

1 Traffic Rules

As members of society, we are all obligated to obey traffic rules to ensure the safe and smooth movement of the many vehicles and pedestrians using our streets.

1-1 Safety guidelines for pedestrians

(1) Walking on roads and sidewalks

Generally, pedestrians should walk on the right side of the street so that vehicles approach on their left

- Pedestrians should keep to the right side of the road.
- Pedestrians should use the sidewalk or stay within the line marked for walking on the road when they are available.

(2) Rules for crossing the street

Crossing the street safely

- Pedestrians should cross the street using the nearest traffic light intersection or pedestrian crossing, overpass or underpass.
- Pedestrians should never cross a street that is marked with signs that prohibit crossing.

Traffic light rules

- Green light: Pedestrians can proceed to cross the street
- Yellow or flashing green light: Pedestrians may not begin to cross the street; if a pedestrian has already commenced crossing, he or she should either attempt to finish crossing quickly or turn back
- Red light: Pedestrians are prohibited from crossing the street
- Crossing streets that have traffic light buttons

Pedestrians should push the button to change the light to green, after which they can proceed to cross the street.

Crossing streets that have no traffic lights

- Pedestrians should cross the street only after confirming there are no vehicles coming from either direction.
- Before crossing the street, pedestrians should stop and look in both directions to check for oncoming vehicles.

If vehicles are approaching, pedestrians should wait until they pass.

- Pedestrians should continue looking both ways to check for oncoming vehicles when crossing the street, and walk straight ahead rather than diagonally.

Rules for rail crossing

- Before walking over a rail crossing, pedestrians should stop and look both ways to make sure it is safe.
- Pedestrians should never attempt to enter a rail crossing when the warning bell is sounding or the crossing bar is on its way down.



Crossing by pedestrians is prohibited

(3) Walking at night

Pedestrians should wear brightly colored clothing or reflective materials at night. When walking on the street at night, pedestrians should wear brightly colored clothing such as white or yellow, as well as accessories with reflective materials or LED lights to ensure that drivers can easily see them.

1-2 Safety guidelines for cyclists

(1) Five rules to follow to ensure safety when riding a bicycle.

Rule 1: In principle, cyclists should ride on the street and use sidewalks only in exceptional cases

- Bicycles are classified as vehicles, so as a general rule, cyclists should use the street.
- Cyclists should use designated bicycle paths when they are available.
- Cyclists should use the lanes marked for bicycles on sidewalks or roads when they are available.
- Children under 13, adults aged 70 and over, and people with physical disabilities are permitted to ride a bicycle on the sidewalk.

When the street is too narrow, cyclists can ride on sidewalks.

Rule 2: Cyclists should ride on the left side of the street

- Cyclists may ride inside the lines marking pedestrian paths. But they must not obstruct pedestrians.

Rule 3: Cyclists must reduce speed on sidewalks and give pedestrians the right of way

- When passing pedestrians on sidewalks, cyclists should reduce speed enough to enable a sudden stop.
- Cyclists should stop riding if there is a risk of obstructing passing pedestrians on sidewalks.
- Cyclists should refrain from unnecessarily ringing bicycle bells at pedestrians on sidewalks.

Pedestrians are given priority on sidewalks, so cyclists are expected to dismount their bicycle if necessary.

Rule 4: Cyclists must obey safety rules

- Cyclists are prohibited from riding under the influence of alcohol.
- Riding two people per bicycle is prohibited.
- Riding side by side is prohibited.
- Cyclists must use bicycle lights at night.
- Cyclists must obey traffic lights at intersections and check for safety after coming to a full stop.

Rule 5: Children must wear a bicycle helmet

Parents and guardians must ensure that children wear a bicycle helmet in the following cases :

- When a child under the age of 6 is riding in the children's seat of a bicycle
- When a child under the age of 13 is riding a bicycle



Reserved for pedestrians and cyclists only

Other rules

- Cyclists must not use umbrellas or smartphones while riding.
- Purchase personal accident insurance to be able to compensate for any damage or injury from a bicycle accident.

(2) Using intersections

When making a right-hand turn

- At intersections with traffic lights

When the light turns green, the cyclist should cross the intersection in a straight direction and come to a stop on the opposite side with the bicycle facing right. When the light of the intersecting street turns green, the cyclist should proceed in a straight direction after looking both ways to check that it is safe.

