SWITZERLAND GLOBAL ENTERPRISE

Japan
Business Travel Guide

Compiled by:

Swiss Business Hub Japan

Tokyo, March 2025

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Entry and Visa Requirements

Swiss and Liechtenstein passport holders can basically enter Japan visa-free for up to 90 days for short-term business activities such as trade shows, business meetings, market surveys, after-sales service, etc. Upon arrival, travelers should have a confirmed return or onward journey ticket and supporting documents detailing the trip's purpose. Proof of sufficient funds for the stay may also be required.

A visa is necessary for long-term residency, employment, or other business activities. Note that Japan and Switzerland do not have a working holiday visa agreement. For official visa information, consult the Japanese authority in Bern or the Immigration Office in Japan. Visit the website of the Embassy of Japan in Switzerland for current visa updates: Visa | Embassy of Switzerland in Japan

Airport Transfers:

- Tokyo, Narita (NRT) — NRT arrival and departure information (90 min to city center)
- Tokyo, Haneda (HND) — HND arrival and departure information (30 min to city center)
- Kansai, Osaka (KIX) — KIX arrival and departure information

HEALTH INFORMATION AND REQUIREMENTS

Inoculations

No specific vaccinations are required for entry into Japan.

Hospitals

Medical facilities in Japan maintain high standards, although language barriers may exist. The Tokyo Medical & Surgical Clinic offers English-speaking staff and emergency services at Tel: 03-3436-3028.

For other facilities with foreign language support, visit: Information on Hospitals and Clinics | Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW)

Emergency services

Medical emergency:	119
Police emergency:	110

For more details, visit Emergency Services | Japan Healthcare Info (JHO)

Health insurance

Health Insurance is mandatory for residents staying in Japan for over 3 months. Learn more about Japan's health insurance system at Health Insurance | Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW)

Drinking water

Tap water in Japan is safe to drink. Bottled water and soft drinks are widely available through vending machines and convenience stores, accepting cash or major e-money cards.

PUBLIC SECURITY / RECOMMENDED PRECAUTIONS

Japan is considered one of the safest countries globally with low crime rates. However, standard precautions are advisable.

Earthquakes / Tsunamis

Japan, located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, experiences frequent minor earthquakes. Early warning systems and structural advancement mitigate risks. Tokyo is generally safe from Tsunamis due to its bay but be prepared for potential flooding or tidal waves.

For earthquake alerts, use smartphone apps such as:

- Yurekuru Call — iOS | Google App
- Erdbeben + Benachrichtigung — iOS | Google App
- Safety Tips — iOS | Google App
- Japan Shelter Guide — iOS | Google App

Identification Obligation

Carry your passport or resident card (for stays exceeding 3 months) at all times in Japan.

Travel advice

Refer to travel advisories issued by the Swiss Foreign Ministry for Japan: Travel advice for Japan (DE, FR, IT) | Swiss Foreign Ministry

TIME ZONE

Japan operates on GMT + 9 hours year-round, without daylight saving time. The time difference with Switzerland is + 7 hours in summer and + 8 hours in winter.

WEATHER

Japan experiences distinct seasons:

Spring: March is cool, warming into April/May. June is rainy with temperatures ranging 18 - 25°C.

Summer: Hot and humid, exceeding 30°C. Stay hydrated and seek shade.

Autumn: Pleasant temperatures from October - November. Beware of typhoons from September – October.

Winter: Cold (0-5 °C) with occasional snow. Check AccuWeather.com

BUSINESS HOURS

	Weekdays	Saturdays	Sundays and Nationals Holidays
Offices	09:00 – 17:00	Closed	Closed
Banks	09:00 – 15:00	Closed	Closed
Post Offices	09:00 – 17:00	Closed	Closed
Department Stores	10:00 – 20:00	10:00 – 20:00	10:00 – 20:00/21:00
Shops	10:00 – 20:00	10:00 – 20:00	10:00 – 20:00
Convenience Stores	Open 24h	Open 24h	Open 24h

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS 2025

The “Golden Week” at the end of April/beginning of May, as well as the week around Obon (August 13 – 16) and December 27 – January 5, are Japanese holiday periods. Those periods, along with a few days before and after each, should be avoided when traveling to Japan for business.

Although Mach is not a holiday season in Japan, it is the closing period of the Japanese financial year, and companies are typically very busy, so it is advisable to avoid scheduling business travel during this time.

