

**DRIVING IN JAPAN
AND
PASSING THE DRIVER'S TEST**

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This book can also be found online at:

www.supermelf.com/japan/ajetdrivingbook

Driving in Japan and Passing the Driver's Test

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Author's Apology: The spellings and words in this book are American English. I use license instead of licence, windshield instead of windscreen, curb instead of kerb, and so forth. I'm not trying to mess with your head, I'm just using an American spellchecker.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM: BUYING AND OWNING A CAR IN JAPAN

Contents:

1. Am I Allowed to Own and Drive a Car in Japan?
2. What Should I Buy?
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AM I ALLOWED TO OWN AND DRIVE A CAR IN JAPAN?

Can I drive a vehicle in Japan?

Yes, you are allowed to drive a vehicle in Japan if you have either a Japanese driver's license *or* an International Driver's Permit IN CONJUNCTION WITH a valid driver's license from your home country. Using the permit, you can drive in Japan for up to one year after your first date of arrival. You cannot drive on your home country license alone – not even for a rental car! - unless you are from Germany, France, or Switzerland, in which case you must also carry an official Japanese translation of your license. You must have a motorcycle license in your home country to drive a motorcycle.

Where do I get an International Driver's Permit?

It is easiest to get one before you leave at a local Automotive Association, but if you are already here, you can often get one through the mail. You can only get International Driver's Permits from your home country. Be cautious of internet scams and use a proper authority. (See <http://drivers.com/article/207/> for a list of recognized authorities, usually major automotive associations.) Under new law, your International Driving Permit is only valid for a *maximum* of one year and *cannot* be renewed unless you have been in your home country for at least three months straight.

Can I own a vehicle in Japan?

Yes, you are allowed to own a vehicle in Japan. Your contracting organization cannot keep you from buying or using a car if you so desire, even to drive to work. They can restrict you from using it to drive *between* places of work, however. Some contracting organizations will give you or help you buy a car, some will try to discourage it.

WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

There are variety of vehicles available to drive in Japan. Cars of all sizes, motorcycles, and scooters, each with different license rules, traffic rules and costs share the road. Deciding what to buy depends on your needs. If you only need to get around town occasionally, you may want a smaller car or scooter. If you want to take friends and explore Japan's roads, a larger, more powerful car will suit you better. For regular commuters, it may come down to a simple preference.

Scooters

If you decide to drive a 50cc or less scooter (good for low-speed around-town driving in decent weather), the buying process is somewhat easier (and much of the paperwork may be taken care of by the scooter shop.) As for licensing, you can get a separate scooter license which is unrelated to a regular driver's license. To get one, you are only required to take a paper test and a lesson; no practical test. Please see the section on The Written Exam for more details.

Motorcycles

Note that for any motorcycle, you can only drive it in Japan with your International Driver's Permit IF it is specified on it that you are allowed to on your home license. A plain car license is not sufficient. There are two types of motorcycle licenses: Normal, for motorcycles over 50cc up to 400 cc, and Large, for motorcycles 401 cc and over.

For exhaustive information on owning and driving scooters and motorbikes in Japan, read the Japan Biker FAQ at <http://www.thejapanfaq.com/bikerfaq-toc.html>.

Cars

As for cars, there are two main types:

- **White-plate cars:** These cars, recognizable by their white-colored license plate, are what typical cars look like in most countries. White-plates are generally more spacious, safer, and have more power than Yellow-plates. They are more expensive to buy and upkeep. A car does not have to be particularly large to be a white plate, but it is always wider than a yellow-plate.

- **Yellow-plate cars:** These are narrow, around-town cars. There is not a lot of leg room or trunk (boot) space. They barely make top speeds on an expressway and are not as safe. They are, however, a lot cheaper to own and run.

Buying

You have two choices when purchasing a car. Either purchase from a dealer (new or used cars) or from another person. The benefit to purchasing from a dealer is that the dealer will do a large amount of the paperwork. Also, there is some assurance of quality. The benefit to purchasing from another person is that the price is likely to be a lot cheaper. If you want to buy from another person, but do not want to do the paperwork, you can hire a dealer or pay someone at the Land Transport Office to do it for you.

The two basic things you have to do when you buy a car are:

- Register the vehicle and transfer ownership
- Verify a parking space

These two steps involve a great deal of paperwork and complicated Japanese forms. Taking a Japanese-speaker with you is practically a necessity if you cannot read or speak Japanese. If you do not use a dealer, you will need the below (you may not need everything for a Yellow-Plate, but you will need most of it):

Documents you need to buy a car:

1. **Alien Registration Card** (*gaikokujin torokushomeisho*) or Alien Registration Completion Certificate if your card has not been issued yet.
2. **Personal Seal** (*inkan* or *hanko*)
3. **Personal Seal Certificate** (*inkan shomeisho*) from your local public office.
4. **Parking Space Certificate** (*shako shomeisho*) from the police station in the municipality where you applied for alien registration. (This may not be needed in a rural area. See below on how to get one.)
5. **Valid Driver's License** (*untten menkyo*)

Documents you need to transfer a car:

All of the above as well as:

1. **Deed of Transfer** (*joto shomeisho*)
2. **Personal Seal Certificate** (*inkan shomeisho*) of the previous owner
3. **Alien Registration Card** (or *juminhyo* if they are Japanese) of the previous owner.
4. **Letter of Attorney** (*inin-jyo*) stamped by previous owner if possible
5. **Compulsory Insurance Certificate** (*jibaiseki hoken-sho*) from the previous owner (or, if you are getting it for the first time, you can only do so once the *shaken* is in your name, so do *shaken* first.)
6. **Shaken Inspection Certificate** (*shaken-sho*) from the previous owner
7. **Proof of Payment of Automobile Tax** (*jidoushazei noufu shoumeisho*) from previous owner (may not be needed)

How do I get proof of a parking space?

Find the person who is renting (or willing to rent) you a parking space within 2km of where you live, often the landlord, building owner, real estate agent, building management company of the building you live in, and ask for an official document showing that the space is yours. This document is a Certificate of Permission for Use of Parking (*hokan basho shodaku shomei*) and it must be stamped by the agent. Then go to the local police station and fill out an application form as well as an application form for a badge (*hyosho*) so you can certify the space. You have to draw two maps in a detailed manner: one of the area (including nearby landmarks) and one of the parking space, including the space number if there is one, the dimensions (in meters) of the spot and the width of any adjacent roads. This takes about a week to process. Note that small / light cars may not need this certificate in less urban areas.

Bring all necessary documents to the local **Land Transport Office** (*ikuun jimusho*). If it is a different Office than the car was previously registered in, then you will have

to get new license plates as well. If possible, go together with the previous owner, bringing all relevant items. Note that the officials will be very, very particular about details. If you fill out a form wrong, you will have to do it over or come in another day.

*** Note that the **Personal Seal Certificate** is only valid for 3 months! If it has been longer than that, for either the buyer or the seller, you need a new certificate (which may be difficult if the seller has left the country.) ***

If you purchase through a dealer, you generally need only your **Personal Seal Certificate** and the **Certificate of Permission for Use of Parking**. They will take care of the rest.

The entire process may take up to 10 days for a White Plate (but may be done in a day if a Yellow Plate.)

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BUYING?

Used cars are worthless without *shaken*. Period. If the car you are buying has less than a year of *shaken*, it should be virtually free, unless it is fairly new and in very good condition. The same logic applies when you are selling. If you have no *shaken* left and do not get more, you might not be able to sell your car (or even give it away) and you will have to pay a scrap dealer to take it off your hands which can cost ¥10,000 to ¥20,000.

The prices below are what you can expect to pay for a car with full *shaken* (valid for 2 years; 3 years if brand new)

	White Plate	Yellow Plate
Cost of a Car (used)	¥240,000 – 300,000	¥160,000 – 220,000
Cost of a Car (new)	¥1,000,000 and up	under ¥1,000,000
Automobile Acquisition Tax	5% of the price of the car	
Automobile Tonnage Tax (based on weight)	¥50,000 – 75,000	under ¥50,000
Name Change	¥10,000 - ¥25,000	¥3,000

Shaken

Shaken is a required road-worthy car inspection. You can inspect your car by yourself, but most people bring their car to a dealer, who does everything for a fee. (If you do it yourself – and you must have a decent command of Japanese to do it – note that White Plates are inspected by the "Transport Bureau Office" and Yellow Plates are inspected by the "Light Motor Vehicle Inspection Organization".) Most people have it done by their dealer or a gasoline stand advertising 車検. *Shaken* must be renewed within one month of the expiry date as shown on the sticker in your front window.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF OWNING?

Owning a car is an expensive prospect in Japan, mainly because of inspection fees. The mandatory insurance covers the other party, but it is strongly recommended that you get the optional Comprehensive Vehicle Insurance (*ninni hoken*) which covers third party expenses beyond the compulsory and which also covers you and your passengers. Unlimited compensation insurance is highly recommended.

	White Plate	Yellow Plate
<i>Shaken</i> (road-worthy inspection, lasts two years)	¥120,000 and up	¥70,000 - ¥100,000
Older-Than-10-Year-Inspection (If your car is older than 10 years old, then you need a mini- <i>shaken</i> a year after you get <i>shaken</i> .)	(from ¥10,000 up to half the price of your shaken)	
Compulsory Third Party Insurance	(included with <i>shaken</i>)	
Mandatory Liability Insurance (per year)	¥30,000	¥20,000
Optional Insurance (per year)	¥40,000 – ¥70,000	
Automobile Tax (per year depending on size)	¥30,000 – ¥50,000	¥5,000 – ¥20,000
Gasoline	about ¥110 per liter (about ¥4000 per tank)	
Permanent Parking Space (per month)	¥0 (in the countryside) – ¥20,000 (in the big city)	
Short-term Parking	¥100 - ¥500 per hour, ¥1000 - ¥5000 yen per day	
Other Maintenance (tires, equipment, repairs)	¥0 – ¥50,000 per year	

CHAPTER 2

THE WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN RULES OF THE ROAD

Contents:

1. The Basics
2. Tolls and Moving Violations
3. What Happens When You Get Pulled Over

THE BASICS

The Japan Automobile Federation (JAF) provides its Rules of the Road in six languages. You can send ¥1000 plus postage to your local JAF office and get a copy mailed to you (office locations and more information available at http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/index_e.htm.)

The Rules of the Road book itself is not very long. It has a variety of illustrations and is translated well. However, the great majority of it is common sense and often such irrelevant common sense (such as 'do not disturb people by revving your engine'), one is discouraged from taking it seriously. However, there are some useful items within not least of which is a full color guide to all road signs, center lines and other street markings, as well as explanations on what a parking ticket looks like and what to do if involved in an accident. If one has not driven in a long time or is a relatively new driver, it is definitely worth looking into.

However, although Japanese driving rules are fairly standard, there are a couple things to watch for:

Americans and Canadians, note that Absolutely No Turns can be made on a red light in Japan.

British, Australians and New Zealanders, note that the Give Way to Cars on Your Right rule is the opposite. For example, if you are turning left onto a street and a car across from you is turning right onto the same street, *you* have the right of way. In other words, the car making the smaller turn goes before the car making the larger turn, even if it is crossing from your right.

Other things to note:

- Seat belts must be worn in the front seat by law.
- Pedestrians always have the right of way. (Despite this, Japanese do not jaywalk often.)
- Give way to emergency vehicles (even if Japanese drivers tend not to.)
- A recent law makes driving while talking on a mobile phone an offense.
- Stop at all railroad crossings, regardless if there are warning lights or barriers.
- Motorcycle riders must wear helmets
- Children under the age of 6 must be in a child-safety seat
- Beginning drivers must attach a Learner's sticker and drivers over 75 must attach a Senior Driver's sticker

Lines

You will see white lines, yellow lines, dashed, solid, and a mixture. The lines do not indicate traffic flow so assume every road goes in two directions (no matter how narrow it is) unless you are on the expressway. Basically, the rule is that, if the line is dashed, you may pass, overtaking the car in front of you. If the line is a solid white, you may pass but exercise caution. Never cross a solid yellow line at all unless there is an additional white line on your side. This is especially true if it is a *thick* yellow line. Also, as a general rule, there is no passing allowed in a tunnel.

Traffic Signs

Traffic signs are not written in *romaji* at all, though many are self-explanatory. See Rules of the Road or your JET Diary for a complete list. Some ones to watch for are:



If you see a lit sign full of *kanji*, it is almost always warning of a construction zone ahead. Despite the intimidating number of *kanji*, it is almost never something to worry about.

