

A background of out-of-focus city lights in various colors (yellow, white, red, blue) against a dark night sky.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS

FOR SOFA LICENSED DRIVERS

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Foundational Regulations for Driving in Japan

Japan Road Traffic Act (Act No. 105 of 1960) The purpose of this Act is to prevent road hazards and otherwise ensure the safety and fluidity of traffic, as well as to contribute to preventing blockages arising from road traffic.

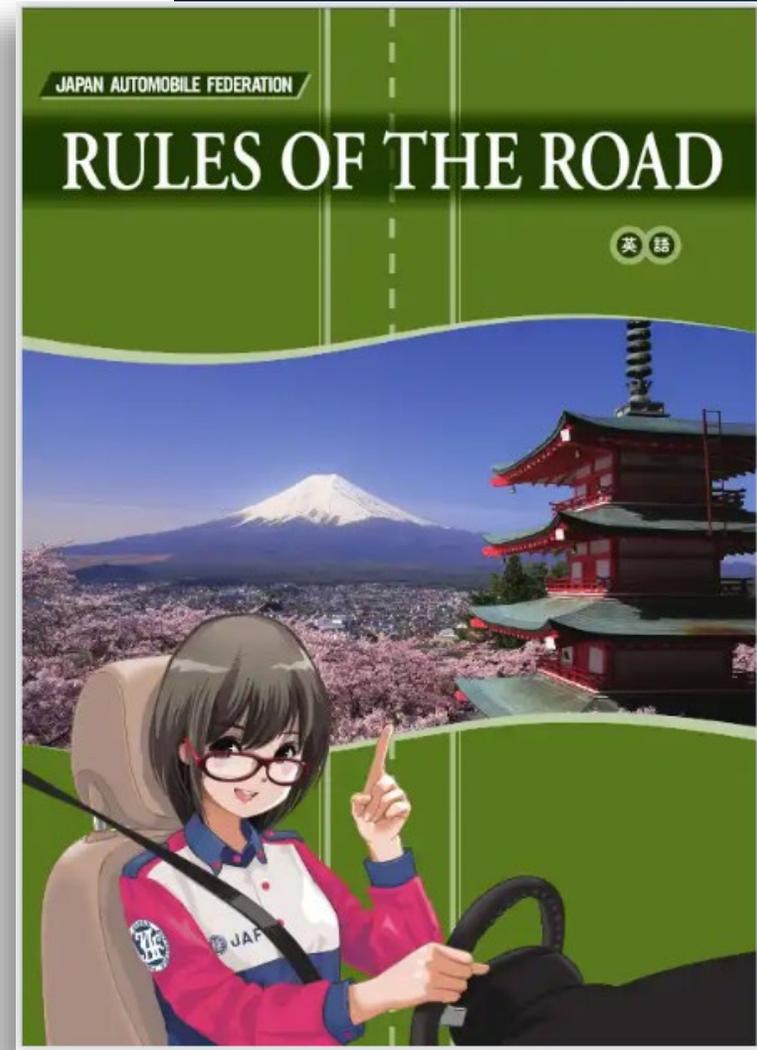
United States Forces Japan (USFJ) Instruction Motor Vehicle Operations and Traffic Supervision - This instruction provides guidance on a variety of issues related to operation, ownership, and registration of privately owned vehicles, to include operator permit issuance and mandatory insurance requirements. The primary focus is the requirements to own and operate privately owned vehicles, but also includes guidance on the use of government motor vehicles.

In addition to overarching regulations, commanders of individual camps, bases, and stations have the authority to establish specific driving policies tailored to their respective areas of responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

This handbook provides an overview of essential Japanese traffic regulations and laws relevant to Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) personnel, including U.S. armed forces members, government civilian employees, their families, and contractors.

For a comprehensive understanding of Japanese traffic rules, the Japan Automobile Federation (JAF) offers a foreign-language version of the "Rules of the Road." This guide, published to help prevent traffic accidents, is available for purchase online and may also be available at some on-base libraries. It includes detailed and up-to-date Japanese traffic regulations as issued by the Japan Traffic Safety Association.



INTRODUCTION

The operation of privately owned vehicles (POV) within Japan is considered a privilege agreed upon between U.S. Forces Japan and the Japanese Provincial Government. Like all high-level agreements of this nature, adherence to local laws and regulations are critical to ensure the agreement remains in good standing. Driving privileges can be revoked through formal Traffic Court adjudication or simply through command administrative action based on the desires and needs of the commander.

INTRODUCTION

The operation of a motor vehicle within Japan carries similar responsibilities and consequences as operating a motor vehicle in the U.S. with few exceptions. A significant difference under Japanese law involves categorizing anyone with a motor vehicle operator's license as being a "professional driver". While driving in the U.S. is more or less taken for granted these days for anyone 16 years of age or older, Japanese citizens must devote considerable time and money toward obtaining their license through a government approved professional driving school. As such, traffic accidents that result in personal injury or death frequently result in criminal prosecution under article 211 of the Japanese Penal Code, "Injury or Death Through Occupational or Professional Negligence."

INTRODUCTION

Penalties can be costly and at-fault drivers will typically be subject to the Japanese traffic law. SOFA licensed drivers are subject to steeper fines and more severe penalties for non-injury related traffic offenses such as DUI/ DWI, speeding, and illegal parking.

INTRODUCTION

Traffic signs used throughout Japan are considered international standard road signs. Vehicle operators licensed anywhere outside the United States should find the road signs depicted in Appendix A recognizable.

