



# The Traveler's Etiquette Guide to Hokkaido



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Enquiries	Hokkaido Kanko Shinko Kiko Public Interest Inc. Association 1st Floor Ryokuen Building, 1-1 Kita 3-jo Nishi 7-chome, Chuo-ku, Sapporo Tel.011-231-6736 Fax. 011-232-5064
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Understand Japanese custom and etiquette for an even more enjoyable visit!

# The Traveler's Etiquette Guide to Hokkaido

Five Concepts for a Pleasant & Rewarding Visit



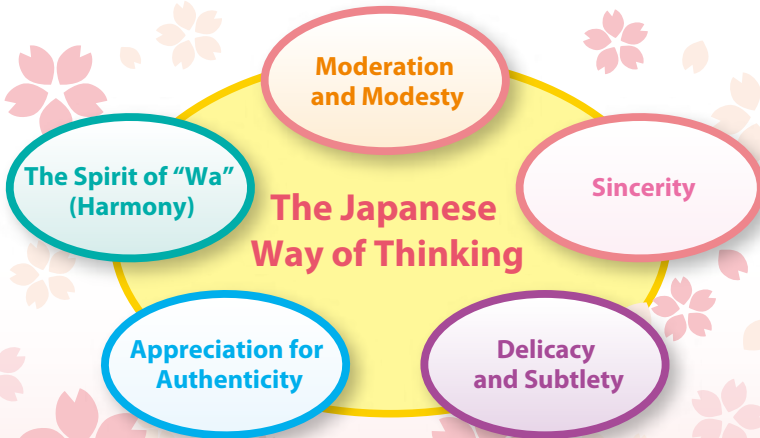
Understand the Japanese mind,

for a pleasant and rewarding visit



### Welcome to Hokkaido, a paradise of Japanese hospitality!

Welcome to Hokkaido! The people of Hokkaido offer a warm welcome and heartfelt hospitality to visitors from around the globe – first-time visitors and repeaters alike. Each and every traveler enjoys Hokkaido in their own unique way. However, the key to an even more rewarding visit is to understand the ways of thinking, customs, and dispositions of Hokkaido’s locals. Through this pamphlet, “The Traveler’s Etiquette Guide to Hokkaido”, we hope to provide insights towards the nature of Japan and the Japanese mind, opening the doors to many joyful and memorable experiences.



POINT

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## The Moderate and Modest Japanese People

Japanese people are often described as having “moderate”, “modest”, or “mild” personalities. At the heart of this disposition lies the cherished concept of “wa” (harmony). As inhabitants of an island nation, the Japanese people have long appreciated the importance of cooperation with family, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. It is considered a virtue to fit in with others – even to the point of restraining one’s personal desires. Japanese people tend to be embarrassed to act differently from others, and have developed a tradition of carefully observing the surroundings before acting.

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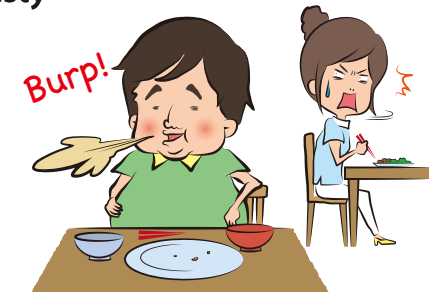
### 1 Speak in a Whisper?

The Japanese appear particularly polite and quiet in settings such as restaurants, subways, and public spaces. Compared to other groups such as Americans or Chinese, the Japanese tend to speak quietly. With little stressed intonation, the Japanese language itself is particularly suited to quiet conversation. As such, the Japanese are easily surprised by loud or intense conversations nearby. It may be helpful to lower your voice slightly when in a Japanese social setting.



### 2 Everything with Modesty – Even Belching!

Japanese etiquette is based on avoiding causing discomfort or nuisance to others. Accordingly, Japanese will avoid bodily functions such as belching or flatulence in public entirely, or perform bodily functions as discreetly as possible. Of course, these functions are a necessary part of human life, but please be modest and discreet when visiting Japan.



## POINT 2 The Spirit of "Wa" (Harmony)

The Japanese have long cherished the spirit of "wa" (harmony) as an essential part of living together in a small island nation, and Japanese society has come to be oriented towards the group than towards the individual. Furthermore, the Japanese consider rules and etiquette to be absolutely essential for group activities. Thus, there is a strong sense of obedience for rules. A Japanese proverb of Chinese origin states, "When you enter a village, act like its people do". This reflects the Japanese concern for learning and following local etiquette when traveling overseas.