New Year’s Day	January 1
Coming of Age Day	January 13 (Second Monday of January)
National Foundation Day	February 11
Emperor’s Birthday	February 23
Vernal Equinox Day	March 20

Shōwa Day	April 29 (Part of Golden Week)
Constitution Memorial Day	May 3 (Part of Golden Week)
Greenery Day	May 4 (Part of Golden Week)
Children's Day	May 5 (Part of Golden Week)
Substitute holiday	May 6 (Part of Golden Week)
Marine Day	July 21 (Third Monday of July)
Mountain Day	August 11
Respect for the Aged Day	September 15 (Third Monday of September)
Autumnal Equinox Day	September 23
Sports Day	October 13 (Second Monday of October)
Labor Thanksgiving Day	November 23
Substitute holiday	November 24

EVENTS AND TRADE FAIRS

2025 World Exposition, Osaka

The EXPO 2025 in Osaka is scheduled to be held from April 13 to October 13, 2025

Official website: Expo 2025 Osaka

SWISS BIOTECH Pavilion @ BioJapan 2025

The SWISS BIOTECH Pavilion at BioJapan 2025 will be held in Yokohama, Japan from October 8 to October 10, 2025.

SWISS BIOTECH Pavilion BioJapan 2025 | S-GE

SWISS Pavilion @ Mass-Trans Innovation Japan 2025

The international trade fair for railway technology will be held from November 26 to 29, 2025 (at Makuhari Messe in Chiba, Japan.

Official Website: Mass-Trans Innovation Japan

Further events and trade fairs

For information on upcoming events and trade fairs, please visit s-ge.com/events and follow the Swiss Business Hub Japan on LinkedIn. Stay updated on on market trends, business opportunities, and more.

COMMUNICATION: TELEPHONE AND INTERNET

Telephone

Japan's country code is +81

Emergency phone numbers

Medical emergency: 119
Police emergency: 110

Internet

For general information on internet access in Japan visit: Internet Access | Japan Guide

Automatic W-iFi Connection App: For free Wi-Fi access Japan Wi-Fi auto-connect

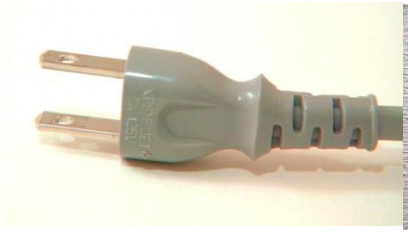
SIM cards, eSIM and pocket WiFi

Data SIM cards or e SIMs are an excellent option if you do not require your phone number for calls and prefer to use VoIP services and internet. For information on where to purchase SIM cards, refer to this guide: How to Buy a SIM Card in Tokyo | Truly Tokyo

For a comprehensive overview of eSIM options: The Best eSIMs for Visiting Japan | Tokyo Cheapo

If you are traveling with a group or multiple devices, renting a pocket Wi-Fi can be a convenient option: Renting a Pocket Wifi in Japan: The Best Options | Tokyo Cheapo

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY



Voltage: 100 V (note: different from North America, 110 V, and Central Europe, 220 V). Swiss appliances that charge a battery may still work, but charging will be slower.

Plug Type: Japanese plugs have two pins and fit into North American outlets. Plug adapters can be purchased at airports and electronic stores. For more information: Japan Electrical Outlet | Travel Japan, JNTO

METHODS OF PAYMENT

Currency

The currency in Japan is the Yen (¥).

The exchange rate as of March 10, 2025 was

100 Swiss Franc	=	16’819 Japanese Yen
100 Japanese Yen	=	0.59 Swiss Franc

When entering or leaving the country with Japanese 1’000’000 Japanese Yen or more in cash or monetary instruments, you must declare it in writing to the customs office.

Payment Methods

While Japan has traditionally been a cash-based society, cashless payment methods have gained popularity. In places that accept credit cards, Visa is the most widely accepted, followed by MasterCard, American Express, and Diners Club. Tipping is not customary in Japan, even in restaurants, taxis, or hotels.

Currency Exchange

Foreign currency can generally be exchanged in banks and post offices, though some banks only exchange USD. For better rates consider withdrawing cash from ATMs. ATMs from Japan Post Bank, Seven Bank, Mizuho Bank, and Mitsubishi UFJ Bank typically accept foreign credit cards without issue. For more information: Japan Currency Exchange | JNTO

IC Cards

Suica and Pasmo

These pre-paid smart cards, issued by Japanese railway companies, are useful for traveling on trains, subways, buses, and taxis. They can also be used for payments at many shops and restaurants, particularly at convenience stores. These cards are available on mobile phones (wallet apps):

- Suica iOS | Google App
- Pasmo iOS | Google App

DOMESTIC TRAVEL, LOCAL TRANSPORT

Planning a Trip

The Japan Official Travel App (iOS | Google App) by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JMTO) is a helpful tool for planning your journey. It calculates routes and fares, offering several options for travel.