Construction Zones

Construction is common, especially construction that reverts traffic to one lane. These zones are either monitored by live workers or by small lights. If a worker waves a *red* flag at you, you must stop. If a worker waves a *white* flag, you may proceed. If a worker is waving a sign with two giant *kanji*, it usually means “slow” indicating construction ahead. There may be a single light during off-peak times. Simply: stop if it is red and proceed if it is blue or green. (Often, a timer shows how long you have to wait before you can proceed - no more than 2 minutes.)

Beware of wildlife on country roads, especially in spring and autumn.

Navigation

Getting from one place to another in Japan by car is relatively easy. Almost all signs, even in rural areas, have *romaji* under the *kanji* as well as clear arrows, so the language barrier is rarely a problem when navigating. Local roads are narrow and twisty, but well-marked. City roads are more of a challenge since there are more lanes, more cars, sudden forks, and less time to decipher signs; in particular, avoid driving in the Tokyo-Yokohama area or the Osaka-Kyoto area unless you have to. Blue signs are the main navigation signs; they will show the main routes. Green signs indicate toll expressways. Almost all local routes have numbers.

A great road atlas in English is available from *Shobunsha* called Road Atlas Japan. The color maps are topographic. All routes, towns, landmarks, and major tourist attractions are written in English with *kanji* included for city names. It is available from a variety of bookshops and online including from Amazon Japan. The price is approximately ¥3000. (ISBN 4-398-20104-1)

Gas / Petrol Stations

Gasoline Stands, as they are called in Japan, are fairly similar to their counterparts elsewhere in the world. The cost is rarely advertised, but hovers just over ¥100 a liter. They are usually full serve, but keep an eye out for the katakana “self” (セルフ) just to be sure. Self-serve gasoline stands often have a fancy Japanese-only push-button screen and want cash ahead of time. If you get stuck, a clerk will probably help.

Good words to know: *mantan* 満タン (the equivalent of “fill ‘er up.” Otherwise, you can ask for a specific amount of litres/yen), *genkin* 現金 (pay by cash), *regyura* レギュラー (regular unleaded gasoline), and *haizara* 灰皿 (ashtray; they may offer to empty it)

Being that Japan is still very much a cash society, there is no credit card pay at the pump. Also, snacks and the like are rarely available at a gasoline stand; you have to go to a convenience store. In addition, if you are in the countryside, most gasoline stands will close quite early (7:30 or 8pm) and will be closed on Sundays and holidays, so plan accordingly.

Pedestrians and Cyclists

Pedestrians are supposed to walk on the right side (unless there are sidewalks) while cyclists are supposed to ride along the left side of traffic.

Breakdowns and Accidents

If you are involved in an accident, call 110 to report it to the police. If there are injuries, call an ambulance at 119.

If your car breaks down, there are a number of road service providers, however, the standard is the Japanese Automobile Federation (JAF). If you are not a member (or are not carrying your card) JAF will assist you, but the service fees start at ¥5,000 and go up from there, depending on where you are and what you need. Flat tires often cannot be fixed on the spot.

The number to call (it should work from mobile phones, pay phones, PHS, etc.) is:

8 1 3 9 (Don't forget to press the pound sign first)
(Japanese mnemonic: *ha-i-san-kyu* or “*hai, thank you*”)

Be prepared to tell them your location, model of your car, and the nature of the breakdown (the best you can.) If you call from an expressway emergency phone or the like, they can pinpoint your location easier.

Regional Road Service Call Centers:

Hokkaido 011-857-8139	Tohoku 022-237-0110	North Kanto 048-840-0111	Kansai 072-645-0111	Chugoku 082-272-4949	Shikoku 087-868-0111
Kyushu 092-841-5000	Chubu 052-889-5300	Tokyo 042-339-0111	Kanagawa 045-482-0111	Chiba 043-224-1655	Yamanashi 055-241-0111
Nagano 026-223-1100	Niigata 025-281-0111	Fukui 0776-25-2560	Ishikawa 076-240-3888	Toyama 076-425-7373	Okinawa 098-877-9163

see more at http://www.jaf.or.jp/rservice/network/fr/f_index.htm

Japanese Driving Habits

Japanese drivers are generally not aggressive. Although they will pull out directly in front of you and go through red lights, they tend to do so in a leisurely manner. The most aggressive drivers by far are taxi drivers. The Japanese rarely honk (except for thank-you honks) but they do tend to, like drivers all over the world, speed, tail you, and pass you dangerously, though on the other hand, they will also politely stop to let you pull out in front of them, flash their lights to let you know if your lights are on, and will pull as far left as they can (putting on their left turn signal sometimes) to let you pass. Local roads rarely have shoulders, so beware of cars stopped or parked right in the middle of the road. Beware of drivers stepping out directly into traffic as well as pedestrians walking on the road who have no sidewalk to walk on. Like any place, driving in the city is more dangerous and aggressive than driving in the country because of the sheer number of cars, but comparatively, Japanese drivers could be worse.

TOLLS & MOVING VIOLATIONS

Toll Roads

If you take the expressways instead of the local roads, be prepared to pay. The good news is that, because of the astronomical price, the expressways are well kept-up, fast, and not clogged with traffic, unless you are near a major city.

Toll expressways are almost always double-lane divided highways with no signals or stops. You get a ticket from an automated machine when you enter and pay the toll person after you exit. The signage is clear, the exits are well-marked, the service areas are plentiful, and everything is easy to get to. But it is almost as expensive as the *shinkansen*. It is only an economical savings if you have a group of at least three in the car splitting the cost. Sometimes, especially when crossing bridges from island to island (from Honshu to Shikoku or Kyushu for example), you have no choice but to take the expressway and pay the high bridge toll. Otherwise, there are usually alternative local roads one can take.

Price:

Motorcycles and Light Vehicles cost about 20 yen per kilometer
Small and Regular-sized Vehicles cost about 25 yen per kilometer

Which means:

Approximately ¥2000 per hour of driving! (That's more than our salary!)

To be precise:

ROUTE	APPROX. PRICE
Tokyo – Kyoto	¥11,000
Osaka – Nagoya	¥5,000
Hiroshima - Fukuoka	¥7,000
Sendai – Aomori	¥7,500
Kagoshima – Nagasaki	¥8,000
Sapporo – Oshamanbe	¥5,000
Kyoda – Naha	¥1,200

Local roads are free, but slower and often traffic-clogged. The average speed limit on a local road is **50kph** compared to **70 or 80kph** on the expressways. This will feel very slow as Japan has some of the lowest speed limits in the world. Actual drivers tend to go 65-75kph and 100kph respectively. That being said, it is not recommended to go over 70kph on local roads you do not know. The already narrow roads have a way of being curvy and sneaky, with cars stopping in the middle without warning and the occasional *obaasan* walking on the side because there are no sidewalks. You are more likely to be pulled over on expressways, but many drivers speed anyway.

Moving Violations

On your license you have 15 points to start, however if you lose more than 6, your license can be suspended for 30 days, so 6 is the number to watch for. If you lose more than 15, the penalty will be applied to your next license.

VIOLATION (for normal-sized cars)	POINTS OFF	COST
Driving Under the Influence (of drugs or alcohol) See more below.	25	¥300,000 – ¥500,000 (and possible jailtime)
Driving without a License	19	¥200,000 – ¥300,000 (and possible jailtime)
Driving on an Expired Temporary License	12	¥200,000 – ¥300,000
Driving without <i>shaken</i> or Insurance	6	¥80,000 - ¥100,000
Going 50kph over the limit	12	¥80,000 - ¥100,000
Going 40 – 50kph over the limit	6	¥60,000 – ¥80,000
Going 30 – 40kph over the limit	6 (3 on expway)	¥25,000 - ¥35,000
Going 25 – 30kph over the limit	3	¥18,000 – ¥25,000
Going 15 – 25kph over the limit	1 or 2	¥12,000 – ¥15,000
Disregarding a Traffic Signal	2	¥7,000 – ¥9,000
Not Wearing a Seatbelt	1	¥2,500 – ¥10,000
Not Carrying Your License	0	¥3,000

see <http://rules.rjq.jp> for full Japanese list

(If alcohol is involved with the violation, the punishment goes up exponentially. Also, if it is a repeat offense, you will lose more points.)

Parking Violations

To park on the street, one's car must be parked 3.5 meters from the other side of the street. If you do the measuring, you'll realize this is impossible on most Japanese streets, even in residential areas. As a result, street parking is basically illegal and you must find a parking lot, usually a pay lot or a commercial lot, to park in. Note that many supermarkets and office buildings have gated parking. If you are parked until after-hours, your car may be trapped inside until the next morning. If you are parked illegally, you may get ticketed or towed. You will have to go to the police station to pay the ticket and get the sticker removed from your car (it is illegal to try to remove it yourself). This is not a quick process, it may take an hour or more, especially for foreigners and especially if your car was towed.

VIOLATION (for normal-sized cars)	POINTS OFF	COST
Leaving your car for a long-period in a no-stopping or parking zone	3	¥18,000
Leaving your car for a long period in a no-parking zone	2	¥15,000
Parking in a no-stopping or parking zone	2	¥12,000
Parking in a no-parking zone	1	¥10,000

from <http://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/kotu/chusya/chusya.htm>

Alcohol Violations

The moral of this section is: don't even think about drinking and driving in Japan. Not even one drink. Especially because you are a teacher (a role model) and because you are a foreigner, the repercussions of being caught driving under any influence are extremely harsh. Expect to be dismissed from the program if you are caught attempting to drive with even a small amount of alcohol in your system (or knowingly let someone else drive when they have drunk.) Watch your co-workers at *enkais*; for the most part, they will not risk it either.

CLASSIFICATION		POINTS OFF	FINE	PUNISHMENT	PRISON
Drunk Driving		35	¥500,000	license cancelled for 2 years	incarcerated up to 3 years
DUI (alcohol concentration per one liter of air - <i>not blood</i>)	above .25mg	13	¥300,000	license suspended for 90 days	incarcerated up to 1 year
	.15mg to .25mg	6	¥300,000	license suspended for 30 days	

from the Tokyo Police (www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/kotu/insyu/insyu.htm)

QUESTION: How much is .15mg?

ANSWER: NOT VERY MUCH! Less than one drink. Although there are a lot of variables to take into consideration to determine your breath alcohol content, if you have had more than a sip for a toast (or a spoonful of medicine), do not chance it!

Note that most other countries' limits are between .2mg or .4mg per liter of air and Japan's was .25 until recently. Note that this system of measurement does *not* use the same units as the U.S, U.K. or other countries.

0.00 mg/l of breath - This is the only safe level.

0.10 mg/l of breath - The limit for drivers in some countries.

0.24 mg/l of breath - The limit for many countries.

0.38 mg/l of breath - The limit for most countries.

0.48 mg/l of breath - The limit for drivers in almost every country is no higher than this.

1.50 mg/l of breath - At this level most people will lose consciousness.

2.00 mg/l of breath - At this level most people will become comatose and may die.

from www.intox.com

QUESTION: I wasn't the one driving, my friend was. I was just in the back seat. I can't get into any trouble, right?

ANSWER: Wrong. If you are in the car OR were even with that person at the time of the drinking even though you were not in the car, you can still be held accountable for your friend's drinking and driving. Hence you face *similar penalties*.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GET PULLED OVER

Although you may not see it a lot and it is generally not as common as in other countries, Japanese and foreigners alike do get pulled over, despite the lack of shoulders on many roads. Drivers are commonly pulled over on the expressways despite the high cost of driving on them in the first place. Police patrol around the clock, especially near cities. Usually, the vehicle will be a big, obvious black and white car with a large signboard and sirens flashing, though there have been known to be unmarked cop cars. Be suspicious of unmarked cars, as you would in any country (don't pull over in an empty, unlit place, etc.)

(Note that the police vehicles are not the same as the large, yellow "Highway Patrol" vehicles with sirens. The yellow vehicles are not there to pull you over, they are simply checking for broken down cars, dead animals on the road, etc. They will be going exactly, or lower, than the speed limit and will sometimes pull aside to let you pass. It is polite to slow down when passing, however. Watch what the drivers around you are doing, just to be safe.)

Once you have pulled off to the left, the officer will proceed with the normal drill of asking for your license, etc. The officer may then tell you to join them in their narrow police vehicle (while your passenger(s) wait). This does not mean you are in extra trouble, however, do be prepared for a long lecture (in Japanese of course). In Japan, being shameful and apologizing is considered as a sign of sincere remorse when caught doing something wrong (from Jr. High students up to old men, for small and large offenses.) You may get lectured for up to an hour, whether you understand it or not, on things that may or may not have any relation to what you did. The more shameful you look, the shorter the lecture will probably be.

