



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- ❑ Driving is on the left.
- ❑ Road signs are in Japanese characters. Driving is not recommended for drivers who do not read and understand Japanese.
- ❑ Drivers are required to carry an International Driving Permit (IDP), Japanese Compulsory Insurance (JCI/jibaisekihoken) and passport. Passports must be carried at all times.
- ❑ Driving insurance in Japan also includes voluntary insurance (nin'i no jidoshahoken); drivers should carry both types as compulsory insurance alone may be insufficient in cases of personal liability.
- ❑ An IDP must be obtained in a driver's home country prior to arrival.
- ❑ Pedestrians account for 35 percent of all road traffic fatalities.
- ❑ Two- and three-wheeled vehicles are popular; drivers and passengers of these vehicles make up 17 percent of all road deaths.
- ❑ Cycling is a common form of transport. Cyclists account for 15 percent of road traffic deaths.
- ❑ Legal blood alcohol limit is below 0.03 for all drivers. Though enforcement of drink driving laws is high, six percent of all fatal crashes involve the use of alcohol.
- ❑ Strict penalties apply to driving under the influence of alcohol, including immediate arrest, steep fines and up to five years in prison. Passengers who allow a person who has been drinking to drive a vehicle are subject to prosecution.
- ❑ There are 3.9 road deaths per 100,000 people in Japan, compared to 2.2 in Sweden and 2.9 in the UK.



Source: CIA Factbook

ROAD CULTURE

- **Drivers** are generally considerate of other road users.
- **Driving over** the speed limit is common.
- **Some drivers** may speed or drive through intersections with disregard to red lights.
- **Drivers** flash hazard lights to warn drivers behind them of their intention to slow down. Some drivers may flash hazard lights as a greeting, or to thank other drivers for letting them into traffic.
- **Many pedestrians** cross against lights at intersections, even when drivers have a green light.
- **Cyclists** often ignore road rules and ride on the wrong side of the road.
- **Cyclists** may disregard traffic rules prohibiting riding bicycles on sidewalks among pedestrians.
- **Taxi drivers** may stop suddenly in roads without signaling in order to pick up or let off passengers.
- **Drivers** are trained to back into parking spaces. In rural areas, drivers may not look behind when parking.

ROAD CONDITIONS

- **There are** 1,218,772 km (757,309 miles) of roads; 992,835 km (616,919 miles) are paved including 8,428 km (5,236 miles) of expressways; 225,937 km (140,390 miles) are unpaved.
- **Driving** in Japan can be challenging. Many road lanes, even on highways, are narrow.
- **Most roads** are generally in good condition with well-maintained surfaces.
- **Traffic** in cities is typically dense and congested.
- **High density** traffic on national highways and expressways is common throughout the country.
- **Few** multi-lane roads are suitable for overtaking.
- **National roads** have frequent traffic light stops.
- **Most highway** and expressway numbering includes Arabic numerals in addition to Japanese characters.
- **Urban expressways** are intra-city expressways found in large cities. Many are built as viaducts running above local roads.
- **Urban roads** (including main roads) are often partially or completely blocked by illegally parked vehicles.
- **Most expressways** are toll roads.
- **Tolls** may be paid in cash (local currency), by ETC (Electronic Toll Collection) or by pre-paid Japan Expressway Pass. ETC payment requires that vehicle be fitted with an electronic toll reader.
- **Japan Expressway Passes** can be purchased at car



Road Conditions, continued

rental agencies or at service areas located along expressways. Passes are not valid on all expressways. Be familiar with requirements for your route.

