



JAPAN WITH KIDS — THE HONEST ANSWERS

The stuff guidebooks skip, from a parent who lives here

We live in Tokyo and raise our kids here. These are the questions visiting families actually ask us — answered straight, with the inconvenient parts left in. Everything here is checked on the ground, not translated from a tourism site. Print it, or keep it on your phone.

1 Can we really use a stroller everywhere?

2 Trains, rush hours & the shinkansen

3 Where do we buy diapers & formula?

4 Bottles & hot water on the go

5 Do hotels have cribs & kid stuff?

6 Laundry & what you can't rent

7 What will my picky eater eat?

8 How bad are the crowds, really?

9 Where do we even sit down?

10 How long does getting around take?



One rule before you read: whatever your itinerary says, add time. Japan runs on time — but families don't. The last two pages of this guide show you exactly how much to add, and why.



STROLLERS & TRAINS

Yes you can — with three honest caveats

Q1 Can we use a stroller the whole trip?

Mostly yes — but budget waiting time. Every station has an elevator, but it is often at the far end of the platform, and you may queue for it. You can board trains without folding the stroller. The exception is **shrines and temples**: paths are gravel (the wheels sink and won't roll), there are no elevators, and the stair flights are long — carrying a stroller up them is genuinely hard. For temple days, take the baby carrier instead.

Q2 When should we stay off the trains?

Two rush hours, not one. Weekday mornings roughly 7:30–9:00 — and the evening rush at **17:00–19:00** is just as bad. Most visitors only plan around the morning one. With a stroller, plan to be at your destination (or at dinner) before five.

Q3 What about the shinkansen (bullet train)?

Reserve seats — treat it as mandatory. The oversized-luggage space behind the last row is **reservation-only**, and the cars are narrow: with a stroller and suitcases, boarding unreserved with kids is a gamble not worth taking. Book the last-row seats with the luggage space when you book your tickets.

Q4 Anything else nobody warns us about?

Stations are mazes. Japanese stations — especially subway stations — are big, multi-level and complicated. The train arriving on time doesn't mean you're there: **getting from the platform to the correct exit can take another 10–15 minutes** with kids. Always add it.



BUYING BABY SUPPLIES

Skip the konbini — go straight to the drugstore

Q5 Where do we buy diapers, wipes, baby food?

Drugstores. Always drugstores. Convenience stores carry almost no baby supplies — don't waste the stop. A drugstore (Matsumoto Kiyoshi, Welcia, Sundrug and the like — they're everywhere) has all of it: diapers, wipes, formula, baby food, medicine, sunscreen. Pack 2–3 days of diapers and restock there instead of hauling a suitcase of them across the world.

Q6 What formula options will we find?

More convenient than at home, honestly. Japanese formula comes as **single-serve sachets, pre-measured cubes, and ready-to-drink cans** — no scooping and no measuring in a hotel room at 3 a.m. Note that Western brands are generally not sold here, so if your baby is fussy about a switch, bring enough of your own; otherwise the Japanese brands are excellent.

Q7 How do we cut down the bottle luggage?

Buy disposable bottle liner bags here. Japanese drugstores sell sterile liner bags that go inside the bottle — so you can travel with **one bottle, a spare teat and a cap** instead of a full set. For hot water: carry a small insulated tumbler. You can fill it free from your hotel kettle in the morning, and top up at the baby rooms in shopping malls and department stores, which have free hot-water dispensers for making formula.



Those baby rooms deserve their own sentence: department stores, big stations and malls have proper nursing rooms — private feeding booths, changing tables, hot water, sometimes scales. They are the best in the world and they are free. Plan your day around them shamelessly.



HOTELS — THE PART THAT SURPRISES EVERYONE

Nothing is "standard". Everything is "by request"

Q8 Will the hotel have a crib?

Only if you ask — never assume. Cribs and other baby equipment are **request items, not room features**, and numbers are limited. Email the hotel before you book, not after. And know that Japanese hotel rooms are small by Western standards — a crib takes real floor space in a typical double.

Q9 Our toddler has outgrown a crib. Now what?

Push the beds together — or go tatami. Bed guards here are genuinely tiny, so don't count on one. The workaround locals use: push two beds together and put the child in the middle. Even better, book a **Japanese-style room** — futons on tatami mean zero falling height, and kids **love** sleeping on tatami. It turns the problem into a highlight.

Q10 Can we do laundry? Can we rent gear?

Laundry: check first. Rentals: don't count on them. Many hotels have coin laundry, but it is **not guaranteed** — confirm before booking if it matters to your packing plan. Baby-gear rental in Japan is a home-delivery service built for residents — delivery and return logistics that don't work around a hotel stay. So the stroller/carrier decision has to be made before you fly: bring it, or buy cheap here.