- At intersections without traffic lights

The cyclist should look behind to check it is safe, cross the intersection in a straight direction, then slow down to make a right-hand turn, and check for oncoming cars before proceeding.

When making a left-hand turn

Cyclists should make sure not to obstruct pedestrians crossing the streets.

Cyclists must come to a full stop at stop signs, and look both ways to check for oncoming cars before proceeding. Cyclists should come to a full stop at intersections where visibility is poor, narrow roads meet wide streets, or where sidewalks come to an end, and then look both ways to check it is safe before proceeding.

When an intersection has designated lines for bicycles, cyclists should ride within the lines.



Vehicles and bicycles must come to a full stop. Look both ways before proceeding



Bicycles may cross within the designated line

1-3 When driving a vehicle

- You must have a driver's license to drive a vehicle.

When requested by a police officer for your driver's license after an infraction or traffic accident, present your driver's license.

- Drive on the left side of the road.
- When driving near pedestrians and cyclists, make sure to slow down and keep a safe distance.
- Never drive a vehicle after drinking alcohol.

Never loan your vehicle to someone who has drunk alcohol, encourage someone who is driving to drink alcohol, or ask someone who has been drinking alcohol to drive.

- When driving a vehicle, you must wear your seatbelt. Passengers must also wear their seatbelts.
- Children who are under 6 years old must use a child seat.
- While driving, do not use your smartphone.

2 Driver's License

In Japan, there are three ways of driving a vehicle (including motorbikes) or motorized two-wheeled vehicle.

- Obtain a Japanese driver's license
- Drive using an international driver's license
- Drive by attaching a Japanese translation of your foreign driver's license

*A driver's license is required for motorized bicycle with pedals, such as a moped.

2-1 Obtaining a Japanese driver's license

You can obtain a Japanese driver's license through the following two methods.

- Switching your foreign driver's license to a Japanese driver's license
- Obtaining through a regular driving test

(1) Switching your foreign driver's license to a Japanese driver's license

People who have a foreign driver's license can obtain a Japanese license for vehicles that they are allowed to drive under their original license, by being exempt from part of the driving test. However, the condition is that you must have remained for 3 or more months in the foreign country after having received your driver's license in that country. Thus, materials that prove the length of your stay, such as a passport with entry/departure stamps, are required.

As documents required for submitting an application may differ depending on the prefectural police, please inquire with the department of motor vehicles for the prefectural police at which you are planning on submitting an application for details. It is not possible to switch over to a Japanese driver's license from an international driver's license.

(2) Method of obtaining a Japanese driver's license through a regular driving test

It is necessary to take and pass a proficiency test, written exam and aptitude test at a driver's license center, etc.

However, you are exempt from the proficiency test if you study at a driving school (designated driver's school) and graduate. Although it is possible to obtain a driver's license by going directly to a driver's license center and taking the proficiency test and written exam, it is the norm to obtain a driver's license after going to a driver's school.

2-2 Driving with an international driver's license

It is possible to drive in Japan for up to one year after arriving in Japan if you have an international driver's license that meets the format specified in the Geneva Convention (Convention on Road Traffic signed on September 19, 1949) (for information on signatory nations in the Geneva Convention, refer to the following Point). In such cases, the period during which you can drive a vehicle, etc. in Japan using your international driver's license is either one year after you arrive in Japan or the expiry date of your international driver's license (one year from the date of issue, whichever comes first). Foreigners registered in the basic resident register should refer to the following Point.