Japan Rail Pass

The Japan Rail Pass offers a cost-effective way to travel for those entering Japan with a tourist visa. Be sure to order your pass in advance, whether for delivery to your home country to receive it once in Japan. For more details on different Japan Rail Passes and to purchase online:

The Japan Rail Pass is a good way for people entering with a tourist visa to get around at a cheaper price. Make sure to order your Japan Rail Pass in advance if you want to get it delivered home or make sure that it can be delivered to you when deciding to order it while already in Japan.

For more information on the different Japan Rail Passes and online purchase, visit the following website: Find Your Japan Rail Pass | JR-EAST

Shinkansen (Bullet Train)

Shinkansen bullet trains are an efficient and fast mode of travel across Japan. Tickets can be purchased at stations in Japan, either through ticket machines or counters. To book tickets online, visit: Shinkansen-Ticket.com

Domestic flights

Several airlines offer domestic flights, some of which are not listed on common search engines. It is beneficial to compare options, especially for budget travel.

- Peach
- JAL
- ANA
- Jetstar
- Skymark

ACCOMMODATION, TEMPORARY OFFICE SPACE

Accommodation

For hotel bookings, jalan.net

You can also check for hotels that are directly serviced by airport limousine buses at Bus Stops | Limousine Bus

Office Space

Short-term, shared, or flexible office spaces such as Regus or WeWork are available in major cities throughout Japan.

SAMPLES AND CATALOGUES

For information on importing samples and catalogues, including ATA Carnets and custom duties

- Overview on Export/Import from and to Japan | Japan Customs
- Export/Import Procedure Using ATA Carnet | Japan Customs

Contact list of Customs Counselors | Japan Customs

DOING BUSINESS: JAPAN AS A TARGET MARKET

If you are considering Japan as your next target export market, conducting thorough market research is essential before reaching out to potential distributors. A successful partnership begins with understanding your customers, competitors, and distribution channels in Japan. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to create an appropriate profile for potential partners. Simply relying on contact lists for cold calls is unlikely to lead to finding qualified business partners. Moreover, being based in Switzerland makes it challenging to assess the up-to-date needs of potential customers, or to determine if your prospective partners have the necessary expertise, industry relationships, and ability to provide after-sales services.

It is crucial to take a close look at the Japanese market and understand how business is conducted. Practices that are logical in Switzerland or other countries may not necessarily apply in Japan.

Additionally, personal relationships and trust hold significant weight in Japan. Japanese businesspeople prefer to work with individuals they have been introduced to through a trusted organization or person, and they are generally willing to enter business relationships only after meeting in person. While meetings face-to-face remain the preferred method, the rise of virtual meetings in Japan has now become an accepted norm.

Once you have secured a meeting with a potential partner or customer, patience is key. The decision-making process in Japanese companies often involves middle management and can take longer compared to Switzerland. However, globally active Japanese companies have become more attuned to the importance of quick and high-quality decisions to improve business efficiency. They expect timely, relevant, and accurate information, showing how your product or proposal can benefit their organization. A company and product overview will not suffice; you need to demonstrate clear value.

When doing business with Japanese companies, thorough research and preparation to identify and address the pain points of your potential customers are crucial for success

Terminating Your Existing Distributor

Some Swiss companies may assume that replacing a Japanese distributor will automatically result in improved sales and that they will find a better partner without losing customers. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Often, poor distributor performance is a result of misunderstandings or poor communication on both sides, including the Swiss manufacturer. It is essential to work closely with your distributor, understand their expectations, and provide the necessary support.

Before considering a new distributor, it is advisable to have a candid discussion with your existing partner. Open and honest communication can help identify the root cause of any challenges and prevent future conflicts. If you do not identify the reasons for failure, you may end up repeating the same mistakes with a new distributor. Additionally, it is important to handle the termination of a business relationship with the utmost care. Japanese business communities are often close-knit and mishandling a distributor change could damage your company's reputation.

Swiss Business Hub Japan is here to assist: We can gather and analyze market information on regulations, customers, and competitors through desk and field research, identify qualified business partners, actively promote your company and products, accompany you to initial meetings, and assist in both verbal and non-verbal communication. We can also help facilitate discussions with existing partners.