This handbook includes traffic safety regulations/requirements while operating a motor vehicle on Marine Corps Installations in Okinawa specifically. Personnel licensed by and/or operating motor vehicles aboard Kadena Air Base (Air Force) and Torii Station are subject to the provisions written in Kadena Air force Instruction 31-204 (Kadena Air Base Motor Vehicle Traffic Supervision) and United States Army Regulation Japan Supplement 1 AR190-5 for Torii Station.

This handbook is generic in nature and does not cover every possible scenario a SOFA licensed driver may find themselves faced with when operating a motor vehicle on/off base. Drivers are reminded to remain vigilant, obey all traffic laws, and drive defensively at all times to ensure safe navigation of a motorized vehicle during your overseas tour.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Navigating Japan Safely: Key Traffic Rules for SOFA Drivers

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

A primary rule throughout Japan dictates all vehicles (motorized or pedaled) remain to the far-left side of the roadway where road conditions permit. Vehicles may partially cross or fully cross over multiple lanes to reach the far-right side of the roadway under the following circumstances:

- 1) When traveling on multi-lane roadways.
- 2) Whenever the width of the left half of the road is insufficient for a vehicle to proceed.
- 3) Whenever a vehicle is unable to proceed on the left side of the road due to road damage, road construction work, or other impediments.
- 4) Whenever attempting to pass another vehicle.
- 5) When merging across multi-lane roadways in order to make a right-hand turn.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

Vehicle may pass other vehicles under the conditions prescribed above when the center of the road is marked by a solid or broken WHITE line. The following road markings prohibit passing.

Solid yellow centerline = No passing from either lane.

Double yellow centerline = No passing from either lane.

Solid yellow centerline = No passing from the lane nearest the solid yellow line.

CAUTION: WHEN OPERATING A VEHICLE AT NIGHT DURING INCLEMENT WEATHER, LANE SEPARATION LINES TEND TO “FADE” DUE TO THE TYPE OF PAINT USED ON JAPANESE ROADWAYS.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

Whenever a sidewalk is separated from the roadway, vehicles must travel on the roadway. However, a vehicle may cross the sidewalk when this is the only way to enter or exit a business, private residence, or similar location. Pedestrians on sidewalks and crosswalks have the right of way at all times.

Vehicles **MUST NOT** be driven into safety zones.

Lanes designated for specific types of vehicles (bus lanes for example), are required to travel in the specific lanes designated for that type of vehicle.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

Bus exclusive lanes are for buses, taxicabs with passengers, and motorcycles exclusively during certain hours of the day. These times will be clearly marked on roadways. The only time POV's are allowed in the bus exclusive lane is to make a left turn. In this instance, you can move into the bus exclusive lane 100 feet (30 meters) prior to your turn, provided you do not interfere with a bus or taxi's right of way.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

When a public bus is signaling to leave a bus stop, no vehicle shall impede or interfere with the bus unless doing so means abruptly changing speed or traffic lanes which could cause an accident in an adjacent traffic lane.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

The following requirements must be adhered to when meeting a bus (school bus, The Green Line) on installation:

- When the bus stops, do NOT proceed. All vehicles, in both directions must stop immediately until the bus moves or the bus driver signals the vehicles to proceed.
- Pay close attention to pedestrians (children) disembarking from a bus to ensure they do not attempt to cross the street once the bus leaves the stop.

NOTE: Between the hours of 0730-0900 and 1730-1900 on HWY 58, the far-left lane is strictly for buses, motorcycles, and designated vehicles only.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

Vehicles will not enter any area of the roadway marked or blocked to impede motorized vehicle traffic.

Vehicles must come to a complete stop at all stop lines, pedestrian crosswalks (when occupied), or at all uncontrolled intersections where stopping is required by law.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Traffic Lanes

When three or more adjoining lanes in the same direction of travel occur, the far-right lane is considered the passing lane.

No vehicle may change its direction of travel without sufficiently signaling the intention to do so regardless of whether a turning lane is provided or not.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW
NATIONAL
EXPRESSWAY
AND EXCLUSIVE
ROADWAYS

Motor Vehicles entering the primary lane of travel on an Expressway must use the speed–acceleration lane to enter.

Motor vehicles intending to exit an Expressway must travel in the lane nearest the exit in the speed-deceleration lane if provided.

Motor vehicles attempting to merge into a primary lane of travel shall not obstruct the passage of vehicles already traveling in the primary lane of travel.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW
NATIONAL
EXPRESSWAY
AND EXCLUSIVE
ROADWAYS

It is the vehicle operator's responsibility to ensure a vehicle is mechanically sound, properly serviced, and cargo secured prior to traveling on an Expressway or Vehicle Exclusive Roadway. Violation of this requirement, either through negligent breakdown or cargo loss, may result in monetary fines and/or penal action (confinement).

Should the need arise to stop a vehicle due to malfunction or breakdown, the vehicle must be moved completely off the Expressway and warning devices (flares/safety triangles) posted to clearly indicate the vehicle is stopped for emergency maintenance reasons.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

NATIONAL EXPRESSWAY AND EXCLUSIVE ROADWAYS

Vehicles stopped on Expressways at night are required to display parking lights and/or emergency flashers and road flares as needed. It is recommended flashers be used any time a vehicle is stopped along a roadway.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

SPEED LIMITS

- Posted speed limits are significantly lower than most European and U.S. drivers are accustomed to. The congested-narrow roadways throughout Japan dictate that reduced speed limits must be observed to ensure public safety. Speed limit signs are depicted in kilometers per hour (km/h).





JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

SPEED LIMITS

Other than Expressways, the maximum speed limit for motorized vehicles operating off U.S. Installations is as follows:

- The maximum speed is 80 km/h for all trucks less than 5 tons, and all passenger vehicles (including buses and motorcycles with 125 cc+ engine displacement)
- The maximum speed is 60 km/h for trucks over 5 tons, all special vehicles (cement trucks, wreckers), and motorcycles under 125cc.
- The maximum speed is 30 km/h for any 2-wheeled vehicle under 50cc.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

SPEED LIMITS

When traveling on Expressways and Exclusive Use Roadways, vehicles will not operate lower than the posted minimum speed limit unless it is unsafe to do so due to hazardous weather/road conditions.

When following vehicles, Japanese law requires drivers to maintain adequate distance to prevent colliding with the vehicle being followed in the event the vehicle makes an abrupt stop or turn. Drivers should avoid making last minute stops or turns.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

SPEED LIMITS

A general safety measure is to apply the 3-4 second rule when driving conditions permit. To calculate the 3-4 second rule, pick a stationary object along the traveled roadway. Once the vehicle in front of you crosses that point, begin counting. You should reach that object within 3-4 seconds. Note that in highly congested traffic areas it will be difficult to apply this rule so drivers must remain vigilant. Additionally, motorcycles require more of a following distance due to a shorter stopping distance.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Overtaking and Passing

“Passing” means going around a slower vehicle to the right on a two-way roadway. “Overtaking” refers to one vehicle moving past a slower vehicle on a one-way or multi-lane roadway.

Overtaking and passing violations account for a high percentage of motor vehicle mishaps in Japan due to the limited availability of dedicated passing lanes on standard roadways. Use caution when passing slower vehicles.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Overtaking and Passing

Vehicles attempting to pass another vehicle must typically pass to the right of the vehicle being overtaken. Certain conditions permit passing on the left; multi-lane roadways for example or when a vehicle stops in front of you or slows its speed to make a turn. Additional passing restrictions include:

Passing a vehicle if it indicates or appears to be passing another vehicle (dual passing).

Not passing if the vehicle ahead is proceeding parallel with or same speed as another vehicle (side by side).

JAPANESE TRAFFIC
REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Overtaking and Passing

Drivers shall not zigzag (cut) between lanes of traffic that are proceeding slowly or when traffic has stopped. The restriction not only applies to intersections, but any location along the roadway where traffic is proceeding at a slow pace.

Passing is prohibited within 30 meters of a crosswalk or intersection, on blind curves, near the top of upgrades or on steep downgrades, inside tunnels (unless multi-lane roadway), and in designated “No Passing Lanes” as marked by a posted traffic sign.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

SPEED LIMITS

Overtaking and Passing

“No Parking Zones” and/or “No Stopping Zones” are designated by posted traffic signs as depicted in Appendix C. Figure 8 depicts a Safety Zone designation – these can be found in front of fire departments, police stations, hospitals, or areas entering mainstream traffic.

Drivers are permitted to stop at posted areas along the roadway under the following circumstances:

When executing a temporary stop to clear the lane of travel for emergency vehicles, as directed by police officer, or to avert danger.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

SPEED LIMITS

Overtaking and Passing

Drivers are not permitted to stop and park along roadway under the following circumstances:

- Within 5 meters or less of fire station, fire hydrant, or fire station truck entrance/exit road.
- Within 1 meter or less of a fire alarm.
- Temporary stops at designated intersections or crosswalks as required by law.

When parking meters are installed, drivers are required to activate the meter unless otherwise posted. If the time limits are exceeded, vehicles may be towed. Recovering a vehicle after it has been towed can be costly and time consuming.

Overtaking and Passing

Parking a vehicle in any of the following locations is considered a violation of Japanese law unless permission is granted beforehand by a local police box having jurisdiction over the proposed parking location:

- Within 3 meters or less of a motor vehicle entrance/exit that provides access to main roadway (example: McDonald's entry/exit on Highway 58 across from Camp Lester).
- Within 1 meter or less of a fire alarm.
- Within 5 meters or less of a roadway construction project.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Overtaking and Passing

Many roadways within U.S. Installations are designated as fire lanes. Be aware of painted curbs (red/yellow) as these designate either no parking or fire lanes.

Parking on grass or bare terrain on U.S. Installations is prohibited unless where otherwise posted.

No vehicle will park in any location where there is less than 0.5 meters of clear-space between the vehicle and the roadway. This does not apply for temporary stops to load or unload cargo or people, when the driver leaves the vehicle temporarily, or to provide emergency response to an ill or injured person.



Overtaking and Passing

Abrupt vehicle stops are to be avoided unless required to avoid an accident.

When a vehicle is stopped to load or discharge people or cargo, it must be stopped as close as possible to the left edge of the roadway and in such manner the vehicle does not impede traffic.

On a one-way street, and if so, designated by a posted traffic sign, vehicles parked along the right side of the roadway.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

SPEED LIMITS

Overtaking and Passing

Designated parking spots may have police-imposed time limits to prevent continuous parking. Vehicle operators need to verify time limits if parking for an extended time period.

A police officer may order a vehicle to be moved or parked in a different manner so as not to obstruct the flow of traffic. When the vehicle operator is not available, police may have the vehicle moved up to 50 meters from where it was originally parked to help prevent a hazardous condition. If moving the vehicle 50 meters does not solve the problem, the vehicle may be impounded. The vehicle operator assumes all costs associated with moving or impounding the vehicle.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Roadway Intersections

Vehicle right-of-way at uncontrolled intersections is observed as follows:

1. Vehicles traveling on priority road have the right-of-way
2. A vehicle approaching an intersection from the left has the right-of-way over a vehicle approaching the intersection from the right.

Any roadway with a centerline or traffic lane that crosses through an intersection is considered the priority road and vehicles traveling on this road have the right of way.