List of Signatory Nations in the Geneva Convention

As of March 1, 2019

Signatory Nations in Geneva Convention	Iceland	Cote d'Ivoire	Dominican Republic	Belgium
	Ireland	Congo	Trinidad and Tobago	Botswana
	United States of America	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Turkey	Poland
	United Arab Emirates	San Marino	Nigeria	Portugal
	Algeria	Sierra Leone	Namibia	Madagascar
	Argentina	Jamaica	Niger	Malawi
	Albania	Georgia	Japan	Mali
	Israel	Syria	New Zealand	Malta
	Italy	Singapore	Norway	Malaysia
	India	Zimbabwe	Haiti	South Africa
	Uganda	Sweden	Vatican	Monaco
	United Kingdom	Spain	Papua New Guinea	Morocco
	Ecuador	Sri Lanka	Paraguay	Montenegro
	Egypt	Slovakia	Barbados	Jordan
	Australia	Slovenia	Hungary	Lao People's Democratic Republic
	Austria	Senegal	Bangladesh	Lithuania
	Netherlands	Serbia	Fiji	Luxembourg
	Ghana	Thailand	Philippines	Romania
	Canada	South Korea	Finland	Rwanda
	Cambodia	Czech Republic	France	Lesotho
	Cyprus	Central African Republic	Bulgaria	Lebanon
	Cuba	Tunisia	Burkina Faso	Russian Federation
	Greece	Chili	Benin	
	Kyrgyzstan	Denmark	Venezuela	
Guatemala	Togo	Peru		
Special Administrative Districts, etc.	Hong Kong	Macau	French overseas territories (French Polynesia, etc.)	Alba
	Curacao	St. Maarten	Cayman Islands	Isle of Man
	Guernsey	Jersey	Gibraltar	U.S. overseas territories (Guam, Puerto Rico, etc.)

*Please note that even if a country is a signatory nation, there are countries, etc. that do not issue international driver's licenses that meet the format of the Geneva Convention.

One Point



Date of expiry of international driver's licenses

Foreigners who are registered in the basic resident register who have
Departed Japan, remained in a foreign country for 3 or more months, and re-entered Japan
Can drive for either one year since the date of re-entry into Japan or the date of expiry of their international driver's license (1 year from date of issue), whichever one comes first.
Departed Japan, remained in a foreign country for less than 3 months, and re-entered Japan
The date of re-entry does apply to the initial date for the one-year period. Accordingly, such foreigners are able to drive for either one year from the date that they first arrived in Japan or the date of expiry of their international driver's license (1 year from date of issue), whichever one comes first.

2-3 Driving by attaching a Japanese translation of your foreign driver's license

People who have a driver's license from Estonia, Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium, Monaco or Taiwan can drive the vehicle that they are certified to drive under their original driver's license in Japan, by attaching a Japanese translation (*) of their foreign driver's license.

The period during which they can drive is one year from the date on which they arrived in Japan, or the last day of the valid period of their foreign driver's license, whichever one comes first. However, if a person recorded in a basic resident register leaves Japan and stays in a foreign country for less than 3 months, the period during which they can drive is the period described in the Point on the "International Driver's License" page.

* The following entities are recognized as those who can create Japanese translations.

- Agency that issues driver's licenses, foreign embassy or consulate in Japan, etc.
- Foreign corporation or other entity recognized by the Japanese National Public Safety Commission (for Taiwanese driver's licenses, the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association)
- Corporation recognized by the Japanese National Public Safety Commission as being able to appropriately and accurately create a Japanese translation of driver's licenses. (Japan Automobile Federation (JAF))

2-4 Renewing a Japanese Driver's License, etc.

(1) Renewing a driver's license

Driver's licenses have a period of validity. People who need to renew their driver's license will be mailed a postcard indicating the items required for the renewal procedure at the address listed on their driver's license. Please carry out the driver's license renewal procedure within the period indicated on this postcard. People who do not renew their license and whose license has expired will not be able to drive.

(2) Changing the address on a driver's license

If changing the name, address, etc. written on a driver's license, carry out the change procedure at your nearest police station, etc. Inquire at your nearest police station regarding details, such as necessary documents.

2-5 Point system for driver's licenses

If you have a traffic violation or cause a traffic accident, a point will be added to your record. Depending on the total number of points over the last 3 years, you may have your license suspended or revoked.

3 Owning a Vehicle

3-1 Registering a vehicle

Vehicles that have not undergone registration may not be driven on the road.

When using a vehicle, it is necessary to register it.

If there has been a change to the name, address, etc. of the owner of a registered vehicle, it is necessary to change the registration.

When changing the owner of a registered vehicle due to the sale or purchase of a vehicle, it is necessary to carry out the procedure for a transfer of registration.

If a registered vehicle is dismantled, or if you are going to export a vehicle, it is necessary to carry out the procedure for disposal of registration.

All procedure are carried out at a Transport Branch Office, etc. For details, inquire at your nearest Transport Branch Office.

3-2 Garage certificate

In owning a vehicle, it is necessary for the owner of the vehicle to secure a storage space for the vehicle.