You will be asked to fill out a form in Japanese, including where you work (it is up to you what to tell them) and your phone number.

If you get a ticket (you probably will), then you have one week to pay it. It can be paid at the post office. Going 100kph on the highway (the normal speed limit in most countries) can cost you 30,000 yen. Go much faster and you start to risk license suspension. Driving the speed limit is, of course, the safest option, but staying under 25kph over the limit is a way to avoid serious consequences.

Sometimes you will see cameras spanning the road. ("Orbis" cameras) They are apparently traffic cameras only and do not record speed violations, however, this

could certainly change. It is safer to slow down if you see one. Watch what the drivers around you do. The drivers around you may also have radar detectors (which many drivers shell out the ¥100,000 for to avoid the high fees and consequences of a ticket), so if many cars seem to suddenly be slowing, follow suit.

CHAPTER 3

SO YOU'VE BEEN HERE A YEAR: GETTING A DRIVER'S LICENSE IN JAPAN

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Q & A – The Blessed and The Cursed
3. The Procedure for *Everyone*

INTRODUCTION

Unless you only want a scooter license, you will eventually have to go through the process of converting your home driver's license to a Japanese one. You can drive using your International Driver's Permit until either exactly *one year* from the date written on it or exactly one year from the date you entered Japan, **WHICHEVER IS SHORTER**. So, if your date on your International Driver's Permit is in May, then it will expire the following May even if you entered the country in July. You can be fined big (up to 300,000 yen) and maybe face worse for driving on an expired permit. If you plan on driving at all after the expiry date, you need to get a Japanese license. If you have to take the practical test (not everyone does: see below), try to start the process *at least* three months before expiry (six is better) since failing the practical test and having to wait weeks in between attempts is very common. In other words, as soon as the snow melts and springtime is in the air, think license!

Q & A – THE BLESSED AND THE CURSED

Some people I know who lived in Japan a few years ago could renew their International Driver's Permits. Why can't I?

Because the Japanese changed the law in June 2002. Now, our International Driving Permits are only valid for a one-year maximum and cannot be renewed. The only time it can be renewed is if you return to your home country and can prove you stayed there three full months before coming back. Not likely for JETs.

WHY? Contrary to popular belief, this law was not to give foreigners a hard time. The reasoning was to keep non-license-holding Japanese from going abroad, getting a license, then coming back and driving on an international permit.

I don't have an International Driver's Permit, but I do have a driver's license from my home country. Can I still get it converted to a Japanese license?

Yes, but only if you were in your home country for a span of at least three months before you came to Japan. Whether you have an International Driver's Permit does not relate to whether you can get your home driver's license converted to a Japanese one. However, you cannot drive in Japan, even for a minute, until you get it converted.

I heard that getting a Japanese license is very difficult and time consuming. Is it?

Yes, it is time consuming, but whether it is difficult or not all depends on whether your are blessed or cursed...

The blessed

United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada
(also Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, South Korea)

The cursed

United States of America, South Africa, China, Brazil, Jamaica
(also Africa, Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, Russia, Singapore and any other country not listed either here or above.)

The blessed go to a Driver License Center with lots of documents and money, take an eye exam, possibly take a written exam, wait around a lot, then they are given a shiny new driver's license that day.

The cursed have some key extra steps before the shiny license part: The written and practical exams.

We're Americans. Why do we have to take the practical test and not the Canadians? They drive on the right, too!

Three reasons. First, American licenses are done by the state government and not the federal government, making a reciprocal agreement tricky since they would have to look into 50 states (as opposed to only 13 colonies in Canada – which did take years to accomplish). Second, the Japanese have to go through an even harder process to get an American license since their international driving permits are valid for less than a month. Third, because they're evil.

What about us South Africans, Chinese, Jamaicans, and Brazilians? Why do we suffer, too?

Probably because they think these countries (along with the U.S.) do not have adequately strict driving tests. More likely because they are evil.

Where can I get my driver's license converted to a Japanese license?

At a Prefectural Driving Center. Every prefecture has at least one Driving Center where foreigners can change their license; it is usually in the biggest city. Some prefectures, especially in rural areas, have more than one. Look in the back of this book to find one near you, or ask your supervisor, other JETs, or check the internet.

Can I get my license transferred (and take the test) in a different prefecture?

No. Unfortunately, you must go to the prefecture you live in as printed on your alien registration card.

There's a Driver's License Center in my prefecture a lot closer to where I live, but it is not listed in this book. Can't I take it there?

Not unless you are getting a scooter license or have already gotten a Japanese license at some point in the past. The local center may have recently acquired the authority to convert a foreign license to a Japanese license, but most likely you will have to go to the main testing center. (You could theoretically get a Japanese license from scratch at a local testing center, but that process involves a 100-question test in Japanese (only a few prefectures have the full test in English) in which you must get at least 90 right. Then you would have to take the full Japanese practical test, which might be on a course or on real roads. It is longer than the test for foreign conversion and includes additional challenges like parallel parking. Getting a Japanese license from scratch could be worth a try, but it will likely end up being a lot longer and harder than just taking the shorter test to get it converted, even if the testing center is far away.)

Most Japanese do not take the practical test. They spend somewhere to the tune of ¥300,000 for a full Driving School Course. With a diploma from an accredited school, they do not need to take the practical test, though they still have to take the written test. (You the foreigner can make use of the driving school in cheaper one-hour increments to practice (recommended) but you won't get a diploma unless you go about 35 times.)

“More than 90% of Japanese driver's license holders are graduates of designated driving schools.”
- *Koyama Driving School*

THE PROCEDURE FOR EVERYONE

Before you even attempt to go to the Driver's License Center, do three things:

1. **DATE OF ISSUE?** Look at your current driver's license from your home country. Is there a Date of Issue on it? If not, you need to contact the driving authorities in your home country and have them send you some kind of certificate that has the Date of Issue of your driver's license on it. It is a hassle, but the Japanese authorities will not change a license without a Date of Issue. (Why? See next question.)
2. **THREE MONTHS?** Is your Date of Issue at least three months before you came to Japan? If not, you will most likely not be able to get it changed into a Japanese license. You will have to get a Japanese license from scratch (yikes.) NOTE: If you recently renewed your license and that is why it has been less than 3 months, then you can still get your license converted. However, you have to get a certificate from your home country licensing authority that shows the original date of issuance. If you very recently renewed your passport, they may want to see a previous passport to show that you were a licensed driver in your country for three full months.
3. **TRANSLATION!** You must get your driver's license translated into Japanese by an official authority (not by your friend.) There are two recognized authorities: one, the embassy of your country and two, slightly cheaper, is the JAF (Japan Automobile Federation). Go to a JAF counter in person and get it translated on the spot or send 3,290 by registered cash mail – 3000 for the translation fee and at least 290 for return postage - to your prefectural JAF office with a copy (COPIES ONLY) of your license. (See www.jaf.or.jp/e/switch.htm for procedure details and www.jaf.or.jp/e/list.htm for a list of JAF addresses for every prefecture.)

Once you have the above taken care of, find out where the Prefectural Driving Center is and how to get there (whether by bus, car, or train). The back of this book has online links to maps, but even they can be confusing. Keep in mind that the Driving Centers will usually be very large buildings with flat land around with all the courses on it. If possible, go with someone who knows where it is the first time. The Driving Centers usually only accept applications for a half hour in the morning and a half hour in the afternoon (sometimes, only one of the two). If you miss this window of time, you may have to wait hours or wait until a later day. Give yourself time to find it.

Once inside the Driving Center, look for a sign in English (it will likely be the only thing in English in the entire building) to guide you to the proper window. Take the items you need listed on the next page to the desk that reads:

外国免許切替え

(gaikoku menkyo kirikae)

BRING THE FOLLOWING TO THE DRIVER'S LICENSE CENTER:

- **Passport** *pasupoto* (They actually want to see all your passports from the time your license was issued, but you can probably tell them that your current passport is your first passport. (If required, you can contact Immigration to get a record of your travel in and out of your home country if you do not have departure / return stamps.))
- **Alien Registration Card** *gaikokujin torokushomeisho* (So that they know you live in this prefecture.)
- **Certificate of Residence** *juu-min-hyou* or *toroku genpyo kisai-jiko shomei-sho* or **Certificate/Proof of Alien Registration** *gaikoku toroku sumi shoumeisho* Some prefectures want the Certificate as further proof that you live at that address, especially if there have been changes recently. Bringing a recent bill with your name and the matching address may also work. You can get this certificate at your city or town hall. It may cost 200 yen.
- **Valid Driver's License From Your Home Country** *gaikoku no unten menkyo* (so they know you can drive in some country) and **Certificate with Date of Issue** (if the date is not printed on your license.)
- **Expired Japanese License** *nihon no menkyo* (Bring it if you have one, but most of us don't.)
- **Translation of Your License** *honyakubun* (by JAF or your embassy)
- **International Driver's Permit** *kokusai menkyosho* (This is not necessary, but bring it if you have one.)
- **Two photos that are 2.4 cm by 3 cm (width by height)** *menkyoyo shashin* (Either black and white or color. You can usually get these photos at booths the Driver's Center if you cannot get any in town. No Print Club, these have got to be official photos with a plain background and no hats. The photo has to be from the past three months. Some centers only need one photo.)
- **Your Registered Seal** *inkan* (This is not necessarily needed, but it does not hurt to have.)
- **Money for Fees** *tesuryo* (Approximately ¥5,000 in fees will be needed, depending on the prefecture)
- **Copies** *kopii* Centers can usually make the copies themselves but a few centers might not be able to. To be safe, bring copies of your passport, alien card, and driver's license (in other words, items that you cannot leave there) in A4 size, front, back, all relevant pages.

What you should have with you:

They will ask you a lot of questions regarding your driving record outside Japan, including questions about what you had to do to pass your driver's test in your home country and whether you went to driving school there. It's okay if you do not know all the answers, but answer the best you can. They will usually only be able to ask in Japanese. Do your best or bring your Japanese friend/supervisor to translate for you.

From there, you may have to take the written exam and the *cursed* countries also have to take, or get a reservation for, the on-the-road practical exam. (See following chapters.)

If you have made it through all the above without being turned away for some reason (likely) or failed (likely), then they will start issuing your license, which can take up to an hour. You will take a simple eye test. Basically, you have to say which direction the letter "C" is facing and know your red, yellow, and blue (yes blue "ao" and not green in Japan) lights. If you are color-blind (*shikimo*) you may have problems depending on the severity of the color-blindness, how well you can 'fake it', and whether the test shows the lights in their proper positions or not. Japan seems to be a little stricter about it than other countries, though they are gradually improving.

They will also take your picture and double-check the spelling and katakana of your name. Then, finally, they will come out with a little white card, laminated on one side. It is rather boring and unimpressive for a country so bent on cute. Your license is good for three years and renewing it, if you stay here that long, is a lot less hassle. If you stay here long term and go through 5 years without any violations, the stripe on your license will be gold (instead of green or blue) and you save on insurance.

Finally, show it off! Everyone wants to see it!

CHAPTER 4

THE WRITTEN TEST

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. The Process for the Majority
3. The Process for the Rest

INTRODUCTION

Generally, only the 'cursed' countries (U.S.A., South Africa, China, Jamaica, etc.) have to take the written exam. However, whether you have to take it or not, this is probably the least stressful part of the entire process. The written test is short and simple.

THE PROCESS FOR THE MAJORITY

If you have a foreign driver's license that you are converting to a Japanese license and you drive an automobile, this is the process. *(If you are getting a Japanese license from scratch or getting a scooter license, see below.)*

- The written test is 10 questions.
- You have 10 minutes to take it.
- It is true or false.
- You have to get 7 correct.
- It is available in Japanese, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Chinese and Persian.

Most of the questions on the written test are common sense. Don't try to interpret them to mean something beyond what is obvious.

A few of the questions take a little more thinking, but that is mostly because of the imperfect translation. Think about what they are trying to say; don't get hung up on the words they are using.

Reviewing the road signs in your JET Diary is not a bad idea.

The only complexity: You may have to put your answers on a different sheet than the test. That answer sheet will be in Japanese only. The tester will tell you which kanji means "True" (usually the first one) and which kanji means "False." Circle the one you want for each of the questions. Sometimes the test is on a computer but it will still be ten questions, true or false.

THE PROCESS FOR THE REST

Scooter License

Getting a scooter license instead of a car license may be a simpler option for many people (especially if you do not have a driver's license from home.) Note that you cannot drive a scooter on your home driver's license (unless it is explicitly specified), even though you can with an ordinary Japanese driver's license.