BUSINESS PRACTICES

Meeting and Greeting

While bowing is the traditional method of greeting in Japan, a bow is not expected from a Swiss businessperson. Typically, a Japanese person with international experience will initiate a handshake.

Business Cards

The exchange of business cards (called "meishi") is a critical part of first introductions. Business cards in Japan are often bilingual, with one side printed in Japanese and the other in English. They must be clean, unused, and of high quality. Always bring an ample supply of cards.

When presenting your card, do so with both hands and a slight bow. Cards should be presented individually, and those of lower rank or younger individuals, or those requesting something from the other party, offer their cards first. Your business card should clearly display your position. Academic titles or degree should only appear if relevant to your role. It is important that your card is presented with the name facing the recipient. Never place your card on the meeting desk or hand it out casually; it should always be handed individually with both hands.

When receiving a card, examine it carefully and treat it with respect. Do not fold, write on, or immediately place it in your pocket, as this is considered disrespectful.

Names and Forms of Address

In Japan, it is customary to address people by their family name followed by "san" (e.g., "Toyota-san"). "San" is gender-neutral and is used for both women and men. It is important not to address someone by their first name unless invited to do so. Never use "san" with your own name. For example, refer to others as "Suzuki-san", not yourself as "Thomas-san".

When writing an email to a Japanese business contact whose gender or name order is unclear, it would be reasonable to assume that the given name is written first, followed by the family name: e.g. Hayao (given name) Miyazaki (family name) or Ken (given name) Watanabe (family name).

Language

While English is commonly used for international business activities in Japan, not everyone is fluent in English. Even those who can speak English often communicate in a way that reflects Japanese cultural nuances, which may cause misunderstandings. Directness, such as outright refusal (”No”) is considered impolite. The Japanese may say something is ”difficult”, which actually means “No.”

Hiring an interpreter can help avoid misunderstandings, as they can also assist in interpreting non-verbal cues and silence, which are significant in Japanese communication. Translating your documents into Japanese also demonstrates your commitment to the market.

Documents

Avoid solely rely on machine translations for documents that will be read by your Japanese customer. It is recommended to have translations reviewed by a professional. The Swiss Business Hub Japan can assist with both translations and document reviews.

Dress code

The dress code in Japan is conservative. Men should wear dark suits with subtly colored shirts and ties. Women should wear conservative dresses or suits. Excessive jewelry, low-cut dresses, heavy makeup, or strong perfumes should be avoided.

It is also common to remove shoes when entering certain private homes, Japanese-style restaurants, or some offices. Wear shoes that are easy to slip on and off, ensure your socks are clean and presentable.

Cool Biz / Super Cool Biz

Japan’s Ministry of the Environment introduced the “Cool Biz” initiative in 2005 to reduce CO^2 emissions in summer by allowing employees to wear lighter clothing in exchange for higher air-conditioning temperatures. The program, extended to “Super Cool Biz” after the 2011 electricity shortage, permits employees to wear short-sleeved shirts without a blazer and forgo neckties. However, dress codes may vary by company. Cool Biz in Japan | Guidable

Gifts

When visiting Japan, it is customary for the visitor to offer gifts at the first meeting. Be prepared to bring multiple gifts, as meetings may involve more people than expected. Gifts should not be opened in front of the giver; if you would like the recipient to open it, you may say, “Please open it”. Wrapping paper is an important part of the gift-giving process and should be handled carefully to show respect.

Luxury chocolate from Switzerland is a popular gift in Japan. However, be aware that brands like Lindt’s are widely available in Japan.

Online meetings

Video conferences have become a part of daily business life. Meeting online tremendously lowers the hurdle for the Japanese to accept a meeting request. However, misunderstandings can more easily arise due to differences in communication styles, including the high-context culture and non-verbal cues in Japan. The Swiss Business Hub Japan is happy to assist in ensuring clear communication during online meetings.

Developing Relationships and Trust

Building trust in Japan requires consistent effort. It is important to win the support not only of the C-level executives but also of middle management. Swiss companies should plan to visit their Japanese counterpart regularly, ideally once or twice a year. Attending tradeshows, inviting them to visit your company in Switzerland, and maintaining regular contact is essential to strengthen the relationship.

Important Japanese Words for Business Travelers

1. **Arigatou gozaimasu (ありがとうございます)** – *Thank you (polite)*

   A polite way to express gratitude.