- **Government-operated** “roadside stations” are rest areas found along national and prefectural highways; “service areas” with fuel are found along expressways.
- **Many tunnels** are inadequately lit.
- **Pedestrian infrastructure** is well developed in cities and towns, but less so in rural areas.
- **There are** many high mountain roads. Mountain roads are often closed during winter months.
- **The following roads** may present particular challenges to motorists:
 - » **Kawazu-Nanadaru Loop Bridge** on Highway 414 south of Tokyo is a double-spiral structure that moves traffic through a 720-degree series of turns in a mountainous area. The road connects to a popular hot springs resort on the Izu peninsula. Heavy traffic may be present on weekends. The road spirals may be difficult for persons who experience vertigo, dizziness or nausea. Reduced speeds are required; the speed limit is 30 kph (18 mph).
 - » **Eshima Ohashi Bridge** in Western Japan links the city of Matsue in Shimane Prefecture to Sakaiminato in Tottori Prefecture. Also known as the Rollercoaster Bridge, it is 1.4 km (.86 miles) long and is regarded as one of the world’s steepest bridges. The bridge should not be attempted by novice drivers or anyone prone to vertigo, or by anyone uncomfortable with extreme heights. The narrow bridge has a concrete surface and one lane in each direction; the road reaches grades of more than six percent.
 - » **The Tsugaru Iwaki Skyline** toll road in the northern Tōhoku region is regarded as one of the most challenging roads in the world. There are 66 hairpin turns and switchbacks along the route, which runs from the base of Mt. Iwaki to 1,247 meters (4,091 feet) above sea level. The paved surface is well maintained. Guard rails are present only on curves. The steep road accesses a tourist chairlift to the volcano, and is popular with visiting drivers. The road is open from mid-April to late October and heavy traffic is common, particularly on weekends and holidays. There is a gate controlling access to the road that is open from 8 am to 4:30 pm. The road closes at 5 pm.

REGIONAL AND SEASONAL CONDITIONS

- **Strict travel restrictions** are in place in areas surrounding the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Some trunk roads are open. Observe all restrictions. Radiation levels remain high.
- **Japan is subject to** earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis, flooding, landslides, severe winter weather and avalanches, and is located within a major earthquake zone with multiple active volcanoes.
- **Tropical cyclone/typhoon** season is from June to Dec. Activity is highest between July and Sept. Southern areas of the country generally experience the most severe storm weather.
- **Landslides** and flooding often occur following heavy rain or severe weather. Earthquake activity may follow a typhoon.
- **Avalanches** may occur in mountainous areas.
- **The Japan Tourism Organization** provides emergency alerts and early warning via “J-Alerts” sent directly to your cell phone with English push-through notifications. The app must be downloaded and enabled to receive alerts.
- **Be familiar with emergency procedures.** The Red Cross provides a website and free, downloadable emergency app: <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies>

Maximum Speed Limits

Type of road	Maximum speed
Urban areas	60 kph (37 mph)
Rural roads	60 kph (37 mph)
Highways	80 kph (50 mph)

Always adjust speed according to signage, hazards and weather conditions.

Signs are generally pictorial and may not follow European Union conventions.

Lane reserved for buses	Traffic merges from left	No right turn ahead	Expressway junction	End of speed restrictions	These directions permitted	Road closed to pedestrians	Tram stop	Soft shoulder: use caution