FEEDING THE KIDS

Your picky eater will be fine — here's the playbook

Q11 What will my picky eater actually eat?

More than you fear. Plain rice, udon noodles, fried chicken (karaage), bread and bananas are available everywhere, always. Family restaurants have kids' menus with pictures you can point at. Conveyor-belt sushi has corn, fries, egg and hamburger plates for the fish-refusers — and watching the belt is half the meal.

Q12 Where's the easiest family dinner nobody mentions?

The shopping-mall food court. It sounds unglamorous — it's the local parents' secret weapon. Most stalls have kids' menus, there are high chairs and space for the stroller, nobody minds noise, and here's the real win: **each adult can get proper Japanese food from a different stall** while the kids eat their noodles. Everyone wins, no reservation needed.

Q13 What about allergies?

Take it seriously — carry it in Japanese. If your child has a serious allergy, bring a written allergy card in Japanese and show it at every restaurant; staff will check, but only if they understand. One trap worth knowing: **buckwheat (soba)** is common here, including in noodle-shop broths where you might not expect it. When in doubt at a soba/udon shop, ask.



CROWDS & WHERE TO REST

The two questions that decide whether your day survives

Q14 How bad are the crowds, really?

At the famous spots: bad, even on weekdays. Asakusa, Shibuya, Harajuku and Disney are crowded **every day** — "we'll go on a Tuesday" does not save you there. What visitors also miss: it's not only Golden Week. **Every national holiday and every 3-day weekend** is packed, because that's when Japanese families travel too. Check the Japanese holiday calendar before you lock your dates. The reliable trick is time, not day: famous spots are at their calmest right at opening.

Q15 Where do we sit down when the kids melt?

Harder than you'd think — plan it. Cafés in busy areas are usually full, and public benches are scarcer than in most Western cities. "We'll just pop in somewhere" fails exactly when you need it most. If there's a café you're counting on, **reserve it** where possible. Otherwise your reliable rest stops are: department-store baby rooms and restaurant floors, mall food courts, convenience-store eat-in corners, and parks.



Best months with small kids: late March–April and October–November. Summer humidity is genuinely tough on toddlers; June is rainy but quiet and cheap. If you're choosing between cherry-blossom crowds and autumn leaves, autumn is the calmer family trip.



HOW LONG THINGS ACTUALLY TAKE

Ride time vs. real family door-to-door time

The left column is what the transit app tells you. The rule we use as a family in Tokyo: **add 15–20 minutes to every single leg** — that's the elevator hunt, the transfer, and the exit maze. It sounds small. Across a day with three legs, it's an hour you didn't plan.

AROUND TOKYO	APP SAYS	FAMILY REALITY
Shinjuku → Asakusa	~30 min	45–50 min
Tokyo Sta. → Toyosu (teamLab)	~25 min	40–45 min
Ueno → Shibuya	~30 min	45–50 min
Shibuya → Odaiba	~35 min	50–55 min

DAY TRIPS	APP SAYS	FAMILY REALITY
Tokyo → Disney (Maihama)	~20 min	35–40 min
Tokyo → Kamakura	~60 min	~1 h 20 min
Tokyo → Hakone (Yumoto)	~90 min	~1 h 50 min
Tokyo → Nikko	~2 h	~2 h 20 min

THE BIG ONE	APP SAYS	FAMILY REALITY
Tokyo → Kyoto (shinkansen)	~2 h 15 min	~2 h 35 min
Tokyo → Osaka (shinkansen)	~2 h 30 min	~2 h 50 min



The rule hiding in this table: the extra 15–20 minutes applies to **every leg, every time** — and a shinkansen day is still a travel day: by the time you're checked in at the other end, the morning is gone. If a day on your itinerary has three legs from this page in it, that day is already broken.



THE ONE-DAY RULE

How much actually fits in a day with kids

AGES	A REALISTIC DAY
0–2 (napper)	One area, one main thing. The nap decides the schedule — not you.
3–5	One area + one nearby extra. Meltdown risk spikes after 15:00.
6–9	Two areas max, with a real sit-down break between them.
10+	Two areas and an evening thing — if the walking shoes are good.



If a day is over the limit: cut, don't compress

The instinct is to keep everything and start earlier. It doesn't work — kids don't speed up, they melt down. Drop the whole extra area, keep the gap, and you'll actually enjoy what's left. The best day in most family trips to Japan is the one where the afternoon had nothing planned.



And if you'd rather start from a plan that already works

In the shop: the **14-Day Family Plan** (Tokyo to Osaka), the **5-Day Tokyo Itinerary for Toddlers**, the **Family Packing Checklist**, the **Jet Lag Plan for Kids & Babies** and the **Tokyo Restaurant Map for Families** — all built and checked from here in Tokyo.



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