SPEED LIMITS Roadway Intersections

Drivers entering or traveling through an intersection are required to pay attention to other vehicles in the intersection as well as pedestrians that may be in crosswalks close in proximity to the intersection.

Vehicles shall not enter an intersection even if a traffic signal is green if doing so will block cross traffic due to stalled rush-hour traffic.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Roadway Intersections

Vehicles shall not enter crosswalks, railroad crossings, or any other portion of the road that may impede vehicle or pedestrian cross traffic due to stalled rush-hour traffic.

Left turns on a red traffic light after a complete stop are prohibited off military installations unless otherwise permitted by a traffic control device (green signal or a white sign with blue arrow).



Vehicle Signaling

When making a lane change or turning any direction, vehicle operators are required to use either the vehicle's turn signal or a hand signal at least 30 meters prior to an intended turn or lane change. Drivers should ensure vehicle signals are turned off after the lane change or turn has been made.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Buses Entering Traffic

If a bus has a right turn signal on,
stop and let them enter traffic.

Buses have right of way and it's
not safe or legal to interfere with
them.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS
OVERVIEW

Use of Vehicle Horn

It is not acceptable to sound a vehicles horn unless where required by law or to avert a hazard.



Headlight Use During Inclement Weather

Japanese traffic law does not require the use of headlights during periods of reduced visibility from inclement weather. However, headlight use is mandatory aboard all U.S. Installations and highly encouraged during reduced visibility.

JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Vehicle Maintenance Requirements

Under Japanese traffic law, police officers have the right to stop a vehicle when the vehicle does not appear to be mechanically sound or safe to be on the road. Police officers may also conduct an on-the-spot vehicle inspection and provide the vehicle operator with an itemized maintenance list. Police officers may also affix a sticker to the vehicle, clearly visible to all, denoting that the vehicle is in need of maintenance. The sticker can only be removed by a police officer after all discrepancies to the vehicle have been repaired and certified.



JAPANESE TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OVERVIEW

Vehicle Maintenance Requirements

If a police car with lights on and siren and/or bullhorn come up behind you, then you must pull over. If they have lights on only, then continue to drive as normal.

If the Police Officer points the red tip of the wand at you, you must pull over. If the Police Officer points the white tip of the wand at you, it's a warning.

Vehicle Maintenance Requirements

SOFA licensed drivers should note that vehicles must be inspected every two years for a Japanese Compulsory Insurance (JCI). Vehicles passing JCI must display an up-to-date sticker in their vehicle's windshield. Vehicles that do not pass this inspection, or vehicles with expired stickers are not allowed to be driven. Contact the Joint Vehicle Registration Office on Camp Foster for further information at 645-7481

A blurred, high-angle photograph of a multi-lane highway at night. The image shows streaks of light from cars moving away from the viewer, with a prominent white arrow painted on the road surface in the foreground. The overall tone is dark with a blue and white color palette.

DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Earned Responsibility, Ensuring Safety on Every Road

DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Implied Consent

Any person subject to this privilege shall be deemed to have consented to evidentiary tests of their blood, breath and/or urine to determine the blood alcohol or drug content (BAC). This consent applies when lawfully stopped, detained, apprehended, or cited for any driving offense committed while operating or in physical control of a motor vehicle in Japan, whether on or off a military installation. If a licensed driver is suspected of Driving under the Influence (DUI) of drugs or alcohol and refuses at any time to give a sample of their blood, breath, or urine, will be automatically considered as a refusal. Any person deemed deceased, unconscious, or otherwise in a condition rendering them incapable of refusal, shall be deemed not to have withdrawn their consent and such tests may be administered whether or not such person has been told that their failure to submit or to complete the test will result in revocation of their driving privileges.



Suspension or Revocation of Driving Privileges

The MCB Traffic Court magistrate will adjudicate all traffic cases and will suspend/revoke driving privileges as deemed appropriate by traffic court requirements.

Commanding Officers may also revoke service member driving privileges by submitting a formal letter to the Director of the Installation Safety Office requesting suspension of service member's license along with the physical copy of the SOFA license.

DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Restrictions on Use and Operation of Motor Vehicles

Authorized drivers will not rent, lend, or permit the use or operation of their POVs by persons other than those who possess a valid operator's permit (USFJ Form 4EJ), except for the temporary convenience of the owner or his or her family, such as when the vehicle is any of the following conditions:

- Undergoing maintenance or repair.
- Being shipped into or out of Japan.
- Stored in a parking lot or garage.
- Placed in temporary storage pending authorized disposition to resident of Japan.
- Undergoing inspection and processing at a GOJ Land & Transportation Office (LTO)
- Being driven by a properly licensed or authorized individual while the owner/operator is incapable of driving (e.g., physically incapacitated, too tired, or consumed any amount of alcohol).

