# Japan etiquette

etiquettescholar.com (2015) ‘Japan etiquette’ [online]. Available at <https://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining_etiquette/table-etiquette/pacific_dinner_etiquette/japanese.html> (Accessed 20 February 2018)

**Dining etiquette for toasts**

The toast in Japan is *kampai* which means ‘bottoms up’ or ‘drain the glass’. An honoured guest should make a toast soon after the host does or at the end of the meal.

***Dining etiquette for tea ceremonies***

The tea ceremony requires strict adherence to rules designed to promote tranquility. Remove your shoes upon entering. You will probably be seated on a tatami flooring or a *zabuton* (a cushion or pillow). Once your shoes are removed, never step down on the *genkan* in your stockinged or slippered feet, but instantly step up onto the tatami. This way, you avoid bringing whatever dirt there may be in the *genkan* area into the house.

Once you have entered the tatami room, greet the guests who are already there with a slight bow and sit down in the place indicated. Do not talk or shake hands. Stay in your place, bow and then be seated silently.

First, you will be served a small cake *(o-kashi)* on a small plate. Pick up the plate with one hand and hold it at chest level so that crumbs fall on the plate. Crumbs *must not* fall anywhere on you or the tatami. Eat the cake in several small bites, then put the plate back down in the place from which you originally picked it up.

After you have eaten the *o-kashi,* the tea will be served. Before you pick up your cup, bow to those guests who have not yet been served tea (they will be served, as you are served, individually, and in order of status, after each individual has performed this ceremony), pick up the cup with your right hand, bring it to chest level, and hold it there with both hands for a moment. Now turn the bowl clockwise two quarter turns, and drink the tea completely in several sips. When you are finished drinking, turn the bowl *counterclockwise* in two similar quarter turns back to the original position and place the bowl down in front of you on the tatami just inside the seam. Make a formal bow to the hostess when you are finished drinking and have set the bowl down. Tea bowls and utensils must be handled with great care. If there are many others to be served, polite conversation with those either waiting or finished drinking is acceptable. Take special care not to be loud, too talkative or disruptive of anything that could break the peace and harmony of the event. Once everyone has been served, everyone makes a bow of gratitude to the hostess and then departs.

Tea at a Japanese home or office is a casual event, at which a tray will be brought out with a cup of tea, a small plate with a cake and a hot, viet cloth (an *o-shibori*).

***Dining etiquette before the meal***

The custom of *o-shibori*. Wipe your hands with the towel provided, not your face, and you do so before you touch any of the food, not after the meal.

***Dining etiquette for seating***

Traditional Japanese meals are taken sitting on the tatami, a reedlike mat inset in the top part of the floor.

At formal traditional Japanese dining events, you may be sitting in a *seiza* position (on one's heels with the legs tucked underneath the buttocks), which can be uncomfortable. Your hostess may suggest that you ‘get comfortable’; when she does, you may sit cross-legged (if male), or with your legs tucked to one side (if female). Never spread your legs directly out in front of you.

The most honoured position is at the middle of the table, with the second most important person seated next. The host sits at the middle of the table on one side, and the honoured guest in the middle on the other side, opposite the host. The honoured guest sits on the side of the table farthest from the door.

***Dining etiquette for beginning to eat***

In Japan, it is expected before you begin eating or drinking anything that you say *‘itidakimasu’* (basically *‘bon appetit’)* and that after the meal you say *‘gochisosama deshita’* (basically ‘thanks for a great meal’) to the host or hostess. Do not to drink or eat until your Japanese host does and, throughout the meal, try to follow the cues of your colleagues in terms of when they drink, eat and toast.

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***Dining etiquette for paying the bill***

Usually the one who does the inviting pays the bill. Sometimes other circumstances determine the payee (such as rank).

***Dining etiquette for tipping***

Tipping is usually not done-but if there is a tip, 10 per cent is sufficient.