

To Foreign Nationals Who Drive Vehicles in Japan (English Language Version)

Introduction

This booklet is designed to help you understand Japanese traffic rules and regulations, mainly focusing on our basic rules.

Please understand Japanese traffic rules are somewhat different from yours. Accurate knowledge of the traffic rules will contribute to your safe driving in Japan.

Rules and regulations in this booklet are based on the Laws and Ordinances in effect as of February 1, 2011.

Chapter 1 Basic Information

1 Driver's license system

You must be licensed to drive a car or ride a moped on public roads. Please be aware that your license clearly says which vehicle you can drive or in what condition you can tow another car. While driving, you must always carry your driver's license.

In case you violate a traffic rule or cause a traffic accident, you must show your driver's license to a police officer when asked to do so. You must not drive while your license is being suspended.

2 Classification of driver's licenses

(1) Category 1 License:

A license to drive a car or ride a moped (except for those in Category 2)

(2) Category 2 License:

A license to drive as a bus driver, a taxi driver or a chauffeur for transportation services, or to drive as a substitute driver for drunk drivers, etc.

(3) Learner's Permit:

A provisional license issued to a learner driver who is provisionally permitted to drive a large, ~~or~~ medium or regular vehicle for the Category 1 License

3 Types of driver's licenses

The table below shows the various types of driver's licenses with their corresponding vehicles and motorcycles.

Type of license	Permitted vehicles							
	Large vehicle	Medium vehicle	Regular vehicle	Special oversized vehicle	Large motorcycle	Regular motorcycle	Special compact vehicle	Moped
Large vehicle	○	○	○				○	○
Medium		○	○				○	○
Regular automobile			○				○	○
Special oversized vehicle				○			○	○
Large motorcycle					○	○	○	○
Regular motorcycle						○	○	○
Special compact vehicle							○	

Moped									○
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4 Towing license

When you tow another car by a large, medium, regular, or heavy-duty special vehicle, you need a towing license in addition to your original license.

However, you don't need a towing license when drawing a car which weighs 750 kg or less in total, or pulling a broken-down car with a rope or a crane.

Driving without a driver's license is punishable by imprisonment not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding 300,000 yen.

5 Car owner's responsibility

You must comply with the following two conditions as a car owner in Japan.

- (1) The vehicle must be covered by a valid motor vehicle inspection certificate. (Motorcycles with a total engine displacement of 250 cc or more and automobiles.)
- (2) The vehicle must be covered by a compulsory automobile liability insurance policy or a mutual relief system certificate.

In addition, you are recommended to take out a voluntary insurance policy.

6 Prohibition of Drinking and Driving

In order to eliminate drinking and driving, the penalties to drivers have been strengthened and, at the same time, the penalties to persons responsible for drivers' actions have been put in place.

Penalties for Drinking and Driving

- **Drunk Driving (Driving in such a condition that normal driving may be impaired by alcohol)**
→ Imprisonment not exceeding 5 years or a fine not exceeding 1,000,000 yen, and 35 penalty points (15 points correspond to revocation of a driver's license in Japan.)
- **Driving under the influence of alcohol**
 - (1) When a driver's breath alcohol content exceeds 0.25 mg/liter:
→ Imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or a fine not exceeding 500,000 yen, and 25 penalty points
 - (2) When a driver's breath alcohol content is 0.15 mg/liter or more but not exceeding 0.25 mg/liter:
→ Imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or a fine not exceeding 500,000 yen, and 13 penalty points

Penalties to Persons Responsible for a Driver's Actions

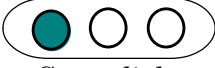
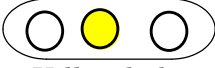

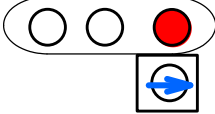
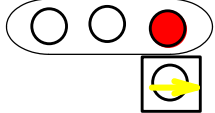