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### 1 The Importance of Punctuality

During group activities, the Japanese are particularly strict about time. For example, during a group tour, if one of the tour members became absorbed in shopping and did not show up for the appointed time, the tour staff would go into a panic. It is taken for granted that everyone will carefully observe scheduled times. Make sure to be on time in Japan, or you will certainly upset everyone else.



### 2 Disposing of Rubbish

The Japanese people cherish neatness and cleanliness, and there is a strong custom of cleaning up your own rubbish. As such, when visiting Japan, please be mindful not to drop rubbish on the floor or streets, and to carefully sort your rubbish into the proper bins according to category. There are special disposal bins for used paper diapers in public toilets. In places without rubbish bins, visitors are expected to take their rubbish with them.



### 3 Always Orderly, Even in Long Queues

The Japanese people have a strong sense of following rules and avoiding inconvenience to others. This trait can be seen in the orderly behavior of Japanese when in long lines or crowded waiting areas. Cutting ahead in a queue is an unthinkable breach of etiquette in Japan.



### 4 Be Mindful of Private Property

In Japan, like most other countries, smoking in public is restricted to designated areas, and all other public spaces are considered to be non-smoking areas. If you smoke, please do so only in designated areas. Never smoke while walking, as this will disturb others, such as parents with babies in strollers and other tourists.



### Only Take Home Disposable or Consumable Items

Of the items provided at your accommodation, you may generally take home disposable or consumable items such as soap, shampoo, and razors. However, please do not remove other items such as cutlery, dishes, kettles, hairdryers, or the like from your guest room -- taking such items is considered theft.



## POINT 3 Japanese Dining Customs

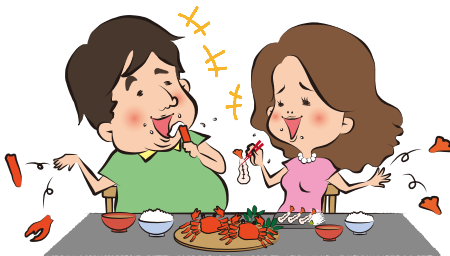
In traditional Japanese dining custom, instead of being seated at a table, diners sit in *seiza* style directly on the tatami floor, and dine from individual legged trays. This tradition has led to the practice of holding dishes, such as the rice bowl and soup bowl, while dining. When using chopsticks, it is considered proper style to elegantly lift items from their dishes, instead of bringing the dish all the way up to the face. Let's look at a few more Japanese dining manners.



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### 1 A Tranquil and Tidy Table

In traditional Japanese dining custom, general etiquette dictates to avoid unnecessary noise or speaking while chewing. As tables were not used in traditional Japanese dining, any spilled foods would soil the tatami mats, so there is a strong aversion to leaving bones or other litter directly on the tabletop. Please return any such waste to the corner of a plate.



### 2 Waste Not, Want Not

"Mottainai" is a Japanese concept of regret for waste, inspired by Buddhist philosophy. This idea lives on at the modern dining table, where it is good etiquette to finish all of your food. Leaving food behind might imply to your hosts that you did not enjoy the meal.



### 3 Please Don't Bring In or Take Out



Bringing your own food or drink into a dining establishment is not common practice in Japan, and is punishable by fine in some cases – when in doubt, don't bring in. Likewise, during buffet dining, please do not fill personal water bottles from the buffet or take extra food with you. Taking home provided cutlery, seasonings, or other amenities is also highly frowned upon.



### No Roomwear in Hotel Common Areas.

Many accommodation facilities in Japan provide roomwear, yukatas, or slippers for use inside the guest rooms. Some of these accommodation facilities allow guests to use roomwear throughout common areas, but others do not. Roomwear may generally be worn outside your room at Japanese-style ryokans (traditional inns) and some other types of facilities, but please be aware that the terms of accommodation at most western-style hotels request guests to not wear yukata, bathrobes, slippers, or the like in hallways or other common areas.



## POINT 4 Public Bath Etiquette

Partaking in the Japanese style of public bathing will place you stark naked, surrounded by many other bathers – perhaps a bit of a shock if you aren't expecting it! The Japanese love bathing, and there is even an expression, "hadaka no tsukiai", which means "socialization in the nude", which refers to the heart-to-heart communication possible in a public bath, where bathers shed their professions and social status to become equals. The Japanese love cleanliness in general, and are particularly obsessed with keeping the bathwater pristine. The saying goes, "In the west, take a bath to get clean. In Japan, get clean to take a bath."