TRANSPORTATION

- **Transportation** options include cars, buses, subways, taxis, rideshare services, bicycles, trains and boats. Public transport is well developed and extensive.
- **Rechargeable** Integrated Circuit (IC) smartcards are issued by entities including Suica, Pasma and Icard. IC cards can be used on buses, trains, subways, many taxis and other forms of public transport.
- **Bus systems** are extensive, but may be difficult to navigate for those who do not speak or read Japanese.
- **JR Buses** are operated by Japan Rail Pass and include local routes and airport transportation services. Buses are blue and white with a large JR logo on the side.
- **Enter buses** through rear doors and exit through front doors near driver.
- **Ticket machines** and transport card e-readers are located in the rear of buses. Cash fares for tickets are paid when exiting; place ticket and fare in the box or slot at the front of bus.
- **Electronic buses** display upcoming stops. Passengers must push buttons located on the sides of buses to request a stop. Drivers will not stop otherwise.
- **Small and remote** villages are generally not served by JR Buses.
- **“Highway buses”** are overnight buses that offer service between cities along major highway routes.
- **Subway signs** are typically in Japanese. English translations may be available at some stations in major cities.
- **Use only** officially licensed taxis, identified by green license plates.
- **Taxis** are generally regarded as safe.
- **Taxis are** metered. Driver may not turn on meter unless passengers insist; some drivers may expect a passenger to negotiate a fare in advance.
- **Taxis may** be found at taxi stands, ordered by phone or app, or flagged on the street.
- **Taxi stands** are usually located near train stations.
- **To determine** taxi availability, check the color of the plate located on the lower corner of the dashboard: red generally indicates availability, green generally indicates the taxi is occupied; at night, a light on taxi roof means the taxi is available.
- **Taxi fares** vary by region, company and size of taxi vehicle (small, medium or large) with fares for larger vehicles being the highest.
- **Most taxis** accept credit cards. Payment in major cities may also be made by cash or by rechargeable IC cards.
- **Many drivers** do not speak or read English. Carry your destination written in Japanese.

- **Use only** rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver’s name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.
- **Many people** travel by bicycle. Bicycle rental companies are widely available; train stations often offer bicycle rentals.
- **Rental bicycles** include single-gear “mamachari” bikes and electric E-bikes. If renting an E-bike, be familiar with the greater speeds and additional necessary braking time.
- **Helmets** are generally not provided with bicycle rentals. Bring your own helmet.
- **The rail network** is well developed. Trains are generally regarded as safe.
- **Approximately 70** percent of Japan’s railways are operated by Japan Railways (JR). The remainder are operated by a variety of private companies.
- **Rail lines** connects the country’s four major islands: Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku.
- **Trains** include high-speed shinkansen (bullet trains), urban, regional, interregional and night trains.
- **Generally**, a second set of gates divides shinkansen platforms from the regular train platforms, requiring a separate set of tickets. Some stations may have direct gates to the shinkansen platforms and only require one ticket for access.
- **Night train** service is available between Tokyo and Okayama on the Sunrise Seto/Izumo. Regular seating is not available; passengers must book cabins or compartments called “nobi nobi seats.”
- **Advance reservations** are required for night trains.
- **Use only** rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver’s name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.
- **Ferries** to Japan’s many islands are operated by numerous companies. Check that vessels are not overcrowded and are equipped with an adequate number of life rafts. Seasonal freezing water temperatures pose a serious health risk.
- **Fully autonomous** car ferries are currently undergoing trials on some routes.

TRAFFIC REGULATIONS

- **Drivers must** be at least 18 years of age. Car rental agencies generally require drivers to be at least 21.
- **Surcharges** may apply to rental car drivers younger than 25 years of age.
- **Right turns** on red are prohibited.



Traffic Regulations, continued

- **Traffic lights** may display both a red light and a green arrow. The red light applies to turning traffic. The green arrow indicates that through traffic may continue.
- **Older Japanese stop** signs are triangular in shape and should not be confused with yield signs.
- **Laws stipulate** up to 15 years in prison for drivers found guilty of drink driving, speeding or careless driving that results in injury.
- **Seat belt use** is mandatory for driver and all occupants.
- **Restraints** are required for children up to six years old. Children are allowed to ride in front seats of vehicles if secured in a restraint appropriate to size. For safety, children should be seated in rear seats of vehicles and secured in an appropriate restraint.
- **Helmet use** is compulsory for motorcycle drivers and passengers. Fastened helmets are not required by law; for safety, helmets should be fastened.
- **Children** are not restricted from being motorcycle passengers. If possible, children should not be passengers on motorcycles.
- **Where there** are no sidewalks, pedestrians should walk on the right side of the road.
- **Cyclists** may not ride on sidewalks unless signs indicate that sidewalk riding is allowed.
- **Vehicles** must come to a full stop before crossing a railroad track.
- **Police may** carry out random breath tests for alcohol.