- **When a person provides a vehicle to a driver who has consumed alcoholic drinks and is likely to drive under the influence of alcohol:**
 - If the driver has committed drunk driving
→ Imprisonment not exceeding 5 years or a fine not exceeding 1,000,000 yen
 - If the driver has driven a vehicle under the influence of alcohol
→ Imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or a fine not exceeding 500,000 yen
- **When a person provides alcoholic drinks to a driver or encourages a driver to drink alcoholic drinks, despite the driver is likely to drive under the influence of alcohol:**
 - If the driver has committed drunk driving
→ Imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or a fine not exceeding 500,000 yen
 - If the driver has driven a vehicle under the influence of alcohol
→ Imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or a fine not exceeding 300,000 yen

- **When a person asks a driver for a ride in the driver's vehicle, while being aware that the driver has consumed alcoholic drinks, and rides in that vehicle:**
 - **When the person is aware that the driver is drunk:**
 - If the driver has committed drunk driving
 - **Imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or a fine not exceeding 500,000 yen**
 - If the driver has driven a vehicle under the influence of alcohol
 - **Imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or a fine not exceeding 300,000 yen**
 - **When the person is aware that the driver is under the influence of alcohol:**
 - If the driver has committed drunk driving
 - **Imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or a fine not exceeding 300,000 yen**
 - If the driver has driven a vehicle under the influence of alcohol
 - **Imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or a fine not exceeding 300,000 yen**

Chapter 2 Traffic Regulations

1 Important Traffic Regulations

(1) Types of traffic lights and their meanings

 <p style="text-align: center;">Green light</p>	<p>Pedestrians may continue crossing.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>Vehicles other than non-motor vehicles and streetcars may go straight or turn left or right. Mopeds making a two-step right turn may go straight ahead to the point for turning right, and then change the direction they are heading in.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>Non-motor vehicles (bicycles, carts, etc.) may go straight and turn left. When turning right, these vehicles must proceed to the point of making a right turn, stop and change their direction to the right and wait at that point.</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Yellow light</p>	<p>Pedestrians must not start crossing. A pedestrian who is already crossing the road must finish crossing the road quickly or else turn back.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>Vehicles and streetcars must not move farther than the stopping point. However, if a vehicle is rapidly approaching the stopping point when the signal changes to yellow, and cannot stop safely, it may continue to proceed.</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Red light</p>	<p>Pedestrians must not cross.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>Vehicles and streetcars must not proceed past the stopping point.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>A vehicle or streetcar, when already making a right turn at an intersection, may continue to proceed even if the traffic light on the right is red. In this case, the vehicle or streetcar, must not obstruct the traffic of vehicles or streetcars approaching on a green light. However, non-motor vehicles and mopeds making a two-step right turn must stop after crossing the road and wait at that point while the traffic light on the right is red.</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Green arrow light</p>	<p>Motor vehicles may proceed in the direction indicated by the arrow even if the traffic light is yellow or red. However, when the arrow indicates a right turn, non-motor vehicles and mopeds making a two-step right turn must not proceed.</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Yellow arrow light</p>	<p>Streetcars may proceed in the direction indicated by the arrow even if the traffic light is yellow or red, but pedestrians and motor vehicles must not proceed.</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Flashing yellow light</p>	<p>Pedestrians, motor vehicles and streetcars may proceed carefully, paying attention to other traffic.</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Flashing red light</p>	<p>Pedestrians may proceed carefully, paying attention to other traffic.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>Motor vehicles and streetcars must stop at the stopping point before proceeding.</p>

(2) Stopping at intersections



You must stop before the stop line (or before the intersection when there is no stop line) at an intersection with a Stop sign, and yield to vehicles traveling on the crossing road.

(3) Railroad crossing



Traffic accidents resulting in death or serious injury are prone to happen at railroad crossings. Before passing through a railroad crossing, drivers must stop before the crossing (or behind the near side of the stopping line, if any), and look and listen to check for safety, rolling down the vehicle's window if necessary.

(4) Illegal parking and stopping



No Parking or Stopping traffic sign



No Parking traffic sign

Illegal parking and stopping are responsible for neighborhood traffic congestion and also affect visibility on the road, resulting in traffic accidents involving pedestrians stepping out from behind parked or stopped vehicles. If you intend to park or stop your vehicle, ensure that you do so legally. (Articles 44 to 49-7, the Road Traffic Act)

2 Rules of lane usage

(1) Driving on the left

Vehicles must stay to the left of the center of the road (or left of the center line when there is one).