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### 1 Hadaka no Tsukiai ("Socialization in the Nude")

First, remove all of your clothes, and bring the small washing towel with you into the bathing area. Most public baths provide soap and shampoo, but you may also bring your own if you like. Do not wear swimming suits, bathrobes, or slippers – that would certainly be a shock for the locals! Please give Japan's "hadaka no tsukiai" a try.



### 2 Wash Your Body Before Bathing



In a Japanese public bath, bathtubs are shared by everyone. As such, bathers are fastidious about keeping the bathwater clean. Before you soak in the tub, carefully wash your body completely clean, and be sure to rinse off any soap. Jumping straight in the tub without washing first is a big "No!"

### 3 The Tranquil Tradition of Japanese Bathing

The bath area is meant for tranquil relaxation. Please do not shout, swim, take pictures, eat, or drink in the bath area. Also, when washing your body at the washing stations, please be mindful not to spray the shower on others. After washing, please rinse the wash station and chair and return everything to its original place.



### 4 Dry Off Before Entering the Changeroom

When leaving the bath, it is a common courtesy to towel off before you enter the changeroom to avoid tracking water inside. This also helps prevent the risk of slipping and falling in the changeroom.



#### About Japan's Bath Tax

In Japan, a local tax is levied for bathing use of hot springs or mineral springs. The tax is typically about 150 yen for guests staying at an accommodation attached to the hot spring, or around 50-100 yen for day visitors. If staying at a hot spring accommodation, the tax generally must be paid even if you don't use the bath.



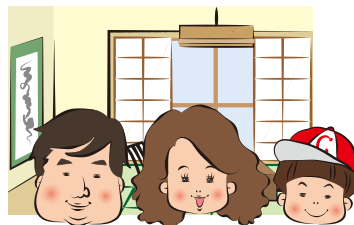
Each country has its own unique history, customs, and culture. Traveling overseas is a great way to expand your horizons, but may also contain some unwelcome surprises! For example, in Japan, accommodation prices are typically calculated per person, not per room. Traditionally, Japanese inns have served both dinner and breakfast with each stay, so enjoying meals at your accommodation is a big part of Japanese hospitality. Even today, there are some inns and hotels which only offer accommodation combined with meals. Let's take a look at some of these differences in social custom.



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### 1 Accommodation Priced per Person, not per Room

Most Japanese hotels and inns publish their prices per person, not per room. If three people share a room, you will pay three times the "three people occupancy" price. Meals are also billed per person. Check the total price in advance, so you don't get surprised by the bill at check out!



Accommodation Cost  
 10,000 yen + 10,000 yen + 7,000 yen  
 = Total: 27,000 yen

### 2 Reliably Made in Japan

In Japan, it's forbidden to open the packaging of a product until you've purchased and paid for it. Japan is a world leader in production technology and quality control, and it's common sense that consumers don't need to open packages to check for defects. As such, opening packages before purchase could be considered damaging the product, or even prosecuted as shoplifting. If you'd like to know more about the package contents, ask the sales staff.



### 3 Accident Insurance in Japan

why?

Consider the case where a bus tour participant falls and is injured while walking at one of the attractions. Unless the tour itself is enrolled in accident insurance, there would be no insurance coverage provided for the injury. Bus carriers are not liable for any damage that occurs outside the vehicle, except as a result of embarking or disembarking. Make sure to carry travel insurance issued in your country of residence.



### 4 Toilet Etiquette

The Japanese pursuit of cleanliness includes using the toilet. It's common courtesy to make sure that you don't dirty the toilet or washroom. Japanese toilet paper is water-soluble and designed to be flushed down the toilet. Please place the paper in the toilet bowl before you flush. If you've soiled the toilet, please be considerate of others and wipe it clean.

No soiled toilet paper in the bins!  
 Flush instead!



### How to use a "Washlet"

One of the first things that visitors to Japan notice are toilet control panels marked with a plethora of features such as "Bottom Clean", "Bidet", "Deodorize", "Heating", and more! You might be thinking, "But I just want to flush!" In many cases, the toilet is mechanically flushed by a separate lever or button from the control panel. Check the side of the tank or the walls around the toilet to find the lever or button.