Tokyo Metropolis (Capital)

- » Transportation options include cars, buses, subways, taxis, rental bicycles, rideshare services, trains and boats.
- » There is no single "Tokyo City;" Tokyo is a collection of 23 separate wards, each of which functions as a city. Beyond the mainland, Tokyo includes two additional wards: Tama Region and Islands.
- » Traffic is heavy during rush hours, and can be confusing for drivers who do not speak or read Japanese.
- » Driving is not recommended. Extensive public transportation is available. Prepaid IC transportation smartcards may be purchased at most stations and at many supermarkets.
- » Official taxis are green, yellow and black. Taxis are metered; availability is indicated by lights on roofs, lights in windows, or signs in windows. Many taxis use signs in English.
- » Taxis may be flagged on streets or found at ranks at train stations, bus terminals and many large shopping centers.
- » Taxi drivers may not speak English. Carry destination written in Japanese characters.
- » Rideshare options are available. Use only rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver's name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.
- » City buses are operated by Toei Transport Network and by multiple private companies. Japan Rail also operates a network of buses (JR Buses).
- » Buses are generally more difficult for non-Japanese speakers and readers to use than subways and trains.
- » Tokyo Metro and Toei Subway operate subway trains. Tokyo Metro has nine lines and Toei Subway has four lines.
- » Metro signs include an alphabet letter representing the subway line name and a number indicating the station. Signs are encircled by a color that also identifies the subway line.
- » The JR Yamanote loop line connects the centers of all the individual cities that comprise the Tokyo Metropolis.
- » Metro and subway ticket vending machines include English translations. Fares may also be paid at entrance gates by using a reloadable IC transportation smartcard.
- » Tokyo Metro Tourist Information centers are located in Shinjuku, Ginza, Omote-sando, Ueno, Shibuya, Tokyo and Ikebukuro metro stations.
- » Tokyo is connected by rail to other parts of Japan. Train operators include JR Rail and multiple private companies.
- » Many train routes originate at metro stations located along the JR Yamanote line.
- » There are multiple shinkansen bullet train lines connecting the city to Osaka, Kyoto, Kyushu, Kanazawa, Niigata, Hokkaido, Tohoku Region and other destinations.
- » Cycling is a popular form of transportation. Bicycle rentals are available at multiple locations throughout the city including many transportation stations; helmets are usually not provided.
- » The practice of "arukisumaho" (walking while looking down at a smartphone or electronic device) is widespread. Cyclists and drivers should be alert to distracted pedestrians.

**Tokyo Metropolis, continued**

- » Though pedestrians have right-of-way at crosswalks, driver compliance is low. Pedestrians should use caution at traffic lights and crossings, and should be alert to cyclists riding on sidewalks.
- » Multiple companies operate ferry services to nearby locations. Be alert to overcrowding and avoid vessels that may have too many passengers.
- » The city is served by Narita International Airport and Tokyo Haneda Airport.
- » Narita Airport is the main airport for international flights. It is 70 km (43 miles) from city center.
- » Train connections from the airport to the city include the Keisei Skyliner to Nippori Station, and the JR Narita Express to Tokyo Station.
- » Taxis offer fixed rates from the airport to city locations.
- » Bus options to the city from both airports include a range of city buses and airport limousine buses.
- » Haneda Airport is located 14 km (8.7 miles) from city center. Transportation to the city includes buses, taxis, rental cars, the Tokyo Monorail train and the Keikyu Airport Line.
- » Airport limousine buses connect the airport to major hotels and rail stations.
- » There are multiple city bus lines between the airport and the city.
- » Major and local car rental companies are represented at both airports.