The written test is difficult, however, there are no restrictions on foreigners. You can take it at any local driver's testing center if they have the test in English and most do. The questions are very specific and the translation is not perfect, so do not get too hung up on the wording. It is 50 true or false questions. You must get 45 right. It is somewhat difficult and well worth studying from the scooter book (available in English).

You may notice that many young Japanese are taking the tests with you. That is because the age to drive scooters (and small motorcycles) is age 16 instead of 18 as it is for cars.

Once you pass the written test, a 2 hour scooter lesson is required (it is given in Japanese). However, no practical exam is necessary. The total cost for the test and the lesson could be up to ¥12,000.

A Full Japanese License

Getting a full Japanese car / motorcycle license from scratch the way the Japanese do it requires one to take the full Japanese written test, which is one hundred true or false questions. That written test is only available in English in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Osaka, Kyoto, Aichi, Hyogo, Hokkaido, Saitama, Niigata, Shizuoka, Miyagi, and Tokushima. You must get ninety correct (90%) to pass.

Also required is the full Japanese practical test which is longer and more complex than the test for foreigners, can be on either a course or on the road, and is not discussed in this book for lack of knowledge about it. Many Japanese opt out of the practical test by graduating from an accredited driving school, which can cost 300,000 yen. However, one cannot opt out of the written test.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRACTICAL TEST

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Q & A
3. General Advice
4. Taking the Test [Advice for Manual Transmission in Brackets]
 - a. Before You Get In The Car
 - b. Before You Start the Engine
 - c. Before You Pull Out
 - d. On The Road
 - i. Stay Left
 - ii. Stay Really Left
 - iii. Pump Those Brakes!
 - iv. Signal Early and Often
 - v. Look Over Your Shoulder!
 - vi. Stop for Three Seconds
 - vii. The S-Curve and the Crank
 - viii. Obstacles in the Road
 - ix. Additional Advice
 - e. At the End
 - f. Passing and Failing
5. Conclusion and Survey Results

INTRODUCTION

“THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THE TEST IS NOT TO GET FRUSTRATED WITH THE RIDICULOUSNESS OF THE TEST. THERE IS NOTHING PRACTICAL ABOUT THE 'PRACTICAL TEST'”

- *HIROSHIMA JET*

For those of you who have to take the practical test – mainly those from the U.S., South Africa, and Jamaica - the practical test is not so much a test of your driving ability as it is a test of your ability to navigate a set course in the proper manner. Sometimes the skills overlap, sometimes they do not. It tests your ability to control the car, whether it is going fast or slow. It tests your ability to navigate very narrow sections of road. It is a test to show that you are aware of any possible danger at any time, even if it is physically impossible. It is a test to show that you are patient and careful.

Opinions differ on which prefectures have harder tests, the cities or the *inaka*. Every prefecture will have different levels of strictness about different things. In the end, it usually depends on the proctor, so try to make a good impression.

The practical test is taken on a private course. The giant course resembles one at a driving school or at a go-cart park. The turns tend to be marked with small signs indicating “B1” or “D2” or such so the proctor can be specific.

You take the test in their vehicle, not your own. The vehicles are full-sized white-plate cars that used to be taxis, so if you are used to a narrow car, be especially cautious.

If you drive a manual, you must take the test in a manual. Otherwise, you may take it in either. Your reservation is not based on which type of car you choose. Manual drivers have to adjust to the clutch quickly, but the proctors are aware of that.

You will most likely be taking the test with other foreigners since there is often a limit to the number of foreigners who take it per day and you are all tested together. In some prefectures, you ride in the back of the car as someone else takes their test and vice versa. The proctor will usually be male. He may get out of the car and politely explain as much as he can about the test beforehand or he might just wave you in curtly from the car. He may try to use a little English, but more likely he will use none at all.

Every prefecture has a different course and different levels of difficulty. Try to talk to as many people you know who have taken the test, so you have an idea which details your prefecture is strict about.

There is often a wait between every step of the process. You have to wait in line to pay the fee, wait to turn in the application, wait to take the test, wait until everyone is finished, wait to be called back to the window and, if you pass, you have to wait to take your eye exam, wait to have your picture taken, wait as they confirm all your information, then wait to receive your license. Bringing a book and snacks is a wise idea (though many driving centers have their own snack bars, sometimes restaurants.)

“THE TIME I PASSED, I WAS THE ONLY ONE TAKING THE TEST. NO ONE WAS AHEAD OF ME OR BEHIND ME. I HAD ONE STAFF MEMBER PERSONALLY PROCESSING MY LICENSE. STILL, FROM START TO FINISH, I WAS THERE TWO HOURS.”

Q & A

Do I need a reservation for the practical test?

Almost always. If you get lucky, there may be a slot open to take the practical test on the same day you take your written test, but not every prefecture will allow that. Prepare to have to make a reservation.

Can I make the reservation for whenever I want?

Usually yes. Some prefectures assign you a time, but most will let you choose. Keep in mind that the next open time might not be for a week, two weeks, three weeks, or even a month! Summers are especially busy. The reservations will almost always be on work days during business hours either in the morning session or the afternoon session. You will have to take a day (or at least a morning or afternoon depending on how far away you live) off work.

Do I have to take *nenkyu* (paid yearly leave) to take my driver's exam?

It depends on your contracting organization. Many will let you take a special day of leave without having to take a paid holiday. If you have to drive to get to your places of work then you have a good argument. Ask for it. If you fail more than 4 to 6 times, however, they might not be willing to give you any more special days of leave.

What should I wear?

Do NOT wear sandals or any shoes where your toes are exposed. Do not wear heels. People have also been turned away for wearing a skirt or clothing that is very loose or hanging (though some people recommend wearing a short skirt). Wear practical, non-restrictive clothing. Dressing nice doesn't hurt.

Can I drive to the Driver's Center to take my practical test?

Sure, as long as your International Driver's Permit is still valid. Otherwise, take the bus or train, just in case they are watching you. There are usually a lot of buses and trains that go to the driver's center for obvious reasons.

What if I don't know any Japanese?

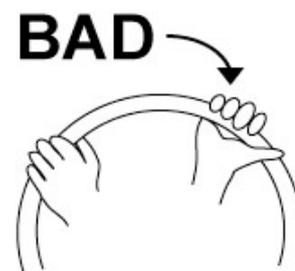
Although it helps put the proctor at ease, knowing Japanese is not necessary. If you know the course well, then you don't need to understand his instructions (though it might be unnerving to hear him give an instruction and not know for sure what he is saying). A simple '*hai*' might do after he issues an instruction. At the end, he may explain to you what you did wrong. He will draw a diagram if necessary, but the more Japanese you have, the better you will understand why you failed so you can avoid it next time. If you can, bring a friend to translate. Although the friend cannot be with you in the car during the test, he or she can translate his remarks afterwards. A decent grasp of beginner Japanese and knowledge of a few key terms will help you understand if you cannot bring a Japanese speaker with you. See the chapter on "Handy Japanese" in this book.

How much money should I bring?

Bring no less than ¥5,500. You may not need it all. The fee for processing is ¥2,400 every time you take the test and the license fee if you pass is ¥1,750. Both are usually paid at a separate window, where you will receive stamps as proof of payment. Often, you will have to pay for the rental of the prefecture's car to take the test. That's ¥1,100 and you may have to use a ticket machine. If you are getting a motorcycle license, etc, in addition, it will be another ¥3,300.

GENERAL ADVICE:

- 1. Know the Course.** If it's the same course every time, try to get a course map from your predecessor, a fellow JET, your supervisor, or a driving school. Be able to drive the course in your head without looking at the map. If you are unable to get the map ahead of time, or if the course changes every time, you will receive the proper course at the center. Give yourself time to walk the course. Most centers will have an hour preceding the morning test block (usually 8-9) and an hour preceding the afternoon testing block (usually 12-1) when the course is closed to cars and open to people. Walk it. Not only does it get the blood moving, it dramatically reduces the chances of ambiguity. Things that are obvious on the map might not be so clear on the course, but you may see things on the course that aren't specifically outlined on the map, either. Walking the course leisurely takes about 25 to 30 minutes. You'll usually see a few other people doing the same thing. Ask if you're not sure if it is okay.
- 2. Exaggerate.** Everything you do in this test (from checking over your shoulder to untwisting your seatbelt to hitting the brakes) should be done in a slow, obvious, or exaggerated manner. Make it clear that you are looking around a lot and checking your mirrors often.
- 3. Be Polite and Japanese.** Try to use as much Japanese as you can to make the proctor feel comfortable. Even simply saying "*hai*" after a command will help. Saying "*arigatou gozaimasu*" afterwards is a good idea too. Questioning the proctor too much (beyond what you need to understand) might not be wise. Getting angry or defensive will not help. You are more likely to pass if you are polite and look remorseful about your errors.
- 4. Verbalize actions.** In some prefectures (like Ehime) the proctors like to hear what you are doing and, in general, verbalizing actions is a good way to avoid ambiguity later. If you do not know a lot of Japanese, saying "*Yoshi*" ("all right; OK") every time you check your mirrors is one way to be sure the proctor knows that you checked. Saying what you are doing is not always necessary, but it is never a bad idea if you are able to.
- 5. Don't be in a hurry.** The course is short and will be over in minutes, you do not need to rush. It is easy to slip into natural driving when you know you are on an extremely safe course and do not need to check for people/obstacles/bikes/crazy drivers, but keep alert. Remember that you are demonstrating how to be a paranoid, careful driver even when your instinct tells you that you are on the safest road in Japan.
- 6. Note Hand Placement on the Steering Wheel.** Keep both hands on the wheel at 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock. Do not let your hand rest long on the gear shift or anywhere else. When you turn, do hand-over-hand. **IMPORTANT:** Do not turn your hand palm-upwards on the steering wheel. It will count against you.



“IT MIGHT NOT BE RELEVANT, BUT I PASSED THE TEST THE ONE TIME I SAID “*YOROSHIKU ONEGAI SHIMASU*” BEFORE I BEGAN.”

TAKING THE TEST

Before You Get In The Car

Walk around car and do the following

- Bend down and look under the back of the car
- Bend down and look under the front of the car
- Before walking out toward the driver's side, look both ways as if you are parked on a very busy street.



“IT MAY FEEL SILLY TO LOOK FOR STRAY CATS OR PLAYING CHILDREN ON A CLOSED COURSE, BUT JUST DO IT. I FAILED ONCE BECAUSE I DIDN’T BEND DOWN LOW ENOUGH WHEN CHECKING.”

Before You Start the Engine

Sit in the driver's seat and do the following (in any order)

- Adjust your seat, even if it doesn't need it.
- Put on your seat belt; make sure there are no twists.
- Put your hand on the rear-view mirror, adjust if needed, and double-check the side mirrors.
- (Lock your door – only some prefectures)

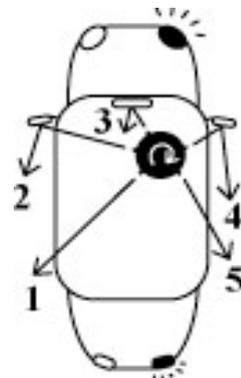


“I WAS SO BUSY LOOKING AROUND THE CAR, DEMONSTRATING HOW GOOD I WAS AT GETTING TO KNOW THE CAR BEFORE I DROVE IT, THAT I ACTUALLY FORGOT TO PUT ON MY SEATBELT. I FAILED. REMEMBER THE IMPORTANT STUFF OVER THE DETAILS.”

Before You Pull Out

When the proctor has given you the okay (or if he seems ready) do the following in order:

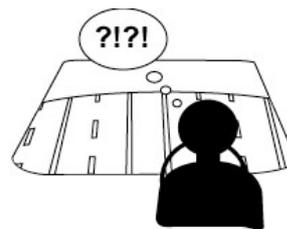
1. Check that emergency brake is in place, visually or with your hand
2. Start the car with the brake pressed in [with clutch and brake pressed in]
3. Release the emergency brake
4. Put your turn signal on
5. Put the car into Drive [1st gear]
6. Before you move the car, do the “full head spin”
 - Look over your left shoulder
 - Look in your passenger side mirror
 - Look in your rear-view mirror
 - Look in your driver side mirror
 - Look over your right shoulder
7. If you're clear, really clear, slowly pull forward



On The Road

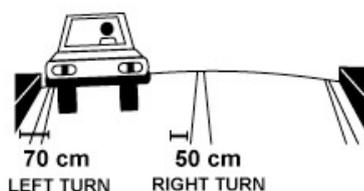
- **STAY LEFT**

Most people know to drive on the left side in Japan, but it is not always obvious which lanes constitute the “left side” on the course. Study the course beforehand to determine which lanes are legal. The lines - sometimes solid, sometimes dashed, sometimes white, sometimes yellow - rarely help clarify except that you should never cross a solid yellow line. The course looks nothing like typical Japanese streets. In general, there will be multiple lanes along the outside loop and just a singular lane on the inside loop. The road through the middle may be a double-lane.