DRIVING PRIVILEGES

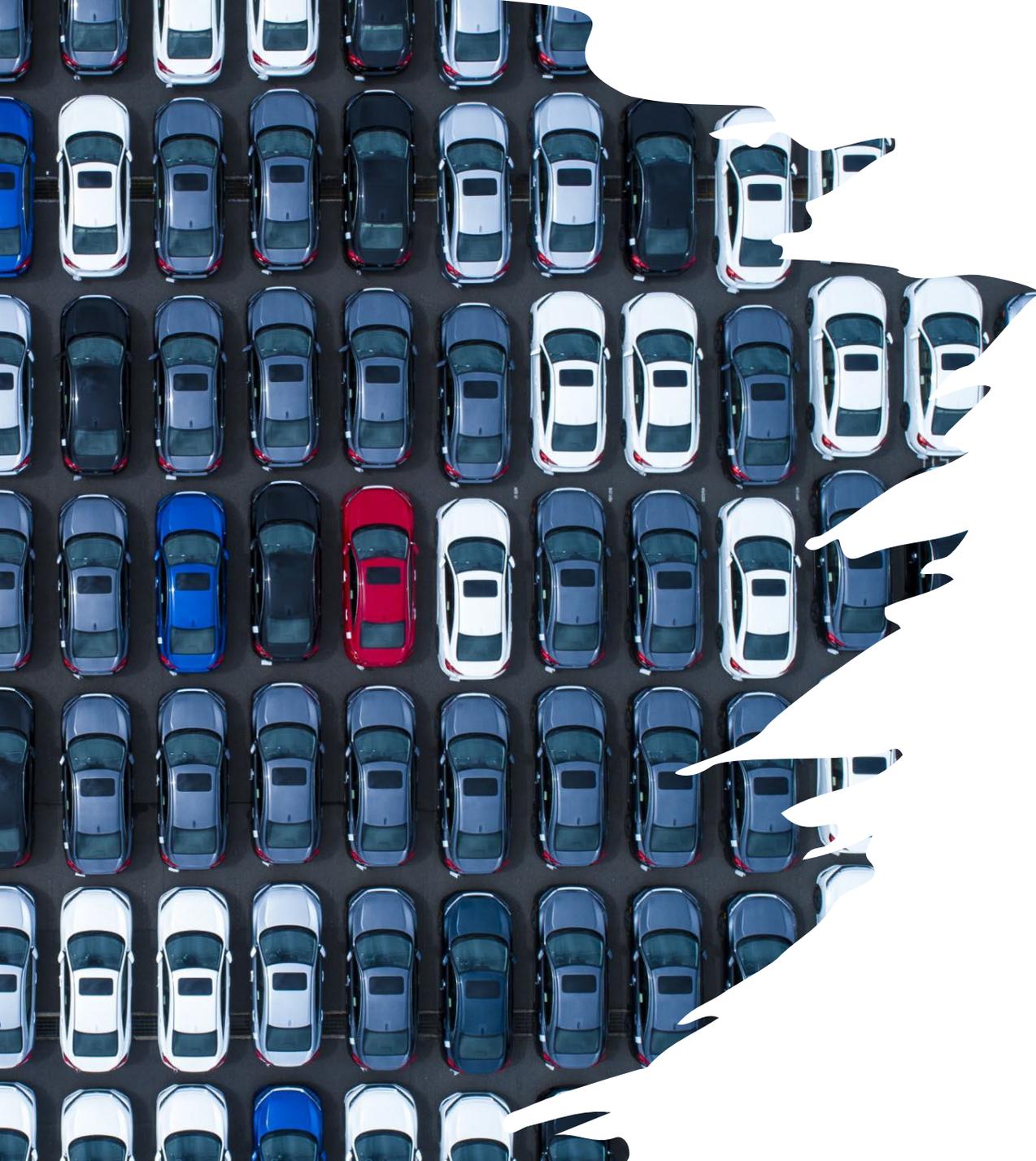
Daiko Taxi Service

Daiko Taxi Service allows a SOFA member who is incapable of driving his/her vehicle (e.g., physically incapacitated, too tired, or consumed alcohol) to employ a commercial driving service to provide an additional driver for the purpose of returning an owner and POV to the owner's residence.

Regulations require the SOFA member to ride in his/her own vehicle as a passenger.

The Daiko licensed operators providing this service shall operate the motor vehicle in accordance with the established provisions for the motor vehicle operation aboard Marine Corps Installations as well as all applicable Japanese traffic laws.





DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Rented or Borrowed Motor Vehicle

Personnel will not operate a rented or borrowed motor vehicle, including any Japanese-owned motor vehicle, unless the following requirements are met:

- Operators must have a valid USFJ Form 4EJ for the type of motor vehicle operated.
- The owner is unavailable (e.g., deployed, TAD, leave, etc.), operators have the owner's written permission in their immediate possession while operating the motor vehicle.
- The vehicle is covered with appropriate insurance.

DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Required Documents

All personnel operating a motor vehicle in Japan must produce, upon request from military or Japanese law enforcement officials, the following:

Proof of vehicle ownership or registration as required by issuing authority.

A valid USFJ Form 4EJ operator's permit supported by an official DoD Identification Card or passport with stamp

Proof of JCI and property damage liability insurance.



DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Required Documents

Per USFJ INST 31-205, Chap 2, SOFA Status/Permanent Party Members are not authorized to operate SOFA plated vehicles with an International Driver's permit (IDP)





DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Required Documents

Driving without a valid driver's license, aiding and abetting another to drive without a valid driver's license, improper acquisition of a driver's license and knowingly loaning a vehicle to someone who does not possess a valid driver's license can result in a fine and or punishment of up to 3 years confinement and no more than 500,000 yen.

Anyone who gets in a vehicle knowing the driver does not possess a valid driver's license can receive a fine/ punishment of 500,000 yen or up to 3 years confinement.

An aerial photograph of a car accident on a zebra crossing in Japan. Two cars, a silver hatchback and a purple sedan, are involved in a collision. A woman in a white coat stands near the silver car, and a man in a dark suit stands near the purple car, looking at his phone. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey filter.

ACCIDENTS

Accident Protocol: Essential Steps for SOFA Drivers in Japan

ACCIDENTS

Reporting Requirements

Persons involved in a motor vehicle accident shall immediately report the occurrence to the nearest military law enforcement agency; if off-base, to the Japanese police by expeditious means.

Whenever the driver of a vehicle fails to or is physically incapable of reporting an accident and occupant in the vehicle at the time of the accident is capable of doing so, the occupant shall report the accident.

