

Japan HVIS Tips and Suggestions

Introduction

The upcoming Hypervelocity Impact Symposium (HVIS) in September 2024 will take place in Tsukuba, Japan. Tsukuba is a technical center located approximately an hour north of Tokyo. This HVIS is the first in Asia and should provide an opportunity for the hypervelocity community to better know our colleagues in East Asia. Japan is a country of many aspects; technology, natural beauty, world renowned cuisine, and deep traditions; just to name a few. However, for many, this will be their first trip to Japan. It is possible that the local landscape will be unfamiliar. Therefore, this document provides some information that will hopefully be of use for first time Japan travelers.



Arrival Basics

The symposium website contains information on how to reach Tsukuba.

<https://hvis2024japan.jp/access/>

Essentially, one has different options depending on the arrival location in Japan. The train station and bus station are located in the center of Tsukuba. It is only a short distance to the Tsukuba International Congress Center.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/WqS6W8Se7egXWnZG6>

Most businesses take credit cards. However, cash is still widely used; especially with smaller vendors. Therefore, it is advisable to have local currency. One can use ATM's, but it is recommended that one informs their financial institution that withdrawals may be needed in Japan. If problems do arise, Japan post offices have ATM's which accept a wide range of cards.

It is also recommended that one confirms that their cell phone carrier works in Japan. If this proves to be a problem, pocket wi-fi devices are readily available. They can be rented from any airport and can be reserved in advance.

Language

If one already speaks and writes Japanese, that is ideal. However, this will often not be true. In that case, a brief discussion of the language should prove useful. Japanese has three alphabets; kanji, hiragana and katakana. Kanji are pictographic characters that convey both sound and

meaning. Kanji characters are derived from the characters used in the Chinese alphabet. Hiragana is a phonetic alphabet whose characters can be used on their own or in conjunction with kanji to construct words. Lastly, katakana are also phonetic characters and are used for foreign words.

The complexity of the Japanese writing system can make it difficult to read or write. Therefore, for first time visitors, it is practical to focus on useful words and phrases. Lists like this can be found in websites, books, etc. A few are shown below as examples.

<u>Japanese</u>	<u>English</u>
doomo	thank you, casual
doomo arigatou	thank you, more formal
doomo arigatou gozaimasu	thank you, most formal
doo itashimashita	you are welcome, literally "what did I do?"
sumimasen	excuse me, sorry; a catchall word that one can use often
shitsurei shimashita	very sorry
hai	yes and/or affirmative. Note that Japanese speakers often use this word to indicate that they are paying attention to a conversation. It does not necessarily mean agreement.
chigaimasu	no, literally "I must differ". Unless accompanied by softening language, a direct "no" is typically considered rude. Therefore, this word is suggested instead.

Useful Apps

There are any number of apps that can be helpful while traveling in Japan. Here are a few examples.

Google Translate. This app has a number of translation features that should prove useful. This includes the capability to use the camera to translate text.

Japan Official Travel. This popular app has information on both transportation and destinations. <https://www.japan.travel/en/app/>

Japan Travel by Navitime. This app can assist with navigation around Japan. https://www.navitime.co.jp/pcstorage/html/japan_travel/english/

It is recommended that one downloads and reviews these apps prior to arriving in Japan. This should provide familiarity with the various features.

Tokyo and Kyoto

One may wish to travel beyond Tsukuba either prior to or after the HVIS. There are many places one might choose, but it is worth highlighting Tokyo and Kyoto. Tokyo is the current capital and Kyoto was the previous capital. In fact, their names have similarities where Tokyo means “eastern capital” and Kyoto means “capital city”.

Tokyo is one of the largest cities on earth and even from observation levels in skyscrapers the view extends to the horizon. Therefore, it can be useful to think of Tokyo in terms of its interesting neighborhoods. Some are best seen during the day, e.g., Ueno. Ueno has parks and a museum; both best during the daylight. Others are best at night; e.g., Akihabara, Ginza, Shibuya. Akihabara was once known for its electronics, but in more recent years has shifted its focus more towards anime and manga. Ginza is a well known high end shopping district. Shibuya is definitely a nighttime neighborhood; where one can find many clubs. This is a good time to mention that the Tokyo subway shuts down at midnight and opens at 0600.



Asakusa is a more traditional area. Sensoji, the oldest Buddhist temple in Tokyo, is located here. The Kaminarimon gate marks the entrance and is a favorite for photographers. The road that runs from the Kaminarimon gate to the temple is called the Nakamise Dori. This road is lined with shops that offer traditional crafts and Japanese confections.

Tokyo can be intense so perhaps one would like to get out of town for a day. There are many interesting places that are relatively close such as Nikko, Kamakura and Hakone. Nikko is in the mountains and the first shogun was buried here. To get to Nikko there are buses and trains.

<http://gojapan.about.com/cs/kantoregion1/a/nikko.htm>

Kyoto is farther away, but reachable by the Shinkansen, the so-called bullet train. Kyoto is the cultural heart of the country and is much smaller than Tokyo. It has many beautiful temples and gardens. Also, where Tokyo is bright lights, big city; here you can see a more traditional world. Furthermore, Kyoto can serve well as a home base for the Kansai region. It is centrally located to many nearby areas, and it is a fantastic city to explore in its own right.

The train station where one arrives by Shinkansen is an excellent one. It is a mall, hotel, and food court all in one. The lower floors of the mall contain food halls and if you consult the directory, you can find higher floors that have numerous restaurants. Also, the train station has a Tourist Information Center (TIC) which can be a great resource for any traveler.

There are a number of shrines and temples on the east side of Kyoto, and the TIC has walking maps that show the most well-known sites. Kiyomizudera is one of the most popular temples in Kyoto, and in addition to its beautiful architecture, it has a great view of Kyoto. Make sure to drink the lucky water. To do so, you must take the path to the base of the mountain.

<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3901.html>



There are a number of interesting locations in Kyoto. Here are just a few of the attractions. Arashiyama is a wonderful bamboo woods and is located west of Kyoto. Kinkaku-ji is on the northwest side of town. It is a beautiful Buddhist temple and is literally covered in gold. Unfortunately, due to the delicate nature of the gold foil, one can't go inside. Not far from Kinkaku-ji is Ryoan-ji, a Buddhist temple with a famous Zen stone garden.

Rail Travel

The Japan Rail (JR) system is excellent and the JR pass is a great deal. The JR pass is available only to foreigners and provides a discount for JR trains. It does not apply to non-JR trains and subways. It is also worth noting that the Yamanote line which encircles Tokyo is a JR line, so is free using the JR pass. Note that the pass must be purchased outside of Japan. Upon arriving at an airport, one can go to the JR pass office and receive the actual pass. www.jrpass.com

In addition to the JR trains, most large cities in Japan have subway systems. The subways in Japan are very convenient and have very high on time rates. One can purchase subway tickets from machines and counters at subway stations. Alternatively, one can purchase integrated circuit (IC) cards. There are a number of IC cards, please see the link below. Two cards, Pasma and Suica are heavily used in the Tokyo subway system. These cards are very convenient when using the subway. Note that due to worldwide semiconductor shortages, the sale of Pasma and Suica cards is currently restricted. However, they are still available to foreign tourists and also one can download app versions to one's phone.

https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2359_003.html

Conclusion

Certainly, attending the symposium is the primary focus for all the attendees. However, for those who wish to explore while on work travel, Japan is an interesting and receptive country. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Michael Hopson (mvhopson@gmail.com).