- **STAY REALLY LEFT**

Not only stay in the left lane but stay on the left side of the left lane, even if there is no center line. The rule, especially when making a turn, is 70 cm from the left – about the distance from your knees to your toes – but I’ve never heard of anyone failing for driving too far left unless they slid against the curb. It may feel like you are driving in the gutter; your right wheel will practically be in the center of the lane. The only time you don’t stay to the left side is when you are making a right turn. In that case, go to on the right side of the lane within 50cm (but be careful of the line!) Do not drive in the obvious, safe place: the center of the lane.



“MAINLY I FAILED FOR NOT STAYING LEFT ENOUGH.”

- **PUMP THOSE BRAKES**

When you slow down or stop, always pump your brakes instead of pressing down on them once. This is especially important right before you enter a curve. The proctor will think you are going too fast in the curve, no matter what your speed, if you don’t pump your brakes several times beforehand. Don’t worry about a smooth ride, instead be dramatic and obvious. Speeding up and braking hard is preferable to easing off the gas and gently braking.

- **SIGNAL EARLY AND OFTEN**

The rule is to signal 30 meters before the turn. I say, signal as soon as you come out of the previous turn. For the majority of the course, your turn signal should be on. Even if there are other turns ahead of your target, still put your signal on. (The logic is that a person behind you will know it is not the earlier turns because you would have had your signal on even earlier for those.) Your turn signal might pop off a lot, especially in the S-curve. Put it immediately back on. When you are coming out of the Crank or the S-curve (see more below) remember to signal. The proctor will probably tell you to turn, but sometimes, when you are concentrating hard on getting through the narrow section, you forget to signal.

● **LOOK OVER YOUR SHOULDER!**

LEFT TURN This is one of the most unintuitive, but important rules you must follow to pass the test. Every time you make a left turn:

1. Look right.
2. Look left.
3. Look in your passenger side mirror.
4. Look over your left shoulder. (IMPORTANT!)

Looking over your shoulder and taking your eyes off the front will feel strange and often unsafe, but you must do it. The theory is that a bicycle or scooter could have caught up with you while you were slowing down to make the turn and be riding along invisibly on your left. Before turning the wheel, you must look entirely over your left shoulder, not just check your mirror, swiveling your head at least 90 degrees.

RIGHT TURN When you make a right turn, the procedure is the same, but not quite as vital:

1. Look left.
2. Look right.
3. Look in your driver's side mirror.
4. Look over your right shoulder (OPTIONAL. Theoretically, there is no reason for bikes, etc, to be next to your right side.)

CHANGING LANES When you change lanes, ALWAYS signal and look over your shoulder before turning the wheel. Also, if you are changing lanes twice in a row, doing each one distinctly is wise.

“THE PROCTOR SAID I DID EVERYTHING PERFECT EXCEPT THAT I FORGOT TO CHECK OVER MY LEFT SHOULDER ONCE OUT OF 12 TIMES. I FAILED.”

● **STOP FOR THREE SECONDS**

This is a fairly common rule in many countries, but just to reiterate: At every stop sign or blinking red light (the equivalent of a stop sign), you must be fully stopped behind the line for a solid three seconds before proceeding. Count to three slowly in your head before moving forward.

● **THE S-CURVE AND THE CRANK**

What's the *S-curve*? The S-curve is exactly that, a narrow curve shaped like an "S." Start slow and drive careful and intuitive, staying as close as you comfortably can to the right side (the side you can see better). Do not forget to signal when you are most of the way through (your signal will probably pop out about three times, keep re-signaling.) It's not as hard as the crank. What's the *crank*? The crank is a very narrow section of road. (The proctor may sound like he is calling it the "clank") This crank is a road with two sharp right-angle turns, shaped like a square 'S' or '5'. It is wide enough for the car, but you must get through without driving over the curb or hitting the vertical poles. You may, however, reverse up to three times and you may run up against the curb as long

as you don't drive over it. The objective is to try not to have your back rear tire clip the curb.

Crank Technique:

1. Take it very, very slow [1st gear with clutch in most of the time] and enter it from a stop.
2. Stay as far right as possible and turn left at the last moment
3. Move left and try to stay left as far as possible before turning the wheel right.
4. Take it on instinct. Try to sense where the edges of the car are and be prepared to hit a curb at any moment. If you have to reverse, don't try to turn the wheel too much, go straight back to where you came.

If you do have to reverse, be very sure to turn and look behind you before you do. The crank takes a lot of concentration and it is easy to forget the simple things like checking behind. In both the S-curve and the crank, be especially careful if you have to make a left turn out – it is easy to clip your rear tire.

“WHEN I WENT TO DRIVING SCHOOL, IT WAS NOT UNTIL MY FIFTH OR SO TIME THROUGH THE CRANK THAT I HIT THE CURB. DON'T GET OVERCONFIDENT. TAKE IT SLOW.”

● OBSTACLES IN THE ROAD

1. Something Blocking Your Path

During the course, you will probably come across a parked car or construction cones in the road blocking your way. This is actually a realistic obstacle you will face in Japan. There is a specific procedure for passing it, but it is logical and easy to remember:

1. Right turn signal
2. Look in side mirror and look **over right shoulder**
3. Move car into right lane to go around obstacle.
4. Left turn signal
5. Look in passenger side mirror and look **over left shoulder**
6. Return to left lane

Your signal is on the whole time. Don't forget that, if there is a left turn right after this obstacle, check over your left shoulder again, no matter how redundant it might seem.

2. **Red Lights** Stop with your bumper well behind the line at a red light and do not rev in anticipation of green. If there is a car in front of you, make sure you can see its rear tires when you stop. Look both ways before proceeding, despite that it is green and your right-of-way. [Manual drivers: do not shift into neutral before the car is stopped. Keep the clutch in until you stop.]
3. **Other Cars** There will be very few other cars on the course at the same time as you, but when you do come across them, give them wide berth. It is better to wait a long time for a car in the distance than to turn in front of them. Note: Be aware that you may share the course with freight trucks and motorcycle drivers taking their tests. Do not be alarmed.
4. **Railroad Tracks** Not all prefectures have this as part of the test. Know where the tracks are since from a distance they look like two funny bumps

randomly on a road in the middle of the course. The thin pole may not look like the railroad crossings you are used to. You must stop completely, look both ways very obviously and then ROLL DOWN THE WINDOW to listen for a train. Yes. As silly as it may feel on fake railroad bumps, roll down the window and listen for a 'train' before proceeding.

5. **Construction Zones** Two words: GO SLOW. Lean forward and look around every obstructed view. Act extremely alert and cautious.
6. **Crosswalks** You don't have to come to a full stop at a crosswalk, but slow down enough (pumping the brakes a couple times) so that you could stop if a person walked out onto the crosswalk. [Shift down into second gear if not there already]

“I SAW A METAL BOX PROPPED UP NEXT TO THE CROSSWALK. I PEEKED INSIDE AND SAW A SOCCER BALL. THE BOX HAD A RECEIVING ANTENNAE AT THE TOP AS IF IT COULD BE REMOTE CONTROLLED. THEN I REALIZED: THE PROCTOR COULD MAKE THE BALL ROLL RIGHT OUT ONTO THE CROSSWALK DURING THE TEST! WATCH OUT FOR THAT.”

● ADDITIONAL ADVICE

- **Love Your Mirrors** Always keep an eye on your mirrors, especially before a turn or a lane change. Look in your rear-view mirror before you brake.
- **Look Both Ways** Look left and right at EVERY INTERSECTION you cross, even if it is a traffic light intersection and the light is green. If coming out of a small side street, make sure to look both ways before entering the bigger street
- **No Swerving** Make clean turns. Do not swerve left before turning right and vice versa.
- **Make Wide Right Turns** Although you should take *left* turns as tight as possible, take *right* turns rather wide, especially when you are turning onto a double-lane street. Sometimes this means you are driving straight forward a little ways before turning right. That is okay. Make it as near a right angle as possible. Also, it is often preferable, to turn into the FAR LEFT lane when turning right, not the closest lane, the right lane.
- **Avoid the Triangle!** You will often see a small triangle or diamond painted on the ground at turns. They are turning guides. Aim for them but DO NOT drive over them. This holds true for pretty much any solid line. If there is a little arrow next to it, try to put your wheel on that.
- **Speed** On the course, there is usually a long, straight area where the proctor will want you to go 35, 40, or even 50kph on some courses [up to third, possibly fourth gear]. Usually, the proctor will tell you where, but not always. Generally, if you are along the outside of the course and do not have a turn for awhile, speed up. People have failed for not going fast enough. The proctor wants to know that you can control the car at high speeds. However, once you have reached the speed limit or the speed the proctor has indicated, slow down again immediately. More people have failed for not going slow enough.
- **Downshifting** Manual drivers: brake before/while you downshift.
- **Obstructed Views** Sometimes you will pass an intersection with high walls on one or both sides. Two words: GO SLOW. Approach the intersection very

carefully, leaning forward toward your windshield as you go to check that the hidden view is clear. In real life, this kind of turn would have a mirror. The test site likely won't.

■ **“Slow” Signs (or marks painted on the road indicating the same)** You do not need to fully stop. Treat these as a rolling stop, like it is a “Give Way” or “Yield” sign. Proceed carefully, looking around, hitting the brakes at least once.

■ **Hills** Not all courses will have this, but if you find yourself on an incline, the proctor will almost certainly have you stop. Come to a stop. Engage your emergency brake. Remain stopped for a moment. Disengage your emergency brake, press the gas, and slowly proceed. The key is not to roll backwards before going forward. There is no trick to make this easier – it is worth practicing if have not driven on hills much before. [Manual drivers: the hill can be tricky because you are in a car with an unfamiliar clutch. Let the clutch out very slowly, feeling it out, do not worry if you rev a little.]

■ **Curves** Take curves very slow, about 15-20kph. Pump your brakes repeatedly before entering a curve [downshift into second], but do not pump your brakes inside the curve. Try not to give it any gas inside the curve unless you have to.

■ **Speed Limits** Unfortunately, the speed limit signs on the course are very small and not typical of signs on real roads. Look for them when you walk the course. In general, along the outer loop will be from 35-45 and the inner loop will be 25-30, sometimes 15 around turns. If in the inner loop or on the inside roads of the course, it is wise to stay under 25 [second gear].

“I KNEW THERE WAS AN OBSTRUCTED VIEW. I COULDN'T MISS IT – IT WAS A GIANT WALL. ON MY FIRST GO BY IT, I WENT VERY, VERY SLOW. I CAME BY IT AGAIN TOWARD THE END OF THE COURSE FROM A DIFFERENT DIRECTION, CONFIDENT AT THAT POINT THAT I HAD DONE THE COURSE PERFECTLY. I DROVE RIGHT PAST IT. THAT WAS THE REASON I FAILED.”

At the End

1. The proctor will usually say the number of the spot he wants you to pull up at. It should be the same place, or very close to the place, you started.
2. Pull forward until your front bumper is exactly in line with the striped pole. You can fail for pulling up too far or not far enough. Also, be careful not to hit the curb.
3. Put on the emergency brake and put the car into Park [1st Gear or Reverse]
4. Turn off the car, leaving the key in the ignition.
5. Wait for the proctor to give you further instructions. He may tell others in the car to leave before he tells you your mistakes. He may ask you to move into the back seat for the next driver. He may tell you to wait outside or in the building. Always be polite and try to say “*arigato gozaimasu*”

“I PULLED UP TOO FAR FORWARD, WELL PAST THE POLE, AND THAT'S WHY I FAILED. HE NEVER EVEN TOLD ME WHERE I WAS SUPPOSED TO PULL UP AND DIDN'T LET ME TRY AGAIN.”

