

Questions and Answers – Lydon-Mizoguchi – April 2020

Question: Who should consider going on this adventure? This trip is designed for travelers wishing to learn something about Japan. Most visitors to Japan skim the surface of the culture and the people. We put together a three-dimensional experience, one that involves both mind and body. Our trips begin long before we board the airplane, and hopefully continue long after we return. We believe that every minute spent in pre-trip preparation pays off a hundredfold during the adventure itself.

Question: Why join a Lydon-Mizoguchi adventure? Because we travel with a purpose and will be welcomed by friends who we've known for a quarter century. And because we've been meeting and interacting in our pre-trip workshops. We get all the socialization and interpersonal stuff out of the way. You will be part of a well-prepared group of like-minded travelers.

Question: Why go with a group? Can't trips to Japan be done traveling as a couple or alone? You could travel alone, but without the connections and pre-trip instruction you would just skim the surface. We believe very much in the **Power of the Group** – the magnetic force that a group of respectful, interested and prepared travelers exerts on people, drawing them out and exciting them. Traveling with a group also takes the annoying day-to-day challenges of arranging rooms, train tickets and frees you up to focus on the culture and people of Japan.

Question: What is the maximum number that you've set up for this group? 34 including the Lydon-Mizoguchi Team. In 45 years of leading groups all over the world, I've had group as small as a dozen and as large as 104. The optimum size for the kind of traveling we do in Japan is from 30 to 35 well-prepared adults. A group that size allows us to negotiate lower prices, and also permits a wide variety of personalities within the group. Small groups are much more expensive and usually become claustrophobic. Our last 3 groups to Japan (2018, 2017, 2015) were in the 30-35 range.

Question: What is the age range of your group members? During the past 45 years that I've been leading groups around the world, the ages have ranged from mid-20s to mid 80s. We've learned over the years that those under 25 do not have adequate attention spans, so we don't accept anyone under that age. We are seeking group members who are mature and patient and willing to blend seamlessly into the group.

Question: What do you mean when you say "Don't travel with strangers!"? One of the greatest gambles in joining a typical travel group is that you will have little in common with them, nor their interests. Those groups often range from the ill-informed to the ill-mannered. We carefully review group member applications before accepting them. We also continue to monitor group members during the pre-trip sessions, and if we feel that a member's behavior might jeopardize the experience of the group, we will remove them. 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, bluster and bravado.

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, and a couple of the books will be required reading. The subjects during the sessions will include luggage management and how to stay healthy while traveling to Japan.

Question: Will we do a lot of walking? Yes, and if there has been one suggestion that has come from previous Lydon-Mizoguchi groups (besides learn more Japanese, and take lighter luggage) is “do a lot of pre-trip conditioning!” This is not a physical conditioning trip per se, but Japan IS a mountainous country. Hills. And stairs. Get in shape if you aren’t already.

What are the requirements for becoming a member of the Lydon-Mizoguchi 2020 Japan group?

- 1) **A completed application including a deposit (check only) of \$1,500 per passenger.**
- 2) **Attendance at the four mandatory pre-trip sessions, held on the Cabrillo College campus on Sunday afternoons and early evenings:**
 - **Sunday, January 12, 2020**
 - **Sunday, February 2, 2020**
 - **Sunday, March 1, 2020**
 - **Sunday, March 22, 2020**

Question: What if I cannot attend the pre-trip sessions? Then, unless you live over 200 miles from Aptos, we will not accept you into the group. We feel very strongly about the pre-trip sessions, and they are as much of the trip requirements as the fee. You must invest some of your “sweat equity” and become part of the group. Members of previous groups affirm the importance of the pre-trip sessions.

What is the payment schedule? Initial payment of \$1,500 per person to secure a space in the group. This deposit must be made by check. Final payment is due **no later than February 6, 2020**. You may make this payment with a credit card, though there will be a 4% service charge to do so.

May I get a refund if I need to cancel? Yes.

- 1) **Entire Deposit refundable up to January 1, 2020.**
- 2) **Entire \$1,500 deposit is non-refundable after Jan. 1, 2020.**
- 3) **Once final payment is made (due February 6, 2020) the entire trip fee non-refundable if group member cancels.**

Do you recommend buying travel insurance? Yes. We recommend that you explore buying a travel insurance policy. To protect your investment. **Linda Schwedock** at Pacific Harbor Travel (see below) can assist you with travel insurance.

Question: What if you do not yet have a roommate? Roommate compatibility is one of the most important elements in traveling. It is best to come to this trip with a

roommate in hand, a relative or friend who shares the same interests that you do. The pre-trip sessions provide an opportunity for “singles-not-by-choice” to find another single in the group and make a match. However, ultimately, the responsibility for finding a roommate is yours, and should you be unable to, then you’ll need to be prepared to pay the \$1,000 single supplement fee.

Question: What if my spouse or partner is not as excited or interested in being a part of this adventure as I am? Sometimes one partner has a raging desire to experience an adventure like this in Japan, while the other not so much. We have experienced an adventure where the reluctant one joined the group anyway, spreading grumpiness and gloom throughout the trip.

If you find yourself in that dynamic, we would urge you to leave the dark cloud at home. It will save you (and the group) a lot of trouble. You won’t have to get a cat-sitter or put a hold on the mail. And you’ll be able to focus on Japan and not have to worry about they’re having a good time.

Finding a roommate: If you yourself suddenly (temporarily...) single we will work hard to find you a roommate. And, even if it works out that we can’t, the single supplement is modest (\$1,500) price to pay for your being able to experience the trip to Japan you have always dreamed about.