As a result, when purchasing a car or changing your address due to a move, etc., you must receive a vehicle storage certificate (garage certificate) from the chief of police that has jurisdiction over the location that was secured as a storage space when conducting the procedure for registering the vehicle.

For light motor vehicles, it is necessary to submit a notification to the chief of police that has jurisdiction over the area of the storage location.

Only special wards (refers to the 23 wards in Tokyo; hereinafter the same) and some cities require such procedures for light motor vehicles. For other vehicles, special wards, cities, towns, and some villages require these procedures.

For details on the issuance procedure for garage certificates, please inquire with the police station that has jurisdiction over the area of your storage location (parking space).

3-3 Vehicle inspections

By registering inspected vehicles, it is possible to ensure vehicle safety and prevent pollution, and it also becomes possible to systematically comprehend the actual state of ownership and use, as individual vehicles can be identified.

Thus, vehicle inspections exist so that the national government can periodically check whether individual vehicles conform to safety and environmental standards. It is not possible to operate a vehicle unless it passes this inspection, and a valid vehicle inspection certificate is issued.

Users can request an auto repair and maintenance shop for inspection, or have an inspection by himself/herself.

For detailed procedures and costs, please inquire to your nearby Transport Branch office.

3-4 Automobile insurance

(1) Compulsory automobile liability insurance (mutual aid)

The objective of compulsory automobile liability insurance (mutual aid) is to ensure fundamental coverage for bodily injury liability by compensating the economic burden that the wrongdoer should bear, in order to aid victims of traffic accidents. It is mandatory for all vehicles, including motorized two-wheeled vehicles, to be enrolled in insurance.

If you are not enrolled in compulsory automobile liability insurance (mutual aid), it is not possible to drive a vehicle. If you do drive a vehicle, it is a legal violation, and if you cause an accident resulting in injury or death, you will be responsible for a large amount of compensation for damages.

Compulsory automobile liability insurance (mutual aid) is available at insurance company (association) branches, as well as automobile and motorcycle dealers.

For motorized two-wheeled vehicles and light motor vehicles, it is possible to carry out procedures at the post office (not available at all post office branches), and some insurance companies (associations) make offer insurance on the Internet or convenience stores.

(2) Voluntary insurance (mutual aid)

Mandatory vehicle liability insurance (mutual aid) is paid for damages resulting from accidents in which someone is injured or killed due to a vehicle, etc., and does not apply to traffic accidents resulting in property damage.

In addition, it is possible to specify a maximum payment amount per victim. For traffic accidents resulting in property damages that are not covered under mandatory vehicle liability insurance (mutual aid) (accidents such as where somewhere else's property is damaged), vehicle damage (accidents such as where your vehicle is stolen), damage to a person where accident damages exceed the maximum payment by the mandatory vehicle liability insurance (mutual aid), there is voluntary insurance (mutual aid).

You can enroll in voluntary insurance (mutual aid) through a private insurance company (association). The compensation range, compensation amount, premium, etc. vary.

4 What to do when an accident happens

(1) Stop driving

Stop driving your car immediately.

Move your car to a safe location such as the shoulder or an empty lot so that you do not obstruct traffic.

(2) Notify emergency responders and the police

If someone is injured, call an ambulance (dial 119). Until the ambulance comes, do not move the injured person unless necessary. Follow the operator's instructions, and carry out first-aid treatment as possible, such as to stop bleeding.

Regardless of whether there is an injured person, it is necessary to notify the police (dial 110). You must not leave the site of the accident until the police comes.

After a police officer arrives, report on the circumstances of the accident, and have the police officer check the site of the accident.

(3) Medical diagnosis

Although you may think that you are only slightly injured or not at all at the time of an accident, there are cases where you later find out that you have actually suffered a serious injury. It is recommended that you receive a medical diagnosis as quickly as possible.

(4) Issuance of an accident report

As a document that publicly certifies that you were involved in a traffic accident, there is the "accident report" issued by the Japan Safe Driving Center.

Even if it not necessary immediately after a traffic accident, an accident report may later become necessary to carry out procedures to receive various kinds of support. Thus, it is recommended that you obtain this report.

As accident reports are not issued for accidents where the police is not notified, make sure to notify the police when an accident occurs.