Passing and Failing

You may not know right away. Prefectures differ on what happens when you fail. Many proctors will let you finish the course regardless if you have committed a failing offense. Others may call the mistake on the spot and make you drive back to the starting point immediately. Some give you a clear explanation at the end of what you did wrong. Others may make you wait until your name is called / number appears on the board and that's when you know. (The Japanese usually have to wait for their number to show up on a lit board.) It is possible to make a few small mistakes and pass, but in general you have to drive a perfect course to have a chance at passing. Either way, you usually have to wait for everyone else to finish before continuing. They will eventually call you up to the window and give you back your application (don't lose it!) and other items like your passport and alien card, then you make a reservation for your next test. If you pass, they will start the process of your license which may take up to an hour (but at that point, you don't usually mind.)

Usually Instant Fails

- Hitting a curb, sliding against a curb, or going over a curb. (The only exception is in the crank. If you run up against the curb, you can back up and try again, but if you go over it, it is a fail.)
- Not stopping the full three seconds at stop signs and blinking red lights.
- Forgetting to look over your shoulder.
- Forgetting your turn signal or signaling too late.
- Going too fast around curves (and not pumping your brake beforehand)
- Going too fast through a construction zone or obstructed view
- Going over a triangle or a line when turning.
- Making left turns too wide.
- Not lining up with the pole at the end
- Not staying left enough
- Not going fast enough over the straight sections
- Forgetting to put on your seatbelt (yes, you do stupid things when you're nervous)
- Driving in the wrong lane (yes, you do stupid things when you're nervous)

“AFTER DRIVING IN JAPAN 11 MONTHS, I FOUND MYSELF TURNING INTO THE RIGHT LANE INSTEAD OF THE LEFT. I HAD BEEN CONCENTRATING SO HARD IN THE CRANK AND KEEPING MY TURNS GOOD AND TIGHT, THAT I KEPT IT TIGHT... ON THE WRONG SIDE!”

If you make a mistake, you usually may still continue unless they tell you otherwise. Oddly, if you miss a turn on the course, it does not necessarily mean you fail. As long as you keep driving correctly and get back on the course to perform all the requirements, you may still pass.

CONCLUSION

The advice above is a conglomeration of information from different prefectures. To find out about your own prefecture's test, ask your supervisor, ask other JETs, check the internet, do as much research as you possibly can. Try to practice in your own car (if you can) to make some of the important tricks habitual and to lose bad habits. Expect that the first time you will be turned away or fail. It will be the hardest on your nerves. The second time will be easier.

Some prefectures that are known to be particularly strict (there may be more):
Ehime, Toyama, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Niigata, Chiba, Oita, Nagoya, Kagoshima,
Fukushima

Theories

There are a lot of conspiracy theories about why it takes foreigners so long to pass. Some say that you will never pass your first (or second or fifth) try no matter what. Some say that it is all up to the proctor – either you get a nice one or you don't. Some say that all depends on timing - you will only pass on a day when it is relatively empty and the staff do not have anything better to do and therefore you should go off-season (instead of early-mid summer like most of us). These all may be true at some centers / for some proctors, but keep in mind that these are certainly not exclusively true and that the test is difficult for the Japanese as well.

Survey Results

According to a survey of JETs in Japan in 2004 (including 85 respondents from 23 prefectures) the average number of times one must take the practical test before passing is approximately **2.4** times.

Approximately 35% of respondents passed their first time.

Of those who left advice, almost 15% recommended that you be polite, speak as much Japanese as possible, have a positive attitude, or feel out your proctor before proceeding. Nearly 40% recommended taking one to three lessons at a driving school or doing a practice course (on the actual site or elsewhere) with a Japanese person you know (friend / supervisor / contact) who can point out mistakes.

Good luck!

CHAPTER 6: DRIVING SCHOOL

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Q & A

INTRODUCTION

Taking a lesson at one of Japan's many Driving Schools is highly recommended, but not mandatory by any means. It is simply a way to practice driving on a course with a Japanese instructor and to have mistakes you might not realize you are making, corrected. An instructor will teach you how to drive to pass the test, not just give you general driving tips. The lessons are 45 to 50 minutes and you can take as many or as few lessons as you wish, preferably until the instructor agrees that you are ready to take the practical test.

Q & A

What is Driving School?

It is a private lesson on a driving course similar to the one you will see on your practical test. You drive in comparable car to what you will be taking your test in while an instructor sits next to you, has you drive a specific path, and explains errors and advice.

"I went to driving school four times. I did the 'crank' perfect during my first two lessons. The third, I hit the curb. I did not learn until the second time what do to at a railroad stop and my fourth instructor was the only one who told me to go up to third gear and not stay in second the whole time. Sometimes, multiple lessons are helpful."

Why should I go to Driving School?

Although most everything you need to know will be found in this book and from other people, applying it to actual driving is not as easy as it seems. Practicing in your own car is a helpful start, but actually having a Japanese instructor sit next to you and scrutinize you is quite useful. If nothing, it helps you practice listening to Japanese instructions and driving at the same time. Going to Driving School is the closest experience you can have to a test without having to take it. Being under the pressure of remembering all the right things may be more challenging than you think. Also, you will get to practice things like the S-curve and the Crank which you may not ever see on the real road (but that you will definitely see on your test.)

Do I have to take off work?

You do not have to. Driving School, unlike the actual driving test, does not necessarily interfere with work hours. You can take the lessons (45 to 50 minutes long) after work, in the evening, and often on Saturday. You usually do have to make reservations, but rarely have to wait longer than a week.

How much is a lesson at Driving School?

It is fairly expensive. One lesson will run you anywhere from ¥4,000 – ¥8,000. However, if it keeps you from failing even once, then it is worth it.

What do I need to make a reservation?

Call or walk in to a driving school to make a reservation. Bring your driver's license from your home country and, if you have it, a translation. They will probably also want to see your alien registration card. You can sign up for one lesson, multiple lessons, or even a two-hour block. The application form is simple, but in Japanese. However, the people at reception will probably know just enough English to help you fill out the form. Mainly, you need to write your name, address, birthdate, and whether you want to practice manual or automatic transmission.

Don't I need to be able to speak Japanese?

Although knowing a little Japanese is helpful, what you do not know can usually be conveyed through demonstration, drawing diagrams, or body language. To save the time and confusion, you can bring a Japanese person with you or ask for an interpreter (I've heard some places will do this). However, you do not necessarily need one.

Where is the nearest Driving School to me?

This site: <http://school.driver.jp/pref/> has the name and address of nearly every driving school there is in Japan. Unfortunately, it is in Japanese. However, there will likely be one in the nearest town of any size. Look for these words in a phone book or map of the city:

自動車学校 (*jidousha gakkou*)

Number of driving schools in each prefecture

Akita	27	Iwate	31	Okinawa	22
Aichi	54	Kagawa	17	Osaka	42
Aomori	30	Kagoshima	31	Saga	15
Chiba	60	Kanagawa	38	Saitama	49
Ehime	19	Kochi	12	Shiga	20
Fukui	11	Kumamoto	27	Shimane	10
Fukuoka	41	Kyoto	24	Shizuoka	42
Fukushima	37	Mie	21	Tochigi	35
Gifu	29	Miyagi	43	Tokushima	17
Gunma	26	Miyazaki	19	Tokyo	49
Hiroshima	32	Nagano	30	Tottori	8
Hokkaido	82	Nagasaki	19	Toyama	18
Hyogo	53	Nara	10	Wakayama	15
Ishikawa	14	Niigata	38	Yamagata	31
Ibaraki	38	Oita	15	Yamaguchi	26
		Okayama	19	Yamanashi	16

Can't I take a lesson on the course I will actually test on?

Sometimes. Even if no lessons are available, many driving centers leave the course open on certain Saturdays or Sundays for you to practice. There is usually no instructor, but you can take a car around the course a few times. Sometimes it is free (like Fukui) sometimes it costs money (like Kanagawa) and can be anywhere from ¥3,000 to ¥10,000.

APPENDIX A: HELPFUL JAPANESE TERMS

confirm, check (often, a driving instructor will say, “ <u> </u> kakunin” as in, “ check your mirrors” or “ confirm that no one’s coming.” This is an extremely useful word in general.)	<i>kakunin</i>	確認
car	<i>kuruma</i>	車
automobile	<i>jidousha</i>	自動車
used car	<i>furu jidousha</i>	古自動車
motorcycle	<i>outobai</i> (auto bike)	オートバイ
motorcycle	<i>tansha</i> (abbr.)	単車
scooter	<i>gentsuki</i>	原付き
drive	<i>unten</i>	運転
drive	<i>doraibu</i>	ドライブ
driver’s license	<i>unten menkyo</i>	運転免許
breakdown	<i>koshou</i>	故障
accident	<i>jiko</i>	事故
insurance	<i>hoken</i>	保険
ambulance	<i>kyuukyuuusha</i>	救急車
violation	<i>ihan</i>	違反
written exam	<i>hikki shiken</i>	筆記試験
practical exam	<i>jicchi shiken</i>	実地試験
examiner / proctor	<i>shiken-kan</i>	試験官
course	<i>kousu</i>	コース
manual	<i>manyuaru</i>	マニュアル
automatic	<i>misshon</i> (mission)	ミッション
steering wheel	<i>handoru</i> (handle)	ハンドル
turn signal / blinker	<i>aizu</i>	合図
turn signal / blinker	<i>winkaa</i> (winker)	ウィンカー
emergency brake	<i>saido bureiki</i> (side brake)	サイドブレーキ
rear-view mirror	<i>bakku miraa</i> (back mirror)	バックミラー
side-view mirror	<i>saido miraa</i> (side mirror)	サイドミラー

traffic light	<i>shingou</i>	信号
red	<i>aka</i>	赤
yellow	<i>ki-iro</i>	黄色
blue	<i>ao</i>	青

(note: in Japan, the traffic signals are colored **Red**, **Yellow**, and **Blue**.
No orange; no green.)

turn right	<i>migi ni magaru</i>	右に曲がる
turn left	<i>hidari ni magaru</i>	左に曲がる
right turn	<i>usetsu</i>	右折
left turn	<i>sasetsu</i>	左折
change lanes	<i>shasen henkou</i>	車線変更
accelerate	<i>hayameru</i>	速める
accelerate	<i>kasoku suru</i>	加速する
railroad	<i>tetsudou</i>	鉄道
stop	<i>tomatte</i>	止まって
stop (sign)	<i>tomare</i>	止まれ
slow (sign)	<i>jokou</i>	徐行
stop line	<i>teisen</i>	停線
park	<i>chuusha</i>	駐車
Fill 'er up	<i>mantan</i>	満タン

foreign driver license exchange
gaikoku menkyo kirikae
外国免許切替え

driving school
jidousha gakkou
自動車学校

International Driver's Permit
IDP
kokusai jidousha unten menkyoshou
国際自動車運転免許証

APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL WEBSITES AND INFORMATION

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. General Sites on Driving in Japan
3. Individual's Sites Related to the Driver's Test
4. Prefecture-specific Driving Advice

INTRODUCTION

Many of these websites I used in research for this book. The prefectural AJET websites that exist are excellent resources for procedures and information specific to different prefectures. Unless specified, all pages are in English.

GENERAL SITES ON DRIVING IN JAPAN

JAF (Japan Automobile Federation) main page.

http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/index_e.htm

- This has the procedure on getting your license translated as well as ordering information for "Rules of the Road" in 6 languages

Jetset Japan

<http://www.jetsetjapan.com/infozone.shtml>

- This site has a lot of good information about buying and owning a car as well as legal issues on getting a Japanese driver's license.

The Japan Biker FAQ

<http://www.thejapanfaq.com/bikerfaq-toc.html>

- This is a great resource to learning about buying, owning, and maintaining a scooter or motorcycle in Japan.

Drivers.com - Resources for International Driving Permits

<http://drivers.com/article/207>

- List of International Driver's Permit Authorities for every country

JAF Road Service

http://www.jaf.or.jp/rservice/network/fr/f_index.htm

- This page has the main, and all local, numbers to call in case of vehicle breakdown. (In Japanese)

全国自動車教習所

<http://school.driver.jp/pref/>

- This page lists nearly all the driving schools in Japan. (In Japanese)

運転免許センター

http://www.takaragaike.co.jp/takara/m_center.htm

- This page lists all driving centers in Japan and links to their prefectural police sites. (In Japanese)

交通違反の基礎知識

<http://rules.rjq.jp/>

- On this page, you can find out every single driving violation there is, how much the fine is and how many points are taken off. (In Japanese)

INDIVIDUAL'S SITES RELATED TO THE DRIVER'S TEST

The Japan Window

<http://www.globalcompassion.com/driving.htm>

- This page is a step-by-step guide on how to pass the Kanagawa practical test in Yokohama. It is well-written, informative, and detailed.

