

Questions and Answers – Lydon-Mizoguchi – Japan 2017

Question: Who should consider going on this adventure? Our group experiences are designed for travelers wishing to learn something about the places we visit. We have designed a full mind and body experience that will begin long before you board the airplane, and hopefully continue long after you return. We believe that every minute spent in pre-trip preparation pays off a hundredfold during the adventure itself.

Question: Why go with a group? Traveling with a group removes all the annoying day-to-day considerations of making connections, worrying about whether or not the hotel lost your reservation, or what platform your train will come in on. Encountering and understanding another culture in-situ is daunting enough without having to worry about the logistics of everyday life. We take care of the day-to-day stuff so that you can concentrate on spending every waking moment experiencing the wonders of Japan, its culture and people.

Question: Why a Lydon adventure? We always travel with a purpose. For Sandy and Annie Lydon, all trips to Japan are something of a pilgrimage going back to our own first visit to Japan in the summer of 1976. You will be part of a well-prepared group of like-minded travelers. Plus, we always have a great time. We subscribe to the idea that laughter and learning are interwoven.

Question: What subjects will be covered in the pre-trip sessions? The subjects will range from Japanese history, protocol (manners), culture, literature, film and a brief taste of the Japanese language. We will recommend a number of books and films. The subjects during the sessions will include luggage management and how to stay healthy while traveling to Japanese.

Question: What if I cannot attend the pre-trip sessions? Then you shouldn't apply to go with us. We feel very strongly about the pre-trip sessions, and they are as much of the trip requirements as the fee. If you live more than 200 miles from Aptos, then you are not required to attend, but that will put more of a burden on you to do the recommended readings.

Question: Will I be embarrassed by behavior of group members? No. We carefully review group members before accepting them and continue to monitor compatibility during the pre-trip sessions. If we feel that someone in the group is not compatible, we will ask them to leave the group and we will return their money. Our groups are not random collections of people who meet for the first time in the departure lounge of the airport, with all the resulting posturing and bravado.

Question: What's the number one issue in group travel? Being on time. Groups are very tolerant of most human behavior, but they are very impatient with people who keep the group waiting. Every minute we spend waiting is time we could be spending in a museum or wandering through the countryside. Therefore, beginning with our first workshop, we will expect all group members to be on time. Timeliness is essential to the over-all mental and emotional health of the group. **Being on time is particularly important in Japan** as the Japanese place great importance in punctuality.

Question: What's the number two issue in group travel? Group members asking the dreaded "Lazy Question." We expect group members to read distributed materials and pay attention as we go along. Groups have little patience for members who ask questions about things that have already been explained.

Question: What if I have special dietary requirements? We cannot offer diet-restricted menu choices. Breakfasts are almost all buffet so you do have some control over choices, but in most other cases we'll be eating as a group and with a set menu. If you absolutely require a specific diet (vegan, gluten-free, etc.) and cannot adapt to the "food of the realm" then this adventure is not for you. You must adapt to Japanese cuisine, not the other way around.

Question: What other expenses might I encounter? There are a small number of lunches and dinners not included as we will be encouraging you to go out and graze. Transportation to and from SFO is not included. We will be recommending books, maps and films and other published materials that are not included. Beyond those few items, everything else involving the trip is covered in the trip price, including portrages and tips.

Question: Why do you encourage trip cancellation insurance? Because it is the only way to protect your travel investment against unforeseen circumstances. Several times in recent years, group members have found it necessary to cancel at the last minute because of health-related issues, often involving close family members. One of them cancelled the day of departure. In all cases, the trip cancellation insurance kicked in and they were able to get their money refunded. There are also medical and emergency repatriation coverages in the policies. We will review at our sessions.

Question: How much money should I take with me? The amount of money you might need will depend on your own personal shopping habits. Some group members are able to get by on several hundred dollars of spending money, while others who intend to do some shopping spend considerably more. However, it should be noted that group members sometimes catch what we call "the fever" when encountering some of the unusual shopping opportunities in Japan. If your self-discipline is relatively low, perhaps you should take a bit more money.

Question: Cash or credit cards? Japan is still a cash and carry economy. Generally, except for high-end hotels and restaurants, credit cards are not accepted at most places we normal folks patronize.

What about ATMs? Most Japanese ATMs will not accept any credit cards except those issued in Japan. The Japan Post ATMs tend to be more accepting, but generally, figure cash. Museum gift shops, shrine gift shops, etc. – cash.

