

6. Transportation

A. Public Transportation

Trains

There are 3 main types of trains:

- Normal (普通 futsu): stops at every station.
- Rapid (快速 kaisoku): faster, stopping at select stations.
- Limited express (特急 tokkyu): fastest, only stopping at a few stations.



You can buy tickets at the train station ticket machine or manned windows. If you travel by train frequently, it is more convenient to get an IC card, which uses electronic currency. You can put money on IC cards at the ticket machine, and scan the card when you enter and leave the ticket gate. The money for that trip will be automatically deducted.

Some rapid trains may require a separate ticket and IC cards cannot be used.

Digital versions of most IC cards are available, and can be used from your phone.

Fares are written next to the destinations on the map above the ticket machine. There are also special discount tickets you can buy to ride any of the three types of trains to and from Sapporo.

Most express trains will have cars that are labeled "reserved" (指定席 shiteiseki) and "unreserved" (自由席 jiyuuseki). Make sure you take a seat in the correct car according to the ticket you bought.

Trains in Japan leave at the exact scheduled time, so be sure not to be late.

Useful phrases for trains:

- 片道: (kata michi) one way
- 往復: (oufuku) round trip
- 乗り換え: (norikae) change trains
- のりば: (noriba) platform
- 普通で: (futsuu de) by normal train
- 特急で: (tokkyu de) by limited express
- 禁煙: (kin en) non smoking
- 満員: (man in) full/sold-out
- 快速: (kaisoku) rapid
- 料金箱: (ryoukin bako) fare box
- 精算所: (seisan sho) fare adjustment office
- この電車は 札幌 行きですか?: (kono densha wa Sapporo yuki desu ka?) Is this train bound for Sapporo?



Buses

City bus

You can purchase a ticket at the counter if available, or take a ticket when you embark. Some bus companies have prepaid books of ticket vouchers called *kaisuken*.

When getting on a bus, enter at the rear and exit through the front. If you get a ticket when you embark, the electronic board above the driver will indicate the fare, based on the distance. The amount displayed corresponding to the number ticket you have is the fare. Pay when you disembark.

Place both the ticket and fare in the machine next to the driver. The machine does not give change, so you'll need to pay the exact fare. There will be a bill exchange machine, but on most buses the most you can change is a 1000-yen bill.

Express bus

The express bus terminal is adjacent to the train station. There are other express bus stops throughout Iwamizawa. It is a coach bus, so it is more comfortable and you can bring luggage. You can use a ticket bought at the terminal ticket machine, an IC card, or cash when you disembark.

Taxis



Taxis are readily available from almost anywhere. If you have been drinking, you can have someone else drive your car home while you follow in a cab by calling any taxi company and asking for "daiko sabisu". This service costs about twice as much as the normal fare.

Remember: drinking any amount of alcohol and driving is illegal.

B. Driving

Driving in Japan can be very different from driving in your home country. Drinking and driving laws are exceedingly strict in Japan, and winter road conditions can be treacherous.

For more information on driving safety, rules, and tips, see the Japan Automobile Federation (JAF) website:

[\[https://english.jaf.or.jp/driving-in-japan/traffic-rules\]](https://english.jaf.or.jp/driving-in-japan/traffic-rules)



International Driver's License

You can drive in Japan for one year after your initial arrival, if you possess a valid driver's license from your own country in addition to an International Driver's Permit (IDP). If you are staying longer, you must get a Japanese license. Driving license rules and eligibility differ from country to country.

Getting a Japanese License

Depending on the country of your license, you will need to take Japanese driving and written test. Some places may not require you to take the test, and you only need to submit paperwork in order to get a Japanese license. You may also be required to have additional documentation such as proof of residency in your home country or proof of having your license for at least three months before entering Japan.

As of 2024, the areas exempt from the driving test are: Iceland, Ireland, United States of America (Indiana [practical test only], Ohio, Oregon, Colorado, Hawaii, Virginia, Washington, Maryland), England, Italy, Austria, Australia, Netherlands, Canada, South Korea, Greece, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Slovenia, Czech, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Hungary, Finland, France, Belgium, Poland, Portugal, Monaco, Luxembourg, Taiwan.

For more information on exchanging licenses, visit the Tokyo Metropolitan Police website:

[\[https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/menkyo/menkyo/kokugai/kokugai05.html\]](https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/menkyo/menkyo/kokugai/kokugai05.html)

The written test in Hokkaido is only available in English, Chinese, and Korean. When you go to the licensing center (menkyo shikenjo) you will need to take the following items with you:

- A valid license from your home country
- An official translation of the license (see below)
- Residence Card (or Alien Registration card)
- Passport
- One passport size photo



The official translation of your home country license can be handled by the Japan Automobile Federation (JAF). Be prepared for the whole process of getting a license to take time and possibly be expensive.

The practical test in Japan is known to be strict, and it is not unusual to take it more than once. It is not necessary to go to driving school and learn from scratch, but it may be prudent to schedule individual driving practices with a driving school. The rules of the driving test may differ greatly from your home country, and you will need to know them well.

To take the test, make an appointment with your nearest licensing center. You may have to go back more than once to do the written and practical test, and to pick up your license.

For more information on getting a license, driving rules and road safety, visit the JAF website

[\[https://english.jaf.or.jp/\]](https://english.jaf.or.jp/)

JAF also offers a roadside assistance service for an annual fee. They can tow, change tires, or restart batteries in addition to other services. It may be a helpful resource especially in Iwamizawa winters.

C. Owning a car

Purchasing a car can make your life more convenient, as public transportation in Hokkaido is not as expansive and reliable as it is in other parts of Japan.

You can buy a new car from a dealership, or a used car from one of the many shops in the area. You can also search for cars online and have access to vehicles all over the country.



When purchasing a car, you will have to fill out the necessary paperwork, have it inspected, and register it at the closest registration center in Sapporo. If you buy from a dealer, they will do most of the work for you. You may also be asked to provide a "Parking space certificate" (shako shomeisho), a document that acknowledges you have a designated parking spot.

In most of Hokkaido and especially Iwamizawa, you will also have to have a set of winter and summer tires, changed around November and May respectively.

Types of cars

There are two types of cars in Japan, kei cars (yellow plate), and regular cars (white plate). Kei cars cannot be sold outside of Japan due to regulations in other countries. They are cheaper, but smaller, less powerful, have less features and comfort, and may be less safe in an impact.



Regular cars are standard cars have more powerful engines, last longer, and are bigger. They are more expensive than kei cars.

Choose a white plate or yellow plate car based on your personal needs. It should also be noted that when driving in winter, adverse road conditions may require a more powerful engine and 4-wheel drive.

Automobile inspections (shaken)

Japanese cars are held to a high standard of quality and maintenance. As part of registering the car, you will need to have up-to-date automobile inspection (shaken). This is an all-inclusive servicing that will check the condition of the whole car and make sure it is up to standards.

The inspection is completed three years after a new purchase, and then every two years after that. If you buy a used car you will have to complete shaken based on the original owner's purchase, not when you purchased the car. Therefore, your shaken might be due before you've possessed it for two years.

Shaken tends to become more expensive as the car gets older because repairs become more extensive. Kei cars are usually cheaper than regular cars when it comes to this. You can have the inspection completed at most car service areas, and even many gas stations.