The Japan FAQ – Page2B Supplementary information

<http://www.thejapanfaq.com/japanfaq2b.html>

- A few people's suggestions on taking the test

PREFECTURE-SPECIFIC DRIVING ADVICE

Akita AJET - Driving

<http://www.akita-ajet.com/driving.htm>

- This site has very detailed dos and don'ts for passing the practical test in Akita.

Ishikawa JETs – Transportation

<http://www.ishikawajets.org/support/ishikawa/transport.htm>

- Toward the bottom of the page is a lot of good information about buying a car and insurance legalities. There are some details about licenses.

Hyogo JETs

<http://www.geocities.com/hyogoajet/livingguide/hyogoliving/hlgtravel/driving.htm>

- This page has a good variety of information about owning a car as well as a winter driving guide.

Fukui JETs

http://www.fjet.org/trans_drive2.html

- This has a good variety of information about buying and owning a car and the costs involved.

HAJET – Hokkaido AJET

<http://www.hajet.org/life.html>

- On this page is a link to a Word document that details what you need to know about owning a car in Hokkaido. Because of the sub-freezing temperatures in winter, Hokkaido provides unique challenges for car owners there.

Miyagi AJET

http://members.tripod.com/MiyagiAJET/driving_in_japan.htm

- An amusing blurb about driving in Japan.

MyNiigata

<http://www.geocities.com/myniigatacom/home.htm>

- Has one JET's experience buying a car.

OitaJETs

<http://www.oitajets.com/howto/license.htm>

- This is an excellent site on passing all aspects of the driver's license test, step-by-step.

Essentials of Living in Urasoe City

http://8761234.jp/urasoe_hp/urasoe2/english/online/essen/esse_tr.html

- This page has detailed information about the procedure for getting a driver's license in Okinawa

Okinawa JET Webpage

<http://www.okinawajet.com/resources/articles/driving3>

- This website detailed step-by-step instructions on how to pass the practical test in both an automatic and in a manual in Okinawa.

Hamada City – A Guide to Living in Shimane

<http://www.city.hamada.shimane.jp/en/living/18.htm>

- This has lots of useful, clearly written information about buying and owning a car. Some of it is specific to Shimane prefecture.

Toyama JETs Driving Guide

<http://www.toyamajets.com/> (click on Guides to find it)

- This site has a lot of excellent advice for passing the practical test in Toyama.

Yamanashi: "License Fun" How to Get it and How not to Get it

http://www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp/div/english/html/residentinformation_license.htm

- This site has two detailed and interesting experiences on getting (and not getting) one's driver's license at the center.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF PREFECTURAL DRIVING CENTERS

Driving Centers are under the jurisdiction of the Prefectural Police therefore information and procedures can almost always be found on the Prefectural Police homepage in each prefecture. Unfortunately, this information is usually only in Japanese. This list (researched July 2004) is as accurate as possible, but it is subject to change.

The address of all test sites is given both in Japanese and English. The city is italicized. The maps are links to Japanese websites unless otherwise indicated. If an English site was found, that *url* is included as well.

NOTE: If you already have a Japanese license and just need to get it renewed, you have a lot more options, including prefectural police offices. Also, if you are getting a Japanese license from scratch, you will usually have a few more licensing centers open to you. For foreigners switching licenses over (like most of us) there is often only one or two places per prefecture it can be done.

If you do not know Japanese and are trying to read the maps, look for 運転免許センター (Driver's License Center) or whatever the name of the place is (the first group of kanji in every address) to find it on the map.

愛知 Aichi	愛知県運転免許試験場 〒468-8513 名古屋市天白区天白町平針字黒石 2845 Driver License Testing Site 2845 Hirabari Kuroishi Tenpaku-cho Tenpaku-ku <i>Nagoya</i>	052-801-3211
	東三河運転免許センター 〒442-0067 豊川市金屋西町 2-7 Higashimikawa River Driver License Center 2-7 Kanayanishi-machi <i>Toyokawa</i>	053-385-7181
	maps http://www.pref.aichi.jp/police/menkyo/701.html	
秋田 Akita	秋田県運転免許センター 〒010-1607 秋田市新屋南浜町 12-1 Akita Driver License Center 12-1 Hama-machi Araya-minami <i>Akita</i>	018-824-3738 018-863-1111
	map (English) http://www.akita-kenkei.net/kenkei/top/e-menkyo1.html	
青森 Aomori	青森県運転免許センター 〒038-0031 青森市三内丸山 198-4 Driver License Center (2 nd Floor) 198-4 Maruyama Sannai <i>Aomori</i>	017-782-0081
	map http://www.police.pref.aomori.jp/koutsubu/menkyo/menkyocenter.htm	
千葉 Chiba	千葉運転免許センター 〒261-8560 千葉市美浜区浜田 2-1 Chiba Driver License Center 2-1 Hamada Mihama-ku <i>Chiba</i> (<i>You cannot use the license center in Nagareyama.</i>)	043-274-2000
	map (top one) http://www.police.pref.chiba.jp/license/center/#center1	

愛媛 Ehime	愛媛県運転免許センター 〒799-2661 松山市勝岡町1163-7 Ehime Driver's License Center 1163-7 Katsuoka-cho Matsuyama map http://www.police.pref.ehime.jp/menkyokanri/annai.htm	089-934-0110
	福井県運転者教育センター 〒919-0476 春江町針原 58-10 Fukui Driver Education Center Harue-cho map http://www.pref.fukui.jp/kenkei/kotubu/menkyo/menkyo/harue.htm	077-651-2820
福井 Fukui	福井県奥越運転者教育センター 〒912-0011 大野市南新在家 32-1-4 Fukui Okuetsu Driver Education Center Ono map http://www.pref.fukui.jp/kenkei/kotubu/menkyo/menkyo/ono.htm	077-966-7700
	福井県丹南運転者教育センター 〒915-0891 武生市余田町2字橋子田1-1 Fukui Tannan Driver Education Center 2-1-1 Haguri-cho Takefu map http://www.pref.fukui.jp/kenkei/kotubu/menkyo/menkyo/tannan.htm	077-821-3613
	福井県嶺南運転者教育センター 〒919-1323 三方郡三方町倉見 1-51 Fukui Reinan Driver Education Center 1-51 Mikata-cho Mikata-gun map http://www.pref.fukui.jp/kenkei/kotubu/menkyo/menkyo/reinan.htm	077-045-2121
	福岡自動車運転免許試験場 〒811-1392 福岡市南区花畑4丁目7番1号 Fukuoka Automobile Driver's License Examination Site 4-7-1 Hanahata Minami-ku Fukuoka map http://www.police.pref.fukuoka.jp/tetsuzuki/untmenkyo/fukuoka.html	092-565-5010 (license inquiry) 092-565-5109 (test inquiry)
	北九州自動車運転免許試験場 〒802-0842 北九州市小倉南区日の出町2丁目4-1 Kitakyushu Automobile Driver's License Examination Site 2-4-1 Hinode-machi Kokuraminami-ku Kitakyushu map http://www.police.pref.fukuoka.jp/tetsuzuki/untmenkyo/kitakyu.html	093-961-4804
福岡 Fukuoka	筑後自動車運転免許試験場 〒833-0056 筑後市大字久富 1135-2 Chikugo Automobile Driver's License Examination Site 1135-2 Oaza-Hisatomi Chikugo map http://www.police.pref.fukuoka.jp/tetsuzuki/untmenkyo/chikugo.html	0942-53-5208
	筑豊自動車運転免許試験場 〒820-0115 嘉穂郡庄内町大字仁保字立石23-21 Chikuho Automobile Driver's License Examination Site 23-21 Aza-Tateishi, Oaza-Niho Shonai-machi, Kaho-gun map http://www.police.pref.fukuoka.jp/tetsuzuki/untmenkyo/chikuhou.html	0948-82-0160
	福島県運転免許センター 〒960-2261 福島市町庭坂字大原 1-1 Fukushima Driver License Center 1-1 Machiniwasaka Fukushima (you cannot use the Koriyama test site) map (top one) http://www.police.pref.fukushima.jp/koutu/menkyo/m_9.html	024-591-4372
岐阜 Gifu	岐阜運転者講習センター 〒502-0003 岐阜市三田洞東 1-22-8 Gifu Driver's Training Center 1-22-8 Higashi Mitabora Gifu English page http://www.pref.gifu.lg.jp/pref/s18892/an_menkyo/gaimen.e.htm map http://www.pref.gifu.lg.jp/pref/s18892/an_menkyo/gifu.htm	058-237-3331 058-237-3376x314

群馬 Gunma	群馬県 総合交通センター 〒371-0846 前橋市元総社町 80-4 Gunma Prefectural Traffic Center 80-4 Motosoja-machi <i>Maebashi</i>	027-252-1010 027-253-9300
	English page: http://www.city.takasaki.gunma.jp/English/TakasakiNews/Driving.html map http://www.police.pref.gunma.jp/koutuubu/04menkyo/sougou-annaizu.htm	
広島 Hiroshima	広島県運転免許センター 〒731-5198 広島市佐伯区石内南 3 丁目 1 番 1 号 Hiroshima Prefectural Driver's License Center 3-1-1 Ishiuchi-minami Saiki-ku <i>Hiroshima</i> 731-5198 (<i>you cannot use the centers in Fukuyama or Miyoshi</i>)	082-228-0110
	map http://www.police.pref.hiroshima.jp/060/menkyote.html	
北海道 Hokkaido	札幌運転免許試験場 札幌市手稲区曙 5 条 4 丁目 1-1 Sapporo Driver's License Examination Office 1-1, Akebono 5-jo, 4-chome, Teine-ku, <i>Sapporo</i> 006-0835	011-683-5770
	map http://www.police.pref.hokkaido.jp/guide/menkyo/map/sapporo_map.html	
	函館運転免許試験場 函館市石川町 149 番地の 23 Hakodate Driver's License Examination Office 149-23, Ishikawa-cho, <i>Hakodate</i> 041-0802	013-846-2007
	map http://www.police.pref.hokkaido.jp/guide/menkyo/map/hakodate_map.html	
	旭川運転免許試験場 旭川市近文町 17 丁目 2699 番地の 5 Asahikawa Driver's License Examination Office 2699-5., Chikabumi-cho, 17-chome, <i>Asahikawa</i> 070-0821	016-651-2489
	map http://www.police.pref.hokkaido.jp/guide/menkyo/map/asahikawa_map.html	
	釧路運転免許試験場 釧路市大楽毛北 1 丁目 15 番 8 号 Kushiro Driver's License Examination Office 15-8, Otanoshike Kita 1-chome, <i>Kushiro</i> 084-0918	015-457-5913
	map http://www.police.pref.hokkaido.jp/guide/menkyo/map/kushiro_map.html	
帯広運転免許試験場 帯広市西 19 条北 2 丁目 Obihiro Driver's License Examination Office 1-2, Nishi 19-jo, Kita 2-chome, <i>Obihiro</i> 080-2459	015-533-2470	
	map http://www.police.pref.hokkaido.jp/guide/menkyo/map/obihiro_map.html	
	北見運転免許試験場 北見市大正 141 番地の 1 Kitami Driver's License Examination Office 141-1, Taisho, <i>Kitami</i> 090-0008	015-736-7700
map http://www.police.pref.hokkaido.jp/guide/menkyo/map/kitami_map.html		
兵庫 Hyogo	明石運転免許試験場 明石市荷山町 1649 Akashi Driver's License Examination Office 1649-2 Niyama-cho <i>Akashi</i>	078-912-1628
	map (top one) http://www.police.pref.hyogo.jp/tetuduki/untan/map/index.htm	
茨城 Ibaraki	茨城県運転免許センター 〒311-3197 茨城県東茨城郡茨城町大字長岡 3783 番地の 3 Ibaraki Driver's License Center 3783-3 Nagaoka Ibaraki-machi Higashi Ibaraki-gun	029-293-8811
	English site: http://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/kenkei/english/e_menu.htm map http://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/kenkei/menkyo/centermap.htm	
石川 Ishikawa	自動車運転免許センター 〒920-0209 金沢市東蚊爪町 2 丁目 1 番地 Ishikawa Driver's License Center 2-1 Higashi Kagatsume-machi <i>Kanazawa</i>	076-238-5901

