

Innocents Abroad: Training Japanese for Travel

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Introduction

Travel in Japan

When Japanese people travel in Japan they know just what to expect and are relatively assured of their safety. If they stop for a few hours there are usually coin lockers to store bags. If they want to go to the toilet they often leave their bags unattended for a few minutes. Japanese know that the telephone number for emergency services is 110. Taxi drivers expect to be paid exactly the fare on the meter. If people cannot find an address they can stop at a police box to ask for directions. Once they do arrive at their inn they check-in and feel safe. If someone knocks on the door, they open it.

Money wise, Japanese know how much money to bring with them when traveling around Japan. Prices are clearly marked. Merchants expect to be paid in cash. Credit cards are rare but growing. If they need more cash they can quickly find a public automatic teller machine. No particular precautions are necessary.

Travel Abroad

When Japanese people travel abroad, however, many of these habits make them vulnerable. In airports and bus stations it is important to keep close watch on your luggage. Coin lockers and toilets are hard to find. Emergency numbers are different (911 in the U.S). Taxi drivers, waiters, and waitresses expect tips. Service people sometimes question which bill denomination was handed to them. Policemen may not be available to give directions. Who should they ask for directions? Once Japanese arrive at their hotel there may be decisions to make. Hotels often have safety deposit boxes. Where should they carry their passport, their money? If there is a knock on the door, who is it? Should they open the door? Prices on merchandise are not always marked and some merchants may charge Japanese tourists more because they think Japanese are rich. They may also substitute inferior merchandise. Hotels, rental car agencies and merchants often prefer credit cards.

Easy Targets

What makes Japanese Easy Targets

Every year Japanese tourists lose billions of yen because they overlook basic preparations and carry large amounts of cash. Although travelers checks are insured many people don't carry them although they know they should (see below Classroom Exercises). Another key is to be a little suspicious of strangers who approach. Many con men use the trusting nature of Japanese people to take advantage of them. According to NHK "Easy Targets" Executive Producer Stuart Calcote the three reasons Japanese are so vulnerable are their trusting nature, the fact that they are known for carrying cash, and their limited sense of personal space. Pickpockets are familiar with this last trait and target Japanese, knowing they can touch them, particularly in crowds.

Carrying Valuables

Wallets are best carried in the front pocket. A thin body pouch for valuables is often recommended. Women should avoid open bags and purses with shoulder straps (they are easily cut). It is best never to open your wallet and show large amounts of cash in public. Don't trust others with your valuables. A Japanese passport currently sells for about \$3,000 in New York. In fact, it is best not to travel with expensive jewelry, watches, cameras, or luggage. Detective Maurice DiPierro of the Crime Prevention Division of the New York City Police Department says, "In business, if you want to sell a product, you show it off the best you can. Advertise. If you want to become a target and attract criminals, show them how rich you are."

Con Games

Con Games in General

Con games ("shinyosagi" in Japanese), in general, appeal to the weaknesses of people to separate them from their money. Con artists lean on Japanese trust, innocence, desire to help, or greed. Con games often begin with people receiving something for nothing. If something appears to good to be true, it usually is. In the words of N.Y.P.D.'s Detective DiPierro, "How many people still believe in Santa Claus?"

Con Games in New York

Japanese people have long been drawn by the lure of New York City. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a small industry dependent on ripping off tourists. Here are a few of the most common con games:

- **3 Card Monte** This is an old street game with cards (a similar game uses shells). There is excitement on the street. It appeals to the travelers' sense of adventure. People are winning money. The only trouble is that the winners are part of the game. They are called "shills." ("Sakura" is the yakuza word for shills. It describes how hope blossoms, and then dies quickly). You win the first time, then lose, and lose big. Pickpockets ("suri" in Japanese) are often also in the crowd.
- **Bottle Man** A con man fills up an empty bottle of expensive wine or champagne with cheap liquor and bumps into a Japanese person. The bottle drops and breaks. The con man gets excited and loudly demands reimbursement for his loss. This is also done with expensive melons, jewelry boxes, and other valuable items.
- **Lottery Winner** A con man approaches and explains, "I have the winning number but I must leave the city today." He has the ticket and the newspaper with the same number to prove it. "You can keep half," he offers. The tourist gives the con man half the amount of the ticket. Naturally, the ticket is no good.
- **Gold Coin** A con man says he found a gold coin and it says on the bottom of it, "If you find this I'll give you \$300 reward." It has a telephone number. After a call, a shill answers and verifies the value. The tourist then pays half for the coin. This mean a gain of \$150. Actually a loss of \$150 is more like it. At a coin dealer the value is estimated at 17 cents.
- **Pigeon Drop** "I found this wallet filled with money. There is a reward offered by the person who lost it. But I need a lawyer to prove I didn't steal it. A lawyer's certificate cost \$200. Give me \$200 and keep this until I deposit the money." After a quick switch the tourist is left with pieces of cut newspaper. There are variations. Beware of anyone willing to "share" found money.
- **Bank Employee** After leaving the bank someone in a suit approaches and says, "I'm an employee of the bank and we made a mistake. Can I have the money back. You should actually get more." You end up with nothing.

