

Japan

Business Guide

Compiled by:

Swiss Business Hub Japan

Tokyo, March 2018

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BUSINESS TRAVEL

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

To enter Japan, a visa is not required for those who hold a Swiss or Liechtenstein passport and who will stay in Japan for no longer than 90 days for short-term business such as market surveys, business liaison, business talks, signing contracts and after-sale service for investment goods imported into Japan or other similar activities.

When entering Japan you should possess a fixed-date, confirmed return or onward journey ticket and necessary supporting documents which provide evidence justifying the purpose of the trip. Furthermore, a traveler may be asked to show evidence of sufficient funds for the proposed period of stay in the country.

A visa is required if the purpose of your stay is long-term residency or employment of other business activities. Please note that there is no visa agreement regarding working holidays between Japan and Switzerland.

Young Professional Programme

The Government of Japan and the Swiss Federal Council established a programme concerning the exchange of young professionals who go to the other country for a limited period of time to take employment within the field of their previously acquired professional technology or knowledge, in the hope of familiarizing themselves with

business, professional and technical practices in the country and improving their linguistic knowledge. The young professionals will be granted a permit for a temporary stay to take employment within their respective field, notwithstanding the situation in the labor markets.

For further information:

Embassy of Japan in Switzerland

<http://www.ch.emb-japan.go.jp/> (General)

<http://www.ch.emb-japan.go.jp/de/visareise.html> (Visa and Young Professional Programme)

Embassy of Switzerland in Japan

<http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/rebs/asia/vjpn/embjpn.html> (General)

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/japan/en/home/travel-advice/current-situation.html> (Travel Advice)

Arrival and departure procedures at airports

Tokyo Narita: <https://www.narita-airport.jp/en/step>

Tokyo Haneda: <http://www.haneda-airport.jp/inter/en/dept/>

Kansai (Osaka) <http://www.kansai-airport.or.jp/en/route/index.html>

Transfer to city centres

Access to/from International Airports (Source: Japan National Tourist Organization)

Tokyo Narita: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/transportation/airport/naritaMap.html>

Tokyo Haneda: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/transportation/airport/hanedaAirport.html>

Kansai (Osaka): <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/transportation/airport/kansaiAirport.html>

Chubu Centrair (Nagoya): http://www.centrair.jp/en/passenger_guide/

Further information in Swiss national languages and in English on essential travel information such as domestic transportation, accommodations, currency, map, weather, travel tips, etc.

<http://www.jnto.de> (German)

www.tourisme-japon.fr (French)

<http://www.turismo-giappone.it> (Italian)

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/index.html> (English)

(Source: Japan National Tourist Organization)

LANGUAGES USED FOR BUSINESS

Unfortunately, it is sometimes still the case that a Japanese business person is not capable of conducting business in English. More often than that, Swiss business people encounter communication difficulties on account of not only language but also cultural and social barriers. For some cases, it is recommendable to hire an interpreter who also reads facial expressions, gestures and “real meanings” of yes and no. The [Swiss Business Hub Japan](#) gladly helps you to overcome intercultural boundaries.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

January 1	New Year's Holiday
The 2 nd Monday of January	Coming of Age Day
February 11	National Foundation Day
March 20	Vernal Equinox Day
March 21	Vernal Equinox Day Holiday
April 29	Showa Day
May 3	Constitution Memorial Day
May 4	Greenery Day
May 5	Children's Day
The 3 rd Monday of July	Marine Day
August 11	Mountain Day
The 3 rd Monday of September	Respect for the Aged Day
September 23	Autumnal Equinox Day
The 2 nd Monday of October	Health and Sports Day
November 3	Culture Day
November 23	Labor Thanksgiving Day
December 23	The Emperor's Birthday

December 27 – January 5, April 29 – May 5, and August 10 – 15 are Japanese holiday periods. Those periods and a couple of days before and after each period should be avoided when travelling to Japan for business.