	English site: http://www.police.kanazawa.ishikawa.jp/koutu_bu/menkyo/menkyo/license.htm map http://www.police.kanazawa.ishikawa.jp/koutu_bu/menkyo/menkyo/annai.htm	
岩手 Iwate	岩手運転免許センター 〒028-4134 岩手県岩手郡玉山村大字下田字仲平 183 Iwate Driver's License Center 183 Iwate-gun Tamayama-mura Oozage Denji Nakahira map (top one) http://www.pref.iwate.jp/~hp0802/oshirase/menkyo/main.htm	019-683-1251
香川 Kagawa	香川県運転免許センター 〒761-8031 高松市郷東町 587 番地 138 Kagawa Driver's License Center 587-138 Goto-cho Takamatsu map (top one) http://www.pref.kagawa.jp/police/menkyo/tetsuzuki/map.htm	087-881-7615 087-833-0110
鹿児島 Kagoshima	鹿児島県合運転免許試験場 〒899-5421 始良郡始良町東餅田 3937 番地 Kagoshima Driver's License Examination Center 3937 Aira-gun Aira-cho Higashi Mochida map http://www.pref.kagoshima.jp/police/menkyoshiken_021.htm	099-565-2295
神奈川 Kanagawa	神奈川県運転免許試験場 〒241-0815 横浜市旭区中尾 2 丁目 3 番 1 号 Kanagawa Driver's License Examination Center 2-3-1 Nakao Asahi-ku Yokohama map http://www.police.pref.kanagawa.jp/mes/mes83001.htm English page: http://www.police.pref.kanagawa.jp/eng/e_mes/eng83013.htm detailed advice: http://www.globalcompassion.com/driving.htm	045-365-3111
高知 Kochi	高知県運転免許センター 781-2120 吾川郡伊野町枝川 200 Kochi Driver's License Center 200 Agawa-gun Ino-cho Edakawa map http://www.i-kochi.or.jp/hp/kenkei/menkyo/c_menmap.htm	088-893-1221
熊本 Kumamoto	熊本県運転免許センター 869-1107 菊池郡菊陽町大字辛川 2 6 5 5 Kumamoto Driver's License Center 2655 Oarakazagawa Kikuyo-machi Kikuchi-gun map http://www.police.pref.kumamoto.jp/detail.do?news_id=386	096-233-0116
京都 Kyoto	京都府運転免許試験場 京都市伏見区羽東師古川町 647 Kyoto Driver's License Test Site 647 Furukawa-cho Hazuka-shi Fushimi-ku Kyoto 612-8486 map http://www.pref.kyoto.jp/fukei/menkyo/shomu/access/index.html	075-631 5181
三重 Mie	三重県運転免許センター 津市大字垂水 2,566 番地 Mie Prefecture Driver's License Center 2566 Tarumi Tsu 514-0821 map http://www.police.pref.mie.jp/info/anzen/02_menkyo/09_center.html	059-229-1212
宮城 Miyagi	宮城県運転免許センター 仙台市泉区市名坂字高倉 65 Miyagi Driver License Center 65 Ichinazaka Aza Takakura, Izumi-ku 981-3117 <i>(It doesn't appear that the other three centers can be used)</i> map http://www.police.pref.miyagi.jp/menkyo/annai/annai_ken.html	022-373-3601
宮崎 Miyazaki	宮崎運転免許試験場 宮崎市阿波岐原町前浜 4276 - 5 Miyazaki Driver's License Testing Site 4276-5 Gahara-cho Awaki Miyazaki <i>(Those not taking the practical test can use the other 2 centers)</i> map http://www.pref.miyazaki.lg.jp/police/license/index.htm	098-531-0110

長野 Nagano	東北信運転免許センター 長野市川中島町原 7 0 4 - 2 Northeast Driver's License Center 704-2 Hara Kawanakajima-machi <i>Nagano</i> map (top) http://www.pref.nagano.jp/police/koutsu/menkyo/acent.htm	026-292-2345
	中南信運転免許センター 塩尻市大字宗賀字桔梗ヶ原 7 3 - 1 1 6 Central Driver's License Center 73-116 Oaza Soga, <i>Shiojiri</i> map (bottom) http://www.pref.nagano.jp/police/koutsu/menkyo/acent.htm	026-353-6611
長崎 Nagasaki	長崎県運転免許試験場 856-0817 大村市古賀島町 533-5 Nagasaki Driver's License Testing Site 533-5 Kogashima-machi <i>Omura</i> map http://www.npp-unet.ocn.ne.jp/a45shikenjyo/newannnai/annnai.html	095-753-2128
	奈良県運転免許センター 634-0007 橿原市葛本町 120-3 Nara Driver's License Center 120-3 Kuzumoto-cho <i>Kashihara</i> English page http://www.pref.nara.jp/silk/icd/h_english/index.html	074-425-5224 074-422-5541
新潟 Niigata	新潟県運転免許センター 〒957-0193 北蒲原郡聖籠町東港 7 丁目 1 番地 1 Niigata Driving License Center 7-1-1 Higashi-ko Seiro Kita-kanbara-gun map http://www.police.pref.niigata.jp/menkyo/senta.html	025-256-1212
	大分県自動車運転免許試験場 870-0877 大分市大字荏隈 1125-1 Oita Vehicle Licensing Test Site 1-3-1 Kaku Minami <i>Oita</i> (brief) English page http://www.pref.oita.jp/keisatu/menkyo/	097-536-2131
岡山 Okayama	岡山県運転免許センター 709-2116 岡山県御津郡御津町大字中山 444-3 Okayama Driver's License Center 444-3 Mitsu-gun Mitsu-cho <i>Nakayama</i> map http://www.pref.okayama.jp/kenkei/koutu/unmen/menkyo/menkyoe1.htm	086-724-2200
	沖縄県警察本部 運転免許課 900-0036 那覇市西 3 丁目 7 番 1 号 Okinawa Police Prefectural Headquarters, Driver's License Section 3-7-1 Nishi <i>Naha</i> map (top) http://www.police.pref.okinawa.jp/newmenkyo/menkyo11.html	098-868-3401
大阪 Osaka	門真運転免許試験場 571-8555 門真市一番町 23 番 16 号 Kadoma Driver's License Test Site 23-16 Ichiban-cho Kadoma-shi <i>Osaka</i> map http://www.police.pref.osaka.jp/tetsuzuki/menkyo/02_2_1.html	066-908 9121
	光明池運転免許試験場 594-0031 和泉市伏屋町 5 丁目 13 番 1 号 Komyoike Driver's License Test Site 5-13-1 Fushiya-cho Izumi-shi <i>Osaka</i> map http://www.police.pref.osaka.jp/tetsuzuki/menkyo/02_1_1.html	072-556-1881
	佐賀県運転免許センター 849-0901 佐賀市久保泉町大字川久保 2121-26 Saga Driver's License Center 2121-26 Kawakubo Kuboizumi <i>Saga</i> map http://www.saganet.ne.jp/kenkei/tetsu/siken1.html	095-298-2220
埼玉 Saitama	埼玉県警察運転免許センター 365-0028 鴻巣市大字鴻巣 405 番地の 4 Saitama Police Driver's License Center 405-4 Oaza Konosu <i>Konosu</i>	048-543-2001

	map http://www.police.pref.saitama.jp/kenkei/menkyo/menkyo.html#menkyo_center	
島根 Shimane	島根県運転免許センター 690-0131 松江市打出町 250-1 Shimane Driver's License Center 250-1 Uchide-cho, Matsue	085-236-7400
	西部運転免許センター 697-0015 浜田市竹追町 2358-3 Shimane Western Driver's License Center 2385-3 Takezako-cho Hamada	085-523-7900
	maps http://www2.pref.shimane.jp/police/koutsuu/menkyo/annai.html	
滋賀 Shiga	滋賀県運転免許センター 524-0104 守山市木浜町 2294 番地 Shiga Drivers' License Center 2294 Konohamacho Moriyama (You cannot use the subcenter in Sakata-gun)	077-585-1255
	map (top one) http://www.pref.shiga.jp/police/tetuzuki/u-syozai.html English http://www.pref.shiga.jp/kemmin-e/foreigner/e4.html	
静岡 Shizuoka	東部運転免許センター 410-0001 沼津市足高字尾上 241-10 Eastern Driver's License Center 241-20 Ashitaka Onoe Numazu	055-921-2000
	中部運転免許センター 420-0949 静岡市与一 6 丁目 16-1 Central Driver's License Center 6-16-1 Yoichi Shizuoka	054-272-2221
	西部運転免許センター 434-0042 浜北市小松 3220 Western Driver's License Center 3220 Komatsu Hamakita	053-587-2000
	maps http://www.wbs.ne.jp/cmt/kenkei/menkyo/menkyo-q08.htm English page http://www.city.hamamatsu.shizuoka.jp/hamaEng/16_koutuu_04_01.htm#a	
栃木 Tochigi	栃木県運転免許センター 322-0017 鹿沼市下石川 681 Tochigi Driver's License Center 681 Shimoishikawa Kanuma	028-976-0110
	map http://www.pref.tochigi.jp/keisatu/tetuzuki/menkyocenter.html English page http://www.pref.tochigi.jp/keisatu/tetuzuki/untan-gaikokugo.html	
徳島 Tokushima	徳島県運転免許センター 770-8012 徳島市大原町余慶 1 番 1 Tokushima Driver's License Center 1-1 Yoikei Ohara-cho Tokushima	088-662-0561
	map http://www.police.tokushima.tokushima.jp/02tetuzuki/menkyo/menkyo_map.html English page http://www.police.tokushima.tokushima.jp/02tetuzuki/menkyo/menkyo-eng.html	
東京 Tokyo	府中運転免許試験場 183-0002 府中市多磨町 3-1-1 Fuchu Driver's License Testing and Issuing Center 3-1-1 Tamamachi, Fuchu-shi, Tokyo	042-362-3591 English Service: 042-334-6000
	map http://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/menkyo/menkyo/fuchuu.htm	
	鮫洲運転免許試験場 140-0011 品川区東大井 1-12-5 Samezu Driver's License Testing and Issuing Center 1-12-5 Higashi-oi, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo	033-474-1374 English Service: 035-463-6000
	map http://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/menkyo/menkyo/samezu.htm	

	江東運転免許試験場 136-0075 江東区新砂 1-7-24 Koto Driver's License Testing and Issuing Center 1-7-24 Shinsuna, Koto-ku, Tokyo map http://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/menkyo/menkyo/koutou.htm English page http://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/foreign/organize/people.htm#license	033-699-1151
鳥取 Tottori	東部地区運転免許センター 680-0911 鳥取市千代水 2丁目 8 Eastern District Driver's License Center 2-8 Chiyomizu Tottori	085-728-5885
	中部地区運転免許センター 689-2221 東伯郡大栄町由良宿 1300 Central District Driver's License Center 1300 Yura Taiei-machi Tohaku-gun	085-837-4111
	西部地区運転免許センター 683-0004 米子市上福原 1272-2 Western District Driver's License Center 1272-2 Kami-fukuhara Yonago map http://www.pref.tottori.jp/police/koutubu/menkyoka/mennkyo_110.htm	085-922-4607
	富山県運転教育センター 931-8441 富山市高島 62-1 Toyama Driving Education Center 62-1 Takashima Toyama map http://www.pref.toyama.jp/cms_cat_police/110010/kj00001646.html	076-441-2211
和歌山 Wakayama	和歌山県交通センター 640-8524 和歌山市西 1 番地 Wakayama Traffic Center 1 Wakayama Nishi	073-473-0110
	田辺運転免許センター 646-0053 田辺市元町 565-5 Tanabe Driver's License Center 585-5 Motomichi Tanabe	073-922-6700
	新宮運転免許センター 647-0061 新宮市三輪崎 1148-4 Shingu Driver's License Center 1148-4 Miwasaki Shingu	073-531-7771
山形 Yamagata	山形県運転免許センター 994-0068 天童市大字高橋字立谷川原北 3400 Yamagata Driver's License Center 3400 Tachiyagawahara-kita Takadama Aza Oaza Tendo map http://www.pref.yamagata.jp/kenkei/1209900/ANNAIZU1705.GIF	023-655-2150
山口 Yamaguchi	山口県総合交通センター 754-0002 吉敷郡小郡町大字下郷 3560 - 2 Yamaguchi Community Traffic Center 3560-2 Shimogo Ogori-cho Yoshiki-gun map: http://www.police.pref.yamaguchi.jp/0440/menkyo/annaizu.htm	083-973-2900
山梨 Yamanashi	山梨県運転免許センター 400-0205 中巨摩郡八田村野牛島 1828 Yamanashi Driver's License Center 1828 Yagoshima Hattamura Nakakoma-gun map: http://www.pref.yamanashi.jp/police/menkyo/chizu.htm English page: http://www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp/div/english/html/residentinformation.htm#DRI	055-285-0533