ACCIDENTS

Reporting Requirements

The driver of any vehicle involved in an accident resulting in injury to, or the death of, any person, or property damage shall immediately stop their vehicle at the scene of such accident (or as close thereto as possible) and remain at the scene until military police arrive.

The driver of any vehicle involved in an accident shall give his/her name, address, vehicle registration number, name of insurer, insurance policy number, insurance expiration, and upon request show his/her permit to any person injured in the accident or to the driver, occupant, or person attending any vehicle involved in such accident. The same information shall be provided to any law enforcement personnel at the scene of the accident or later investigation.

ACCIDENTS

Reporting Requirements

Duty of witness to Remain at Accident Scene

Witnesses to an accident shall not depart the scene until their identity has been furnished to law enforcement.

Witnesses to an accident shall give any assistance needed when requested by law enforcement.

For all off-base accidents, military police will respond to the scene upon notification. In such accidents, military police will assist Japanese police and the parties involved in exchanging information and instruct SOFA personnel to report to their insurance company.

ACCIDENTS

Reporting Requirements

Solatum Payments and Condolence Procedures: Where an incident results in serious injury or death to a Japanese national, you should make a solatium payment of up to 50,000 yen for serious injuries or 100,000 yen for fatalities. Under certain circumstances, your service commander may make such payments if you are financially unable to do so. Japanese custom dictates that a condolence visit be made to the injured party or to the surviving family and that appropriate fruit, candy or floral gifts be presented.





RULES OF THE ROAD

Navigating Safely and Respectfully in Japan



RULES OF THE ROAD

Alcohol Standards Driving Under the Influence/Driving While Intoxicated

No person may operate or be in physical control of any motor vehicle under the influence of intoxicants, including beverages, drugs, or any combination.

If a person's Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is determined to be a level of .03 to .079 percent by weight of alcohol in the person's blood, the person shall be considered DUI.

If a person's BAC is determined to be .08 percent or more by weight of alcohol in the person's blood, or if tests reflect the presence of illegal drugs, the person shall be determined to be "Driving While Intoxicated" (DWI).

RULES OF THE ROAD

Alcohol Standards Driving Under the Influence/Driving While Intoxicated

When a person submits to a blood test at the request of law enforcement personnel under the provisions of Implied Consent, only a physician, nurse, or other qualified person may withdraw blood for the purpose of determining the alcohol or drug content herein. This limitation shall not apply to collecting breath or urine specimens.

If a person refuses to submit to a chemical test, evidence of refusal shall be admissible in any prosecution or proceeding arising out of acts alleged to have been committed while the person was driving, operating, or in physical control of a motor vehicle.





RULES OF THE ROAD

Alcohol Standards Japanese Standard

Japanese police determine the degree of intoxication by use of the Kitagawa Balloon Test which measures milligrams of alcohol per liter of expired breath. When reading of 0.15 mg/l (equivalent of .03% BAC) of expired breath is obtained, it shall be presumed for the purposes of prosecution in Japanese courts that the person was under the influence of alcohol.

Open Containers of Alcoholic Beverages. Operators and passengers of motor vehicles are prohibited from having open containers of alcoholic beverages in their possession.

RULES OF THE ROAD

General Provisions and Restrictions

Obedience to Police Officers and Other Authorities. All persons shall comply with any lawful order or direction of any police officer, fireman, or uniformed crossing guards to direct, control, or regulate traffic.



RULES OF THE ROAD

General Provisions and Restrictions

Drivers to Exercise Due Care. Every driver shall exercise due care to avoid colliding with any pedestrian or any person operating a vehicle. Drivers shall give an audible signal when necessary and shall exercise proper precautions upon observing any child, pedestrian, or any obviously confused, incapacitated, or intoxicated person.



RULES OF THE ROAD

General Provisions and Restrictions

Unattended Motor Vehicle. No person driving or in charge of a motor vehicle shall permit it to remain unattended without first stopping the engine, removing the key from the ignition, effectively setting the brake, and when upon any grade, turning the wheels to the curb or side of the highway.



RULES OF THE ROAD General Provisions and Restrictions

Unattended Children. Children nine years of age or younger will not be left unattended in a vehicle at any time.



RULES OF THE ROAD General Provisions and Restrictions

Limitations on Reverse Direction. The driver of a vehicle shall not:

- Drive in reverse direction unless such movement can be made safely and without interfering with other traffic;
- Drive in reverse direction upon any shoulder or roadway of any controlled access highway.

RULES OF THE ROAD

General Provisions and Restrictions

Operation of Vehicles upon Approach of an Emergency Vehicle.

Upon approach of an emergency vehicle making use of audible and/or visual signals, vehicle drivers shall yield the right of way, drive parallel to and as close as possible to the closest edge or curb of the roadway, and immediately stop unless doing so would be unsafe. Drivers shall stop clear of any intersection and remain in such position until the emergency vehicle has passed, except when otherwise directed by law enforcement personnel.

RULES OF THE ROAD

General Provisions and Restrictions

Following Too Closely

The driver of a motor vehicle shall not follow another vehicle more closely than is reasonable, having due regard for the speed of such vehicles, traffic congestion, and condition of the highway.

RULES OF THE ROAD

Lane Usage

One-Way Roadways and Rotary Traffic Islands.
Upon roadway designated for one-way traffic by
an official traffic control device:

- A vehicle shall be driven only in the designated direction.
- When no road markings exist to indicate a separation of two or more lanes of travel, then only one lane shall be presumed to exist, and passing is prohibited.
- Driver shall obey the directions of official traffic control devices installed to prohibit the changing of lanes or sections of roadway.