Further information for business hours and holidays in Japan:

http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/businesshours_holidays.html

(Source: Japan National Tourist Organization)

HEALTH AND INOCULATIONS

Drinking water

Tap water is safe to drink anywhere in Japan. Mineral water and other kind of soft drinks can be easily obtained from vending machines, convenience stores and other retail shops. Vending machines mostly only accept cash or major e-money cards issued by railway companies. See [Methods of payment](#), below

Hospitals

Medical systems and facilities in Japan have high standards, although the language could be a problem.

The staff at Tokyo Medical & Surgical Clinic, <http://tmsec.jp/emergencies> is fluent in English and can be reached for emergencies at Tel: 03-3436-3028.

Further medical facilities with English and other foreign language-speaking staff:

http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/policy/health-medical/medical-care/info_hospitals.html (Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)

Emergency services: <http://japanhealthinfo.com/emergency-services/> (Source: Japan Healthcare Info)

Inoculations

There are no inoculations required for entering Japan from anywhere around the world.

TIME ZONE

The whole area of Japan operates in a single time zone, which is GMT + 9 hours. Japan does not have summer time, therefore, the time difference with Switzerland is +7 hours in summer and +8 hours in winter.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

The voltage throughout Japan is 100 V which is different from North America (110 V) and Central Europe (220 V). Japanese electrical plugs have two pins and fit into North American outlets.

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/electricity.html>

METHODS OF PAYMENT

The currency in Japan is the Yen, designated as ¥

The exchange rate with Swiss Francs on March 12, 2018 was

100 Japanese Yen = 0.89129 Swiss Franc

100 Swiss Franc = 11'219.7 Japanese Yen

Japan is still a cash-based country. Hotels and large stores, major convenience chains as well as taxis in big cities like Tokyo, Osaka or Nagoya accept credit cards. Small shops and neighborhood restaurants, however, rely on cash payment.

For information on cash withdrawals at ATMs: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/basic-info/basic-info/atms.html> and on using credit cards http://japan-magazine.jnto.go.jp/en/special_credit.html

(Source: Japan National Tourist Organization)

For business travelers, a useful non-cash payment method will be the pre-paid smart cards issued by railway companies such as Suica, Pasma, etc. The cards can be used for riding trains, subways, buses, taxis, paying at shops, especially convenience stores and kiosks. For more information.

<https://travel.navitime.com/en/area/jp/guide/NTJhowto0013-en/>

http://www.jr-plus.ch/japan-rail-pass-infos/wichtige-informationen/suica-card_351-de.html

With Tokyo 2020 Olympics on the horizon, various cashless payment services are being launched.

[Japan Taxi Wallet](#)

[Rakuten Pay](#)

[Line Pay](#)

International services such as Apple Pay and Android Pay are available since 2016. Japanese businesses are increasingly adopting China-based WeChatPay and Alipay to attract Chinese consumers.

Bic Camera, one of the largest consumer electronic stores, accepts bitcoin.

<https://steemit.com/bitcoin/@penguinpablo/video-paying-with-bitcoin-at-bic-camera-in-tokyo-japan>

TRANSPORTATION

For International airport access, domestic flights, railways, subways, busses, taxis and car rental please refer to <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/transportation/index.html>

(Source: Japan National Tourist Organization).

A good site to check travel routes and departure times is Hyperdia: <http://www.hyperdia.com/en/>

Depending on the season, a reservation of a Shinkansen (high-speed train) seat is advised. Tickets for the Eastern Region of Japan can be reserved online:

<https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/ticket/reservation.html>

HOTELS

According to JNTO, the number of international travelers to Japan in 2017 was 28.7 million (+19.3% from the previous year), the highest record ever. Due to the tourism boom, Swiss business people traveling to Japan find the hotel room rates increasing and rooms sometimes booked out. A reservation should therefore be made well in advance.