(2) Keeping to the left

Drivers should keep to the left even if the road has no lane markings, except when overtaking another vehicle or under other unavoidable circumstances.

3 How to travel through intersections

(1) Left turn

When making a left turn, first approach the left side of the road in preparation for the turn, then travel along the edge of the intersection slowly.

(2) Right turn

When making a right turn, first continue driving near the center of the road as far as possible in preparation for the turn, and then proceed slowly through the center of the intersection. This rule does not apply to mopeds making a two-step right turn.






















(3) How to travel through intersections with no traffic lights or signs

Where the crossing traffic has the right of way or the crossing road is wider, slow down so as not to interfere with the crossing traffic or the operation of streetcars.




Where intersecting roads are about the same width, be careful not to interfere with streetcars or motor vehicles approaching from your left.

4 Traffic signs and their meanings
















(1) Traffic signs (extract)

	Road closed (Closed to all traffic, pedestrians, motor vehicles, streetcars)		Closed to motor vehicles		No entry (One-way exit)
	Closed to automobiles, with the exception of motorcycles				Only designated direction(s) permitted (vehicular traffic prohibited in directions other than indicated by the arrow)
	No crossing (except when crossing by turning left to enter or exit a facility or place facing the road)		No U-turn		No swerving to the right for overtaking
	Maximum height		Maximum width		Maximum speed
	Automobiles only Designates national expressways and limited highways		Cyclists and pedestrians only		Pedestrians only
	One-way traffic		Designated lane		Designated bus lane
	Two-step right turn for mopeds		Direct right turn for mopeds		Sound horn

(2) Auxiliary signs (extract)

	Start of traffic regulation		End of traffic regulation		End of traffic regulation
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(3) Warning signs (extract)

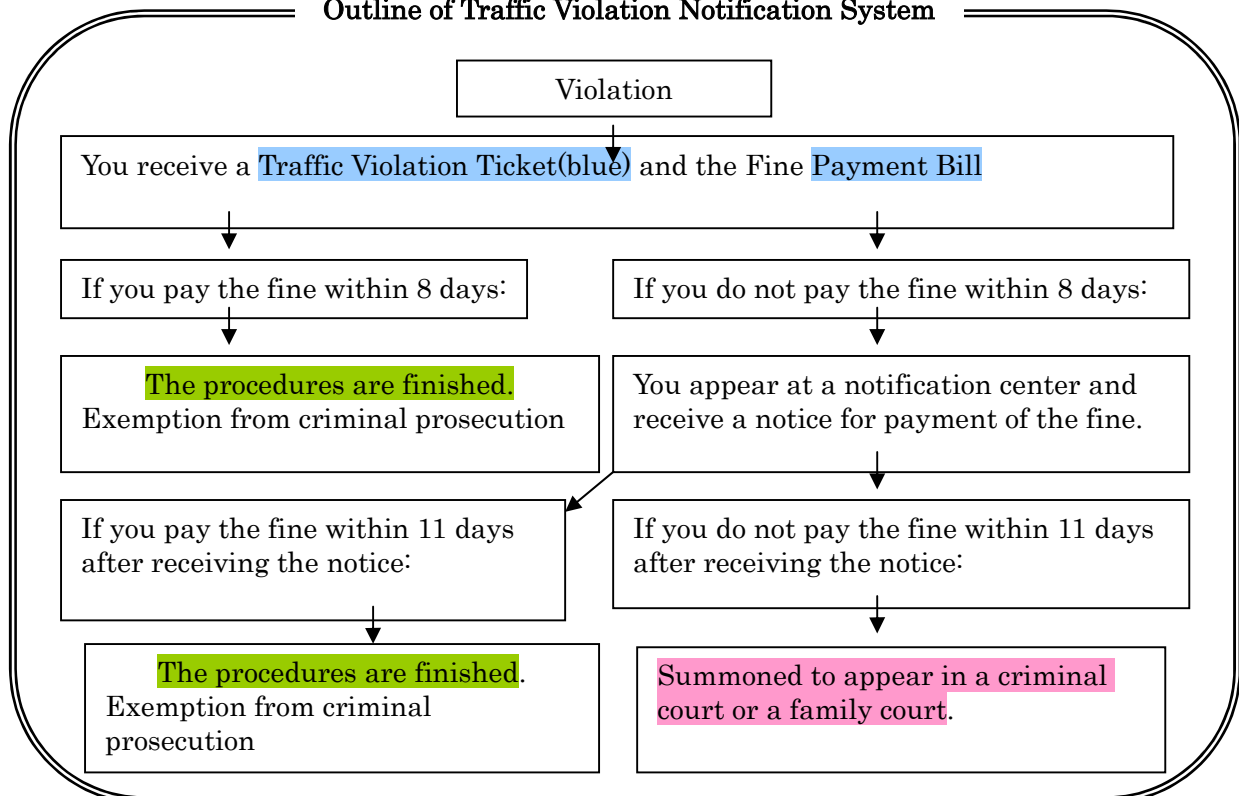
	Intersection ahead		T-junction ahead		Right (left) bend ahead
	Winding road ahead		Railroad crossing ahead		School, kindergarten, nursery school ahead
	Traffic light ahead		Slippery road ahead		Falling rocks ahead
	Merging traffic ahead		Lane ends ahead		Road narrows ahead
	Two-way traffic ahead		Road construction ahead		Cross winds ahead

