Could I have a carrier bag*" when shopping for groceries. This meant I had to frequently juggle my groceries back to the apartment in the absence of a carrier bag, whilst all the while cursing my lack of Japanese knowledge. On the upside however, I would eventually go on to win the silver medal in the local town's traditional bi-annual cabbage juggling competition.

Which isn't real.

The good news is Japanese people won't be mad or offended if you can't speak the language (unlike certain countries in Europe). There's often an expectation that you probably won't be able to speak the language, given the complexity of the Japanese language, and the fact that the language is exclusive to Japan.

If you are able to speak it though, it'll certainly pay huge dividends when it comes to meeting and interacting with the locals, often leading to untold adventures and encounters. With that in mind, I'd recommend learning some phrases if you want to make the most of your time in Japan and there are plenty of good apps to help you these days (*'Human Japanese'* on iOS and Android springs to mind).

All it takes is a few hours of extra homework to make the difference between a good holiday and a spectacular and unforgettable trip. And considering you'll need to remortgage your house and first born son to get to Japan and back, let alone travel around it for a few weeks, whilst consuming all the delicious edible matter you can find, those extra hours of homework beforehand will certainly be a worthy investment of your time.

So save up some pennies, pack your finest wears and hop on over to Japan - and do it all without worrying about the language barrier.

But god help you if you ever dare set foot in Broadtopia, without speaking a word of Broadlish.

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