2. **Sumimasen (すみません)** – *Excuse me / I'm sorry*

   A versatile expression used to apologize or get someone's attention respectfully. Europeans usually feel that the Japanese use it too much.

3. **Onegaishimasu (お願いします)** – *Please (polite request)*

   A polite way to make a request or ask for something.

4. **Otsukaresama desu (お疲れ様です)** – *Thank you for your hard work*

   A common expression used to acknowledge someone's efforts, especially at the end of a meeting or workday.

5. **Hai (はい)** – *Yes*

   Simple affirmative response, often used to show understanding or agreement.

6. **Iie (いいえ)** – *No*

   A polite way to decline or say no.

7. **Shitsurei shimasu (失礼します)** – *Excuse me / I'm sorry for interrupting.*

   Used when entering or leaving a room or interrupting a conversation.

8. **Douzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu (どうぞよろしくお願いします)** – *Please take care of it / I look forward to working with you*

   A polite phrase often used when introducing oneself or in business interactions, showing respect for future collaboration.

9. **Meishi (名刺)** – *Business card*

   The term for business cards, a key part of any business interaction in Japan.

10. **Senpai (先輩)** – *Senior / Mentor*

    Used to show respect to someone with more experience or seniority in a professional setting.

ADDRESSES OF THE EMBASSY AND CONSULATES OF JAPAN IN SWITZERLAND

Embassy of Japan in Switzerland

Engestrasse 53

3012 Bern

Tel.: +41 31 300 22 22

Fax: +41 31 300 22 56

E-Mail: eojs@br.mofa.go.jp

Website: Embassy of Japan in Switzerland

Opening times:

Monday to Friday

09:00 – 11:30, 14:00 – 16:30

Consulate General of Japan in Geneva

Rue de Lausanne 82

1202 Geneva

Tel.: +41 22 719 99 00

Email: consulate@br.mofa.go.jp

Website: Consulate General in Geneve

Opening times:

Monday to Friday

09:00 – 12:00, 14:00 – 17:00

ADDRESSES OF BILATERAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce

P.O. Box 3026

8024 Zurich 1

Switzerland

Tel.: +41 44 381 09 50

E-mail: office@sjcc.ch

Website: Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC)

Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (SCCIJ)

Burex Kojimachi

3-5-2 Kojimachi, Chiyoda-ku

Tokyo 102-0083

Japan

Tel.: +81 (0)3-6256-9012

Fax: +81 (0)3-6256-9013

E-mail: info@sccij.jp

Website: Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (SCCIJ)

SWISS BUSINESS HUB JAPAN

The Swiss Business Hub Japan is dedicated to supporting small and medium-sized businesses in their efforts to expand exports to Japan. In collaboration with external industry specialists, we guide Swiss exporters step-by-step through the entire export process, providing expertise and tailored support to help you succeed in the Japanese market.

Our comprehensive range of services includes:

- **Initial Market Assessment:** We provide insights from local industry leaders to assess the potential of your product in Japan.
- **Regulatory, Legal, and Cultural Knowledge:** We help you navigate Japan's regulatory environment, legal requirements, and cultural considerations to ensure your product meets market expectations.

- **Customer Insights:** We analyze potential customer groups, their purchasing behavior, purchasing channels and expectations to help you tailor your offerings. of potential customer groups, their purchasing behavior, purchasing channels and expectations
- **Competitive Analysis:** We provide an overview of national and international competitors, their strategies, and market activities, enabling you to effectively position your product in Japan.
- **Marketing & Sales Support**: We assist with specific sales activities, helping you develop and implement strategies to penetrate the market.
- **Partner Search:** We identify potential distribution partners and guide you in selecting the right fit for your business.
- **Meeting Coordination:** We arrange meetings with potential distribution partners and provide support.
- **Staff Recruitment:** We assist in finding qualified staff for your operations and business growth in Japan.
- **Business Setup Assistance:** We offer guidance on establishing your business presence in Japan, from legal registration to operational setup.
- **Business Communication Support:** We provide assistance in business meetings and communication, including translation services and inter-cultural guidance.
- **Follow-Up Support:** We help you maintain relationships with partners, ensuring continuous communication and follow-up after initial meetings.
- **Partner Relationship Management:** We support you in managing and nurturing long-term relationships with your partner, ensuring smooth operations and continued success.

We offer solution-oriented, customized services. To discuss your needs and identify the service(s) you will need to succeed in the complex Japanese market, please contact **Swiss Business Hub Japan in Tokyo** at our address below.

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