Information on hotels: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/accomodations/index.html>

Hotels where the airport limousine buses stop: <http://www.limousinebus.co.jp/en/hotelguide/index.html>

INTERNET

Tokyo is going to host the 2020 summer Olympics and is now busy expanding and improving the city's infrastructure. In this context, free WiFi access for visitors has recently been greatly improved.

<https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2279.html>

Free Wifi Smartphone apps:

<https://japanfreewifi.com/>

<http://www.ntt-bp.net/jcfw/en.html>

Rental pocket Wifis and other Wifi services are available for visitors (just a few examples below):

<https://www.japan-rail-pass.com/services/pocket-wifi>

<https://visitor.docomowifi.com/en/details/>

BUSINESS HOURS

	Weekdays	Saturdays	Sundays and National 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

ADDRESSES AND OPENING HOURS OF EMBASSY AND CONSULATE

Embassy of Switzerland

5-9-12 Minami-Azabu

Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-8589, Japan

<http://www.eda.admin.ch/tokyo>

Tel.: (+81) 3 5449 8400

Fax: (+81) 3 3473 6090

Office hours

Monday-Friday 09:00-12:00

Saturday and Sunday closed

Honorary Consulate General of Switzerland in Osaka

River View Kitahama Bldg, Office 601

1-1-30, Kitahama, Chuo-ku, Osaka 541-0041

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/japan/en/home/representations/honorary-consulate-general-osaka.html>

Tel.: +81 (0)6 4708 3790

Fax: +81 (0)6 4708 3956

The Honorary Consulate General of Switzerland in Osaka neither has fixed operating hours, nor treats usual consulate matters such as passport and visa applications.

DOING BUSINESS

JAPAN AS A TARGET MARKET: WHERE TO START?

If you consider Japan as your next target export market some market research is essential before trying to get hold of a list of potential distributors. It is only possible to create the right requirement profile of your partner if you understand your customers, competitors and the nature of distribution channels in Japan: Your success depends upon the capabilities of your partner and it is highly unlikely that you find a qualified business partner based on some contact lists for cold calls. It will also hardly be possible for you based in Switzerland to check out the up-to-date needs and wants of your potential customers, whether your potential partners have the necessary expertise, a network of relationships in the industry and are capable of providing after-sale services. It is important to look at the Japanese market and understand how business is done in Japan. Even if something is completely logically understandable for Switzerland, or in any other country, it does not necessarily mean that the same is true for Japan.

Further, personal contacts are very important in Japan. The Japanese people prefer to do business with someone they are properly introduced to by a trusted person/organization and have met face-to-face with. They are willing to enter into a business relationship only when they are sure they are dealing with a reliable person representing a reliable company (it is not only the quality of your product that convinces your customer, but also who you are).

Once you have got a chance to meet your potential partner/customer, patience is required: The group decision-making process in Japanese companies where members of the middle management play great roles takes a lot more time than in Switzerland. Recently, however, Japanese internationally active companies have been becoming aware of the importance of making rapid and high-quality decisions to improve business operation. They thus expect to be provided with relevant and accurate information based upon which they can make decisions in a timely manner. It is beyond a product overview. It has to demonstrate how the Japanese client company can benefit from your product/proposal.

When doing business with Japanese companies, thorough research and solid preparation are key elements for success.

Terminating your existing distributor

Some Swiss companies terminate their Japanese distributors simply believing that sales performance will automatically improve by replacing the distributor and that they will immediately find a better one without losing customers. It is unfortunately not always the case.

Sometimes, poor distributor performance is due to lack of understanding and poor communication also on the part of the manufacturer. Working closely with your distributor, clearly identifying what they expect from you as well as you from them and providing necessary support are indispensable. Changes in the business landscape can play a role too. Before looking for a new distributor, talk to your existing partner first. Open, honest and sincere communication can avoid problems and conflicts. If you do not identify

reasons for failure, you can make the same mistakes with the new distributor. It is also essential to end a business relationship with an extraordinary degree of caution and care. In every industry, the Japanese business communities are sometimes surprisingly close-knit. If not handled delicately, replacing a distributor could damage Swiss company's reputation and business.

Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE)/Swiss Business Hub Japan will gladly help you: We can collect and analyze market information on regulations, customers and competitors both by desk and field research, identify your qualified potential business partners, actively promote your company as well as your product, escort you to the first business meetings and assist you in verbal and non-verbal communication. We can help facilitate discussions with your existing partners.

For further information on the services S-GE/SBHJ offer Swiss SMEs, please see

<https://www.s-ge.com/de/japan> (D)

<https://www.s-ge.com/fr/japon> (F)

<https://www.s-ge.com/it/giappone> (I)

BUSINESS PRACTICES

Dos and Don'ts

Meeting and greeting

Although between Japanese bowing is a usual way of salutation, a bow is not expected from a Swiss business person. Japanese with international experience will initiate a handshake.

Business cards

The first thing after the initial greeting is to exchange business cards (called "meishi" in Japanese. The word belongs to the most important business Japanese vocabulary list).

First introductions are made while exchanging business cards. Bilingual business cards, with one side printed in Japanese and the other in English, are standards in Japan. They must absolutely be clean and unused. Always take a substantial quantity of them with you.

Cards should be presented individually with both hands with a slight bow. Individuals who are of lower rank or younger, or who are seeking something from the other party, offer their cards first.

Your business cards should clearly state your position. An academic title or degree is not included on your business card unless it is relevant to your job function. Having "Dipl.-Ing.", for example, put on your business card may cause confusion as the title on your card is to help your Japanese business counterpart classify your position within your company.

Present your card with your name facing the recipient. When you give your card, never distribute it onto the meeting desk, hand it individually to each person with both hands. When you receive a card, study

it carefully. Do not fold, write on it or immediately put it into your pocket, as this is considered a sign of disrespect.

Names and forms of address

In Japanese, you can refer to both men and women by their family names, followed by “san” – an example is “Toyota-san”. There is no distinction between gender and marital status with the “san” suffix. Do not address a person you first met by his or her first name, unless specifically invited to do so. Never use “san” with your own name. Only use it when referring to someone else. You can, of course, address Japanese people in English using Mr., Mrs., and Miss or Ms. plus the family name.

When responding to an e-mail written in English (or D/F/I) by a Japanese business contact you have never met before and you are not sure if the person is a man or woman and/or which part is the first or the last name, it would be reasonable to assume:

- The given name is written first, followed by the family name: e.g. Shinzo (given name) Abe (family name)
- If the (possible) first name has many vowels/polysyllabic, it is very likely that it is a man: e.g. Toshihiro, Uichiro, Shonosuke, Men
Naoko, Yatomi, Yumiko: Women
- When in doubt, you can use the full name followed by "san" as an honorific suffix: e.g. Dear Shinzo Abe-san. Never address someone without a honorific title: e.g. Dear Shinzo Abe. Swiss people often do this; it is, however, a no-go.

Japanese traditionally say and write their family name first, followed by their first name. However, many Japanese who deal with Western business professionals use the Western name order. When introducing yourself, make clear which is your family or your given name. When introduced and in doubt, it is no problem to ask.

Persons with titles are addressed only by their title, such as buchô (department manager) or shachô (president) without using a “san”. For instance, the manager, whose last name is Honda, should be addressed as “Honda buchô”. Especially for senior executives, titles are used instead of the family name.

Languages

Few Japanese people are still sufficiently fluent in English in business communication. When never educated/worked outside Japan, even those who are capable of speaking/writing in English very often communicate in the Japanese way of thinking which leads to incomprehension or misunderstanding. Directness in communication on the Swiss side, such as saying right out “No” to suggestions and ideas brought up by the Japanese counterpart is considered impolite. The Japanese would say that something would be difficult to actually mean “No”. In some cases, hiring an interpreter is therefore a good idea not only to avoid misunderstandings, but also to understand gestures and facial expressions

or even silence. It may also demonstrate your commitment to the Japanese market. The same applies to having your documents translated into Japanese.