Kyoto

- » Transportation options include cars, buses, trams, subways, taxis, rental bicycles, rideshare services, trains and boats. Public transport networks are well developed.
- » The Meishin Expressway connects Kyoto to Nagoya and Osaka. Drivers should leave cars in parking areas outside of the main city and use public transport to access city center.
- » Traffic is particularly dense during cherry blossom season.
- » City parking is very limited and difficult to access. The city is compact and walkable.
- » Most forms of public transport accept reloadable IC transportation smartcards for payment.
- » In addition to municipal and regional buses, options include privately-owned bus companies.
- » Most bus routes and electronic displays are also in English, and are easier for visitors to navigate.
- » Kyoto City Buses are green and white; Keihan Buses serving suburbs are red and white; Kyoto buses serving areas north of the city are tan in color.
- » Enter buses from the rear and exit at the front.
- » Bus routes are well developed and include overnight highway bus routes to Tokyo.
- » Kyoto Station is the main bus station. JR Buses can be found at the Karasumi Exit on the north; other companies are located at the Hachijo Exit on the south.
- » Kyoto Fukakusa station also services some JR Bus routes.
- » Taxis are operated by multiple companies. Taxis may be hailed on the street or found at ranks outside of train stations, bus terminals and some large shopping areas.
- » Taxis are metered. Payment may be made in cash. Some taxis may accept credit cards.
- » Not all taxi drivers speak English. Carry your destination written in Japanese characters.
- » Subway service is limited to two lines: Karasuma (north-south), and Tozai (east-west).
- » There are two tram lines.
- » Train service is extensive, with local, commuter and express service. Train stops are signposted in English.
- » Shinkansen bullet trains are available between the city and destinations including Tokyo from JR Kyoto Station.
- » Pedestrians should exercise caution. Not all motorists respect crossings. Despite traffic laws prohibiting this, bicyclists may ride on sidewalks among pedestrians.
- » Many city residents travel by bicycle. Cyclists may have to travel on busy roadways alongside vehicular traffic.
- » Bicycle rentals are available at multiple outlets. Helmets are generally not provided.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND INCLUSIONS FOR MOBILITY CHALLENGED

- **Japan's** accessibility laws mandate that new construction projects for public use include provisions for persons with mobility challenges, but older buildings may not be accessible.
- **Major train stations**, airports and hotels are generally accessible for travelers with mobility challenges. Many smaller stations are inaccessible to those who are unable to climb stairs.
- **Most** city buses in Tokyo have priority seating for the elderly and people with mobility challenges.
- **Newer** high-speed shinkansen trains are fitted with large bathrooms allowing easy access for persons in wheelchairs.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

- **Police and responders** to emergency numbers may not speak English. Be prepared to describe your location/address in Japanese, or have a native Japanese speaker available to help you.
- **Pre-program** emergency numbers into your phone before departure.
 - » Police: 110
 - » Ambulance and fire: 119
- **For roadside assistance**, contact the Japan Automobile Federation (JAF) at 03-5730-0111 in Tokyo, 072-645-0111 in Osaka, 011-857-8139 in Sapporo, 092-841-5000 in Fukuoka, or 098-877-9163 in Okinawa.
- **Appropriate** medical care is widely available. English-speaking medical staff may not be available.
- **Beyond major urban** areas, additional time may be required for first responders and medical professionals to reach patients to stabilize them or to provide life-saving assistance.
- **Payment** for medical care, or proof of ability to pay for care in full, is required at the time of medical services.
- **If involved in a crash:**
 - » Call police.
 - » Stop vehicle in a safe location that does not obstruct other traffic.
 - » Switch off engine.
 - » Assist injured persons. Do not move an injured person unless it is necessary to keep them from becoming further injured.
 - » In the event of crash, Japanese law holds all drivers liable and assesses fault to all parties.



ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION FOR SAFE INTERNATIONAL ROAD TRAVEL (ASIRT)

ASIRT is a non-profit humanitarian organization established in memory of Aron Sobel, age 25, who was killed along with 22 other passengers in a Pamukkale Bus Company crash on the roads of Turkey.

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Association for Safe International Road Travel, 11769 Gainsborough Road, Potomac, MD 20854 USA,

Phone: 1-240-249-0100; Email: asirt@asirt.org; Website: www.asirt.org; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ASIRT.org/>