What about changing money in a bank? It is excruciatingly time-consuming to change money in a Japanese bank. If you are a student of Japanese organizational theory (which I am) it's fascinating, but it can take hours. Literally.

What's the solution regarding money? Bring a lump of Japanese yen with you, and then, be observant about ATMs along the way. Become familiar with the money – we'll give you a chance to do that in the pre-trip sessions. One of the good things about the yen exchange rate hovering around 100 is that it makes it easy to determine dollar equivalents in your head. Just divide by 100.

Question: What is the age range of your group members? In the past 40 years our group members have ranged widely in age, from the late twenties to the eighties. We've found that regardless of the dates on folks' passports, Lydon groups are full of life and energy. We do not accept group members under 21 because of attention span demands.

Question: What if I have some health/physical problems? Again, it will depend on the nature of those problems. We may ask you to get a doctor's release.

Question: Can I earn frequent flyer miles for this trip? Yes. Check with Linda Schwedock at Pacific Harbor Travel. It may also be possible to use frequent flyer miles to pay for the international air fare and have the airfare part of the trip cost refunded. But, all such things can be worked out with Linda.

Question: What's the weather going to be? We are scheduling this trip to be traveling through Japan during a weather window between winter and their summer rainy season. May is a great time to be traveling in Japan, and that's why we're doing it.

What kind of clothing do I need to bring? Casual clothing is fine, but there may be events, dinners and such where slightly better clothing might be appropriate. We will have lengthy discussions about appropriate clothing during our pre-trip sessions.

What about visas? No pre-trip visa is required. A valid passport with an expiration date at least 6 month beyond the end of your stay is all that's required. In this case, December 1, 2017. If your passport expires before Dec. 1, 2017, renew it.

Included in the price of the trip:

- Round Trip air fare SFO to Japan on an IATA Carrier, Coach Class
- All arrival and departure transfers, baggage handling and tips to porters
- First class hotels with Western-style bathroom facilities
- All air, bus, and ferry when in Japan
- All sightseeing by private air conditioned motor coach
- All admissions to included sites
- Most meals, including American-style breakfasts
- English speaking guides
- Four pre-trip instructional meetings, including Japanese language
- Personally escorted by Sandy Lydon, Kaori Mizoguchi and Yoshie Morrissey

Not Included:

- Items of a personal nature, optional sightseeing, telephone, fax, wi-fi, computer charges, room service, laundry, shopping, etc.
- Transportation from home to SFO and return
- Trip cancellation insurance – though it is strongly recommended
- 3.5% handling fee for credit card transactions now imposed by suppliers.
- Passport fees
- Anything else not specified in the “included” list.

Can you pay for the trip with a credit card? We require that you make your \$1,500 deposit by check, but you may pay the remainder with a credit card, though we must add a 3.5% service charge that credit cards are now requiring.

May you go out to Japan ahead of the group, or extend your trip at the end of the itinerary?

Yes, though, if you plan to meet us in Japan, it will be your responsibility to make the arrangements to meet us. The only request we would make for early-outs or extensions is that you use the services of Linda Schwedock at Pacific Harbor Travel (see below). Linda is the best at finding transportation and hotels, and we recommend her without reservation. Pacific Harbor is our travel agent on this side of the Pacific, while Kaori Mizoguchi coordinates the itinerary in Japan.

Travel Arrangements and Coordination in the United States – Pacific Harbor Travel, Santa Cruz

We have been working with Pacific Harbor Travel for the past six years and they have helped arrange our group adventures in Mongolia, Siberia, China (both Silk Road, Western China, Tibet), Scotland, Isle of Man and Ireland.

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Why now and why Japan? We believe that traveling in Japan is very safe. As you may know, we canceled an October 2016 trip to Uzbekistan because of the apprehension group members were having following the terrorist attacks in Europe, Southwest Asia, and California. We have no more qualms about traveling to Japan than we do going to Cambria or Paso Robles. Hollister? I may have qualms about that.

We also believe that there are a number of historic themes and anniversaries that recommend traveling in Japan in 2017 including the recent 70th anniversaries of the end of World War II and President Obama’s visit to Hiroshima earlier in 2016. There are also several efforts currently underway in Japan regarding World War II old business.

This will also mark the 50th anniversary of Sandy’s first trip to Japan. (Actually 51st.)

Finally, we try to adhere to the motto: “If not now, when?” We vote for now.