Chapter 3 Traffic Violations and Traffic Accidents

1 Traffic Violations

In case you are arrested for committing a serious traffic offense, you are subject to criminal prosecution, can be officially charged with the offense and put on trial. However, some minor traffic violations may only require payment of a fine within the specified period.

Outline of Traffic Violation Notification System



2 Point System

The point system issues demerit points to drivers based on their traffic violations or accidents occurring within the past three years and imposes punishments such as license revocation or suspension depending on the number of total points accrued.

When a driver’s total points reaches the criteria for punishment, the Prefectural Public Safety Commission sends a notice to a driver.

Since the notice is an important official document, it must be opened and checked.

3 Traffic Accidents

In the event of a traffic accident, the driver and fellow passengers must take the following steps.

- (1) To prevent further accidents to other vehicles in the area, stop the vehicle at a safe place out of the way of other traffic (the shoulder of the road, a vacant lot, etc.) and turn off the engine.
- (2) If anyone is injured, give whatever first aid is possible until medical personnel or an ambulance arrives. If anyone is bleeding, attempt to stop the bleeding with a clean cloth. Do not move an injured person needlessly. (In particular, do not move an injured person who has sustained an injury to the head.) However, if there is a risk of further injury from other moving vehicles, move the person to a safer place.
- (3) Notify the police about the location of the accident, the number of injured persons, the degree of personal injuries and property damage and what kind of vehicles were involved in the accident and receive the police officer’s instructions.

The driver of an emergency vehicle, a vehicle carrying injured or sick persons or a bus may continue to drive the vehicle to fulfill their duties, after having instructed others to care for the injured, notify police about the accident and take other necessary measures.

Notifying the Police

- If you do not speak or understand Japanese, please ask a Japanese person to notify the police.
- If you contact the police yourself, be sure to give the police the following information.

What number to call..... 110 (The same number from a cell phone)
When did the accident happen (Date and time)..... It is all right to just say “It happened XXX minutes ago.” Be accurate as much as possible.
Where did it happen..... Explain referring to any nearby well-known landmarks.
What type of accident..... “Only vehicles involved” or “Vehicles and pedestrians involved”
How many injured persons and how serious is the injury The number of injured persons, whether the injured persons are conscious or not, where are the injuries, etc.
What is your name and contact information.....Your name, home phone number, cell phone number, home address, business address, etc

★ Failure to notify the police or give aid to the injured may lead to legal punishments. The procedures and punishment for anyone causing a traffic accident are entirely legally defined. You are always required to notify the authorities in the event of an accident.