RULES OF THE ROAD

Lane Usage

Driving on Divided Highways.
When a highway is divided into two or more roadways by an intervening space, physical barrier, or indicated section constructed to impede vehicular traffic; vehicles shall be driven only upon the left-hand roadway unless directed or permitted to use another roadway by traffic control devices or law enforcement personnel.



RULES OF THE ROAD

Cell Phones, Headphones, Listening Devices

Operating a vehicle and using a cell phone is strictly prohibited unless a hands-free device is employed. (i.e. Bluetooth earpiece, vehicle Bluetooth connectivity).

When the need to use a cell phone arises, the vehicle operator must completely pull over to the left side of the roadway and park the vehicle. It is preferred to park the vehicle in a parking area, but in the event of an emergency, a vehicle may park as close to the left curbside as possible and into or out of curve. Hazard flashing lights must be administered as well.

Wearing portable headphones, earphones, or other listening devices while operating a vehicle is strictly prohibited.

RULES OF THE ROAD

Driving on Narrow Streets and Roads

Many of the roads in Japan are very narrow. Some roads have only 1 lane but used for 2 ways traffic. Often there are mirrors on bends, to show oncoming traffic. Use these where they're available.

Remember to GO SLOWLY and to look as far ahead of you as you can at any chance you get where the road opens. It gives you a better chance of spotting oncoming vehicles that might be two or three bends ahead of you.

There are generally enough passing places, but you may have to reverse a bit to get to one.

RULES OF THE ROAD Flashing Hazard Lights to Thank Other Drivers

Japanese drivers customarily thank other drivers by using the emergency blinkers (they turn them on for a couple of seconds). If you want to thank a driver who is not behind your car, a small head bow or wave will also suffice.

RULES OF THE ROAD

Illegal Parking Sticker

An illegal parking sticker may be affixed to an illegally parked vehicle. The user of the illegally parked vehicle who has received the parking sticker may be ordered to pay a fine for a parking violation.

Do not damage or tear the affixed illegal parking sticker until the fine has been paid. The vehicle operator must immediately go to the nearest Bank of Japan or post office to pay the fine. Any delay in paying the fine may cause additional fines to be assessed or driving privileges suspended.

KNOW THE RULES

Traffic Ticket

When incurring in a sanction for illegal parking, you will find a “Parking Violation Ticket” on your vehicle.

In Japan, when parking your motorcycle on the road, depending on the location there may be cases you will incur in a parking violation and to pay a fine.

In case of parking violation

You will find an illegal parking notice, with 駐車違反 wrote on your rental vehicle

Go to the Police Station in charge in the area the parking violation happened, go through the formalities and pay the fine.

After completing the procedures, return the vehicle

In case you will not handle the parking violation procedures

If you will fall to handle the parking violation procedures before returning your rental vehicle, you will be charged the parking violation fee and our company will charge you another 20,000 yen parking violation penalty.

放置車両確認標章

(標章番号)
(登録(車両)番号)

駐車違反
速やかに移動してください。

この車は、“放置車両”であることを確認しました。
この車の使用者は、警察・公安委員会から放置違反金の納付を命ぜられることがあります。
なお、この伝票が取り付けられた日の翌日から起算して30日以内に、この車を運転し駐車した者がこの違反について反則金の納付をした場合又は公訴を提起され、若しくは家庭裁判所の審判に付された場合は、この限りではありません。

取扱者 警察署長
電話番号

違反状況	日時	
	場所	付近道路
	態様	

この車の使用者・運転者その他の車の管理委任者は外の者がこの標章を破壊・弄損し、又は取り除くと処罰されます。

RULES OF THE ROAD

Seat Belts and Child Restraints

Seat Belts are mandatory for all personnel inside a vehicle when the vehicle is operational; on and off base.

Child seats are mandatory for a child under six years of age according to Japanese Traffic Law.

RULES OF THE ROAD

Train Crossings

Bring your vehicle to a complete stop in front of open train crossings. In Japan is mandatory rule to make a complete stop in front of a train crossing even when the bar is open and failing to stop is an actual violation which may incur in a penalty.





MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS, and SMALL MOTORIZED BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS

Mastering Japan's Two-Wheeled Transit

MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS, and SMALL MOTORIZED BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS

Operating Motorcycles on Roadways

All motorcycles are entitled to full use of a lane.

The operator of a motorcycle shall not overtake and pass in any lane currently occupied by another vehicle. Driving on the shoulder of the roadway in order to overtake a vehicle is prohibited; this specifically prohibits “white-lining.”

No person shall operate a motorcycle between lanes of traffic or between adjacent lines or rows of vehicles.

Motorcycles shall not be operated more than one abreast in a single lane.



MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS, and SMALL MOTORIZED BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS

Equipment for Motorcycle Riders and Passengers.

All SOFA personnel operating or riding a motorcycle on or off-base shall wear the appropriate PPE consisting of:

- A properly fastened (under the chin) protective helmet (DoT SNELL Approved).
- Impact or shatter resistant goggles or full-face shield attached to the helmet. A windshield, eyeglasses, sunglasses or fairing alone is not considered to be proper eye protection. Devices used at night will not be tinted.
- Clothing must cover the upper torso and legs; “T” shirts and shorts are prohibited.
- Leather boots that cover the ankles; sneakers, “tennis” shoes, or other athletic-type footwear are prohibited.
- Full fingered gloves.





MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS, and SMALL MOTORIZED BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS

Kickboards and Peddle Assist Bikes

Kickboards, or e-scooter, and pedal-assist bicycles also referred to as SMBES, do not require a POV (Privately Owned Vehicle) License for operation. However, they must be insured and registered at a city office.

