



U.S. ARMY



JAPAN CULTURE INFO

Relocation Readiness
Army Community Service
9810 Lee Road
Fort Jackson, SC 29207



CULTURAL MISTAKES TO AVOID IN JAPAN

1. When you are invited into a Japanese family's home, bring a small present or "omiyage" (usually food). If you are coming straight from your country (the Japanese person is picking you up from the airport), it is preferable to bring some local culinary specialties from your hometown/region.
2. Say "O-jama shimasu" (sorry for disturbing) while entering someone's house.
3. Never wear shoes when stepping onto a tatami mat (used in Japanese homes). Take off your shoes when entering all homes, most business and hotels. A pair of guest slippers will usually be sitting nearby.





CULTURAL MISTAKES TO AVOID IN JAPAN

UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

4. Some shops, cafes, or department stores will provide plastic covers for umbrellas. Make sure not to enter dripping wet umbrella without one.
5. Refrain from blowing your nose in front of other people. Japanese only use paper tissue for this; it is considered rude to blow your nose into a handkerchief and stuff it back in your pocket.
6. You should not eat while standing or walking in the street. Even inside a house, you should sit down to eat. The only exception to this rule is for eating while at a counter (e.g. ramen) or for eating ice cream in the street.





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UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO

7. It is polite to say “itadakimasu” (you would say this to those that you are eating with) which means “I receive this food” once before eating or drinking. After eating you would say “gochisousama deshita” to your host or to the restaurant’s staff which means “it was quite a feast”.
8. Noodles can and should be slurped. Slurping is a compliment to the chef.
9. Bowls and plates should be brought up to the mouth rather than bending one’s head toward it.





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10. If you're at a dinner party and receive drinks, wait before raising the glass to your lips. Everyone will be served, someone will take the lead, make a speech, raise the glass and yell "Kampai!" (cheers)

11. Do not point your finger, feet, or chopstick at people. If you have to indicate to an object or direction to someone, wave your fingers with the palm downwards.

12. You will receive small wet cloth at most Japanese restaurants. Use this to wash your hands before eating, then carefully fold it and set it aside on the table. Do not use it as a napkin or touch any part of your face.





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13. There is no tipping in any situation in Japan. It is actually a little insulting.

14. Avoid expressing your opinion too directly. Japanese have what they call “honne” (real opinion) and “tatemae” (public opinion). They will express the latter in most situations so as not to disturb the group harmony. It is of course flexible and consists in agreeing with the people around them as much as possible. This is the reason why Japanese are so bad at debating serious issues in public (including the media). “Honne” is what you really think but do not say openly or only to close friends or relatives.

15. Avoid interrupting people when they are speaking or thinking about an answer. Japanese people don't mind short periods of silence in the middle of a discussion.





CULTURAL MISTAKES TO AVOID IN JAPAN

16. Avoid looking and staring directly into someone's eyes.
17. Do not use your mobile phone in the train unless it is clearly allowed to do so. Using your phone to play games (as long as your phone is on silent) or emails and texting is fine.
18. "Meishi" (business cards) are exchanged when meeting someone for the first time. They should be given and accepted with both hands in formal situations. Make sure to observe it carefully and remember your opponent's name. Place the card on the table in front of you if you are sitting or place it in your wallet. Do not push business cards into your pocket or fold it in any way.





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19. Japanese wash themselves before entering the bath as they have a custom of sharing the bath water. This is true for public baths (sento) as for thermal spring (osen) and in individual homes.

20. In traditional homes, you may need to sit in the “seiza” position. This can be difficult and painful especially for taller people. It involves sitting on the floor with legs folded under your body with your back resting on your heels.