While on one hand it is true that business communication in the English language is still an issue in Japan, the Japanese are on average well educated. It sometimes happens that your Japanese counterpart picks up some words in German, French or Italian and is even able to say a few sentences in one of the Swiss national languages. Therefore be careful in using your mother tongue between Swiss colleagues in front of your Japanese counterpart as a sort of secret language (Swiss German has a very high level of safety though).

Dress and shoes

The Japanese dress well and rather conservative. Men should not wear bright colors; dark suits and subtly colored shirts as well as ties are appropriate in most business situations. Women should wear conservatively styled dresses or suits, with heels. Too much jewelry, low-cut dresses, heavy make-up or wearing too much perfume is not encouraged.

In Japan, it happens that you suddenly find yourself in the situation where you have to remove your shoes (when invited to private homes, many Japanese-style restaurants, and even going into some offices and meeting halls). Think of wearing shoes that can be easily slipped on and off with no laces. Do not wear old, worn-out socks.

Gifts

The visitor is the one who offers gifts at the first meeting. The Japanese do business in groups and more people may attend meetings than you have expected. Therefore, bring a few extra gifts. Individual gifts should be given to people who made extra efforts in dealing with your project, taking care of your travel arrangements, etc.

Have a gift professionally wrapped where you purchased it. Pastel-colored wrapping paper is preferred. Never use black paper. Do not expect a gift to be opened in front of you. Tell the recipient "Please open it" if you would like it to be opened. Do not open your gift unless asked by the giver to do so, as this is considered greedy. You may ask the giver: "May I open it?" When opening a gift, never tear the wrapping paper. Wrapping paper is selected for its design, elegance and significance. It is considered good form to undo a package with care. You will not only preserve the paper but also show proper respect for the effort that went into making the paper, selecting it and wrapping your gift.

Luxury chocolate truffles are popular gifts from Switzerland.

Developing relationships and trust

As mentioned before, it is important to win support and trust not only of the CEO, but also of the middle management. Swiss companies need to visit their Japanese counterparts once or twice a year. In

addition, meet and greet them at tradeshows when- and wherever possible, and invite them to visit your company in Switzerland too.

Up-to-date Market Overviews - Opportunities for Swiss SMEs

[General](#)

[Fintech](#)

[Healthcare Tech](#)

[Tokyo Summer Olympics 2020](#)

A market report on the following industry can be sent upon request to Swiss Business Hub Japan

- Automotive Industry 2014
- Health and Functional Food 2014
- Wine 2013

Contact to:

Swiss Business Hub Japan: tok.sbhjapan@eda.admin.ch

Customized solutions

Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE) offers customized solutions to support Swiss companies, especially small and medium-sized businesses with intention to expand their exports to Japan. S-GE works in cooperation with Swiss Business Hub Japan (SBHJ) and industry specialists to help Swiss exporters step-by-step throughout the entire exporting process.

Services include:

- Gaining initial assessment from local opinion leaders of a product's chances in Japan
- Gaining regulatory, legal and cultural knowledge about the product's market requirements
- Gaining knowledge of potential customer groups, their purchasing behavior, purchasing channels and expectations
- Gaining knowledge of national and international competitors and their market activities for the successful positioning of the product in Japan
- Supporting your specific sales activities
- Searching for possible distribution partners
- Setting up meetings with potential distribution partners as well as providing logistical support for traveling in Japan
- Assisting in the search for qualified staff
- Assisting in setting up business in Japan
- Assisting in business meetings and communication
- Assisting in follow-up, keeping in touch
- Assisting in managing the relationship with your distributor

To discuss your needs and identify the service(s) you will need to succeed in the complex Japanese market, please contact your nearest S-GE Office.

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Disclaimer

This Business Guide is intended to provide only basic information and addresses that may be useful for Swiss companies traveling to Japan for business.

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