
Kershul, Kristine K. *JAPANESE. A Language Map.*[®]

Seattle, WA: Bilingual Books, Inc., 2001. Revised 2006. ISBN: 13-978-0-944502-13-6. \$7.95. Contact information: 1719 West Nickerson, Seattle, WA 98119; phone: 800/488-5068; info@bbks.com, www.bbks.com.

This user-friendly introduction to basic Japanese for everyday life is ideally suited for independent learners on the run, especially frequent flyers whose professional travels take them to Japan, but also traditional students looking for a concise review of introductory Japanese. What makes this guide especially attractive is, on the one hand, its layout — it unfolds into four two-sided, laminated 9" x 3" pages, making it a discreet travel companion easy to stick in a briefcase or backpack along with other guidebooks — and, on the other hand, the fact that it is jam-packed with essential Japanese language survival skills. Topics covered are organized into easily identifiable rubrics: "Meeting People," "Asking Questions," "Money," "Numbers," "Mail," "Telephone," "Dining Out," "Time," "Calendar," "Hotels," "Emergencies," "Sightseeing," "Transportation," and "Shopping." Each section is organized around key vocabulary and short sentences, typically to express a request for basic information or some amenity.

The downside of language guides such as this one, of course, is that they can only take you so far. Greetings and self-introductory phrases included here are formal and will help you break the ice, but where do you go from there? What do you say next? "Good morning;" "My name is Smith;" "I am from the U.S.A.;" "Do you speak English?;" "I do not understand Japanese;" "See you later." Phrases such as these certainly will impress your hosts that you are trying and that you are not a card-carrying "ugly American." It goes without saying that knowing a few basic phrases also can be immensely useful in some situations: "Toire wa doko desu ka?" / "Where is the lavatory?" If you are lucky, your Japanese hosts' English language skills will be good enough for you to be able to carry on a conversation in English.

The very last section is entitled "Essential Signs" and includes the *kanji* for "restroom," "airport," "train station," and "information," among other topics, and will help travelers locate important places in the blink of an eye (if they can remember the *kanji*, which is a very big if indeed, or don't mind walking around with this guide in one hand). On the other hand, one wonders how useful this section really is, since there are already internationally accepted signs (admittedly with a few minor national peculiarities with regard to color or size) for "lavatory" and "exit" that are standard fare in Japan as they are in the rest of the world.

All Japanese items are written in *romaji* accompanied by a layman's phonetic transcription, for example: *asagohan* (breakfast): ah-sah-goh-han. Now, it would be easy enough for the publisher, in fact (not to say immensely useful for first-time learners of Japanese), to throw in a tape recording or CD of all phrases introduced to give ambitious travelers eager to make a good first impression a chance to practice what they learn.

This “language map” is intended for busy people eager to pick up a smattering of real Japanese, but I hope it will inspire some users to go all out and actually learn the language properly, either in a formal classroom setting or independently. Bilingual Books, Inc., which produced this guide, offers a number of additional resources such as *JAPANESE in 10 Minutes a Day* by the author of this manual, which make it possible for independent learners to do just that: study at their own pace and eventually master basic Japanese.

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Publisher’s Response

At Bilingual Books, we want to help people learn a foreign language and discover the fun another language can bring them.

Your review has rightly captured the essence of *JAPANESE a Language Map*[®] as a portable resource jam-packed with the most essential words used every day. It offers enough of the language to beginners so they may be polite and get around easily on their travels. And plans are already in the works to offer an audio download (rather than a CD) so that students will have the added benefit of hearing the language as well.

As noted in the review, the *Language Map*[®] Series is specifically designed for those on the go who don’t have time to take a class or for students who need a quick reference guide for everyday words.

For those individuals who do have the time and the desire to truly study the language, you also mentioned our book *JAPANESE in 10 Minutes a Day*[®]. This book is designed for classroom use and is intended as the first step in the process of learning Japanese. Coming this fall, an interactive CD-ROM will also be included with the book so that students will have the additional benefits of hearing the language and practicing on the computer. It has excellent built-in, take-home assignments and will have students speaking Japanese from the very first day.

Kristine Kershul
Bilingual Books