Question: What are the three main issues in group travel?

#1 – Being Late. Groups are very impatient with members who are late, and they can be brutally candid about it. 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. If you are chronically late to appointments or meetings, you probably should not apply for this trip.

#2 – Asking the Dreaded Lazy Question. We expect group members to read distributed materials and pay attention as we go along. Groups have little patience with members who ask questions about things that have already been explained or are clear in the distributed materials. Prefacing a question with “I know you’ve covered this before, but remind me...” is not being respectful to your fellow group members.

#3 – Group members who fill the air with their opinions. We Americans are an opinionated people. We review everything and are asked to give it stars. Thumbs up or down. Like. Not Like. Nothing gets in the way of truly understanding another culture or place than the cacophony of opinions that rattle around in our heads as soon as we see something different. Liking-Not Liking will prevent you from really understanding anything outside your own, narrow, rigid (opinionated/prejudiced) vision. Your senses and sensibilities are going to be assaulted by new sights, sounds, smells, and ideas. Our goal is to become culturally neutral. To suspend judgment. We all should focus on listening.

Whether or not you like or agree with something you hear or see or smell or taste should not be the focus of your adventure to Japan.

To get the most out of this adventure (and most others), you'll need – to put it bluntly – to **Shut Up and Listen.**

Quiet your mind and your tongue and observe.

And at the very least, if you can't stifle your own internal opinions, and they continue to cloud your vision, keep them to yourself. Your fellow travelers did not pay all this money and sign up to hear your opinions.

Question: What if I have special dietary requirements? One of the themes of the trip is exploring regional cultures and cuisines. We are traveling to out of the way places rarely visited by Americans, and chefs in these areas are not familiar with dietary restrictions such as gluten-free, non GMO, vegan, etc. The idea is that we adapt to the “food of the realm” rather than the other way around. If you have strict dietary requirements, we cannot accommodate them, and you should not apply to join this trip.

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: 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. 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, credit cards are not accepted at most places we normal folks patronize. And the farther we venture into the countryside, the more cash is used. We will discuss these monetary issues during the pre-trip sessions.

Question: 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. It is excruciatingly time-consuming to change money in a Japanese bank, and is not recommended. Bring a lump of Japanese yen with you. Japan is a very safe country. 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 move the decimal two spaces to the left.

Question: Can I earn frequent flyer miles for this trip? Possibly. Check with Linda Schwedock at Pacific Harbor Travel. 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. Hokkaido will be experiencing late spring, so it can be chilly in the evenings.

Question: What about luggage? How much can we bring? We will be traveling on a variety of conveyances throughout the trip, and there are few, if any baggage handlers available. You will be expected to handle your own luggage most of the time. That is from outside of the bus (we will help get it out from the luggage compartment) into the hotel lobby, onto the elevator and into your room. From one train platform to another.

We will be limiting you to one (1) piece of check-in luggage not to exceed 44 pounds We will conduct some packing demonstrations in the pre-trip workshops.

We will have a uniform group flagging that all luggage must display to help prevent luggage from getting mixed up with others in transit. Also, to make it easier to remove from airport carousals, and to help prevent group members from accidentally leaving them behind.

We advise that you pack for the trans-Pacific flights with the assumption that your check-in suitcase will stray and not be available during the first couple of nights in Tateyama. You should plan to live out of your carry-on, with enough underwear and necessities to tide you over until your suitcase reappears. We will discuss the way experienced travelers approach luggage, carry-ons during the pre-trip sessions.

Question: 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. This itinerary has a very wide range of climates, from temperature early-spring to sub-tropical (Okinawa.) We will discuss these challenges during the 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 our trip is all that's required. In this case if your passport expires before **Nov 1, 2020** you must renew it. Renew or apply now.

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 4% service charge that credit cards are now requiring.

Question: Is there any upgrade available on the trans-Pacific flight? The basic trip fee includes a round-trip ticket between SFO and Haneda Airport in Tokyo. We continue to fly on Japan Airlines because we find their service to be exceptional. However, if you seek a bit more leg room and amenities we also offer an upgrade that Japan Airlines calls **Premium Economy**. Between Economy and Business class. In recent trips we have had quite a number of group members avail themselves of this upgrade. The seats are wider and have more leg room and the service is a bit more attentive. Passengers holding these tickets also have access to the “Sakura” Departure Lounge in SFO, and the JAL VIP lounge at Haneda Airport. Here is a link to JAL’s Premium Economy: The upgrade fee is \$950 for the round trip added to the over-all trip fee. (The seats on the domestic flights in Japan are all Economy. There is no Premium Economy class on those flights.)

<https://www.jal.co.jp/en/inter/service/premium/>

There are a limited number of these upgrade seats available, so if you’re interested, you should so indicate on your application.

Question: May I go out to Japan ahead of the group, or extend your at the end of the itinerary?

Yes. If you plan to meet us in Japan, it will be your responsibility to make the arrangements to meet us at Haneda. 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.

Note: All of the air travel in this itinerary, including trans-Pacific and domestic flights, are booked on a heavily-discounted group fare through Japan Air Lines. If you deviate and do not travel with the group in the SFO-Haneda; Haneda-SFO segments we will have to re-book your entire air ticket at a higher cost that you will have to pay beyond the basic trip fee.

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

We have been working with Pacific Harbor Travel for the past ten 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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This trip is neither affiliated with nor approved by Cabrillo College