

Shoes

You already know that Japanese families do not wear their shoes in the house. This is to keep the house clean. Also, culturally, there is a division between the "inside" world of the family and the "outside" world of work, shopping, etc. The entrance of the home is where you leave the outside behind and relax with your family. You have been invited to be a part of that inside group. This is more special than you may know. Some Japanese families only invite family and very close friends into their home.

You will see that unlike some American houses, most Japanese homes have a formal entry, with a step up into the rest of the house. Usually there is a shoe cupboard (called a getabako GEH TAW BAW KO) or shelf just inside the front door, or a place along the wall where shoes are lined up. When you come into the house, remove your shoes and put them away. If you are visiting another home or in a place without a shelf, turn your shoes around so that you can step back into them and then neatly line them up next to everyone else's shoes and to the side, out of the way where people walk.

Most families and even some public buildings, such as meeting halls and restaurants, will have slip-on slippers for you to wear inside. You can wear these slippers most places in the building, but there are some exceptions. You only wear socks or go barefoot in rooms which have tatami floors. NO slippers or shoes on the woven straw tatami mats. Also, there will be a separate pair of slippers inside the toilet room. Step out of the slippers you are wearing and step into the toilet slippers as you enter the toilet room. Then, when you are finished, step back out of the toilet slippers, leaving them in the toilet room. Toilet slippers don't EVER leave the toilet room. To be polite, try to step out of them backwards, so that they will be ready for the next person. You might have noticed that we said "toilet room" and not "bathroom". That's because in Japan, the toilet and tub are not in the same room. If you ask for a bathroom, it's because you want to take a bath!

Japan has excellent public transportation. You can go almost anywhere in the country by using buses, subways and trains. That means a lot of walking, so you will want to bring comfy shoes. A clean pair of tennis shoes, Converse low-tops or slip-on shoes (like some Skechers, Toms, Bobs, Keds, Vans and others) would work. At Labo Camp, there is an all-day mountain hike. If you are a serious hiker and in good condition, you can sign up for the hike. Hiking boots, a sun hat and full rain gear (lightweight jacket and

pants) are required for the hike. If you don't want to hike, there are many other activities for which tennis shoes will be fine. Sandals should have straps to keep them on your feet while you go up and down stairs and on and off trains. Please don't bring flip flops, clogs or shoes which hurt your feet. This includes Crocs, unless you have the non-clog Croc shoes. Keep in mind that summer in Japan is hot and humid, so heavy shoes like skate shoes might become uncomfortable. It's not always easy for Americans to buy shoes in Japan because our feet are bigger, so please don't count on that.

While in Japan, you might be interested in traditional Japanese footwear. Some tourist locations may even sell them in your size.

Geta (now you know how Getabako got their name) are the wooden-soled flip-flop styled shoes worn with yukata (YOU CAW TAW), the cotton summer kimono. They have wooden bars on the bottom that raise them off the ground, to protect the hem of the yukata from getting dirty in the rain. Zori (ZOE REE) are a more formal sandal, with no bars, often made with black lacquered wood or beautiful fabric and worn with the more expensive kimono. Waraji (WAW RAW JEE) are woven from grass or straw. You will see them worn by monks. People also make them from cotton rope or strips of recycled cloth. Split-toed boots with rubber soles are worn by construction workers. They are called jika tabi (JEE CAW TAW BEE), and the cotton split-toed socks worn with zori are called tabi.