What to do if you suspect a con game

If someone approaches you with anything suspicious or demands that you pay money for breakage the best thing to do is to ask them to accompany you to the nearest police station. You can also suggest that your insurance company will pay for damages only if there is a police report. Ask for their name. Con men don't like the police. They will move on to their next victim.

More Travel Tips

Watch your bags carefully at all times. Don't trust others with them, even if they have uniforms. Don't show a lot of money when making purchases. Don't leave money or valuables in your hotel room. Keep them in the hotel safe or in a hidden pouch. It's often smarter to dress "down" rather than dress "up". The same goes for shopping bags from expensive department stores. Carry your own brown bag. It will not attract criminals. In your hotel, identify callers through the peephole. Call the front desk before admitting anyone you don't know. Many travelers carry two wallets-one for thieves and one for real valuables. Don't buy from unlicensed merchants on the street or from stores that say they are having a "Going out of business sale." Keep receipts from purchases.

Lesson Suggestions and Role Plays

Travelers Checks

Japanese people know they should buy travelers checks but too often don't. They are unfamiliar with checks and thus uncomfortable

with the language of checks. Begin by teaching phrases like, "Will you accept a travelers check?" and "Who should I make the check out to?" They can practice with a sheet of ten make-believe checks. Create a complete simulation of their dream trip overseas. They begin at the bank, buying travelers checks, and signing them once in front of their partner, the banker. They must keep a careful account of the serial numbers on a separate purchaser's record. In pairs, they choose the cities, hotels, sights and souvenirs they will spend their money on. Suggest store and hotel names and model more of the vocabulary for check cashing like "Do you have any picture ID?". Teach them to make checks cashed in banks payable to "Cash." The procedure soon becomes routine.

The Taxi Ride Role Play

One popular role plays involves a taxi ride. Taxi drivers use a variety of basic cons including bill switching, meter rigging, and extra charges for bags and passengers. In groups of three or four, one student plays the taxi driver and the others take a ride. The taxi driver, realistically, is often not a native speaker of English. Students enjoy playing this role since they are encouraged to use choppy English ("You boys from Japan? I love Japan. Japan people very rich. I have Sony Walkman...") Tell the taxi drivers that they are very poor and happy to get some rich Japanese tourists in their cabs. The Japanese tourists are warned that cab drivers routinely try to overcharge them. Tell them that the trip from the airport should cost about 15 dollars. At first, give the passengers a twenty dollar bill and the driver a one dollar bill to pull the switch. After being paid the driver switches bills and holds up the one dollar bill, saying, "You gave me a one!" The Japanese who handed him the twenty protests, "I gave you a twenty!" Another passenger backs him up, "Yes, I saw him give you a twenty. What are you trying to pull! Cut the crap." Students really immerse themselves in this role play. This exercise increases assertiveness.

Hotel Room Role Play

Another role play takes place in a hotel room. A few students are sitting around their room and there is a knock at the door (you can knock on the desks). The man outside wants to get in. His role is to use any method he can to get in. He tries yelling "Room Service" "Fire" and "Hotel Security." The students check with each other, "Did you order anything from Room Service?" They call down to the desk and ask if the hotel has sent anyone to their room.

Conclusion

Although the United States, in general, and New York, in particular are used here, these lessons in crime prevention can be expanded to anywhere in the world. Responsible English teachers are urged to extend their teaching to include sound travel practices.

For More Information

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2-2-1, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100. Tel: (03)3580-3311 Ext.2306. Mr. Shingo Taguchi of the Division for the Protection of Japanese Nationals Overseas has pamphlets and videos available.
- Ministry of Education. A new (1993) safety guidebook is available for teachers of high school students who are traveling abroad. New York Consulate General of Japan, 299 Park Avenue, N.Y. 10171. Bohan manual (Crime Prevention Manual).
- Japan National Tourist Organization (See your local office). They have a series of small booklets with information and safety tips for many different countries and parts of the world (USA-West, USA-East, Europe, South East Asia, Korea, Brazil, Hong Kong & Macao, etc.). Japan America Hotline. KDD and NTT sponsor a Japanese Language Help Line. The number in the U.S. is 212-869-0110, 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Monday to Friday. Contact Dial Service International Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1818, New York, NY 10110.
- 911 Emergency Service for Japanese Many large American cities now are hooked up to a bilingual service. If you say "I want a Japanese operator." or "I don't speak English" they will transfer you someone who speaks Japanese. Note that this is for emergencies only.

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