Pedal-assist bicycles equipped with a hand-operated throttle are classified as mopeds and do require a POV License.

All devices must meet the standards outlined in the Japanese Road Traffic Vehicle Act. Be aware that most devices purchased outside of Japan may not comply with these standards.

MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS, and SMALL MOTORIZED BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS

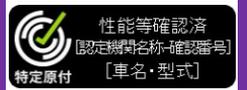
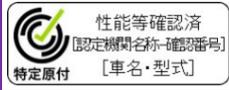
Under 50cc Scooters

Scooters under 50cc and electric bicycles with a throttle must be operated on roads and comply with all traffic laws. These vehicles are limited to a maximum speed of 30 km/h and require a POV License, but a motorcycle endorsement is not necessary. Operators must be over 18 years of age to use these vehicles off base.



Specified Small Motorized Bicycles and Electric Scooters

	Minimum Age	Helmet	License	Number plate/ insurance	Vehicle Structure
<p>Specific Small Motorized Bicycles</p> <p>can not accelerate above 20 km/h</p> <p>Category 1 - SMBES</p> <p>特定小型原動機付自転車</p> 	<p>16</p> <p>years old or above</p>	 <p>×</p> <p>MANDATORY</p>	 <p>×</p> <p>LICENSE NOT REQUIRED FOR SMBES THAT CAN NOT ACCELERATE ABOVE 20 KM/H (CAT 1 & 2)</p>	 <p>10cmX10cm</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicle must meet the safety standards set by the Road Traffic Vehicle Act Can not accelerate over 20 km/h Length: Up to 190cm Width: Up to 60 cm Automatic Transmission (AT) Maximum Speed Indicating Light 
<p>Exceptional Specific Small Motorized Bicycles</p> <p>max speed 6 km/h</p> <p>Category 1 - SMBES</p> <p>特例特定小型原動機付自転車</p> 					



Specified Small Motorized Bicycles and Electric Scooters

Specific Small Motorized Bicycles

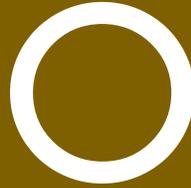
can not accelerate above 20 km/h



Category 2 - SMBES

特定
小型原動機付
自転車

Sidewalks
(flash speed indicating light)



cannot accelerate over 6km/h

Exceptional Specific Small Motorized Bicycles

max speed 6 km/h

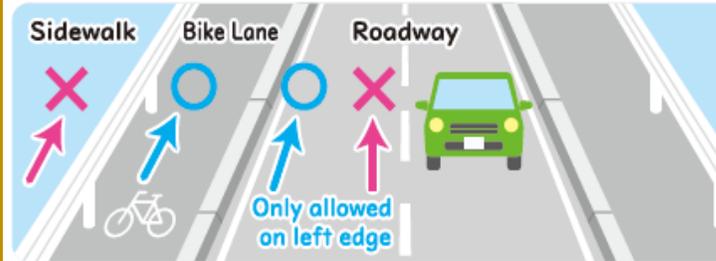


Category 1 - SMBES

特例特定
小型原動機付
自転車

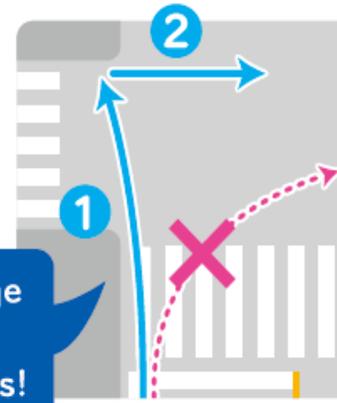
Traffic Rules

Ride on **roadways (or bike lanes)** in areas where the roadway is distinguished from a sidewalk or pedestrian shoulder.



Always check traffic signals and signs, and follow traffic rules.

Make two-stage right turns at intersections!



MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS, and SMALL MOTORIZED BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS

2-Stage Turn for Scooters and Bicycles

The two-stage right turn process, commonly required for scooters and bicycles in Japan on multi-lane roads, is designed to enhance safety by preventing small vehicles from crossing multiple lanes of traffic at once. Here's how it works:

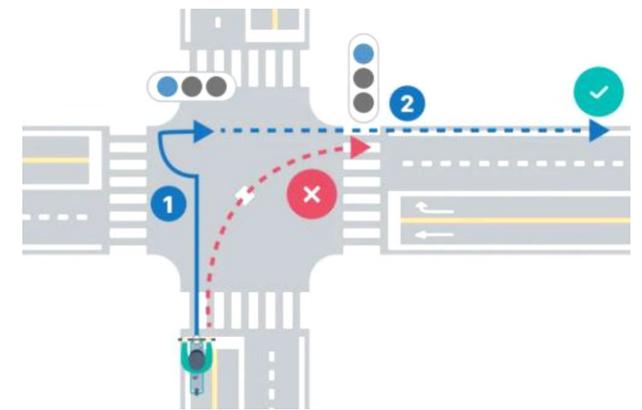
Approach the Intersection: As you approach an intersection where you intend to make a right turn, stay within 1 meter of the left side of the road (the standard position for slower vehicles like scooters).

Cross Straight Through the Intersection: Instead of immediately turning right, proceed straight across the intersection to the opposite corner on the left side of the road you are entering.

Position Yourself for the Right Turn: Once you reach the opposite corner, stop and align yourself with the lane heading in your intended direction. This usually involves positioning your scooter perpendicular to the original direction of travel.

Wait for the Signal: Wait for the green light (or an appropriate signal) for the cross street that will allow you to proceed in the right direction.

Complete the Turn: Once the light turns green, cross the intersection to complete your right turn, effectively making a 90-degree turn in two stages rather than a single maneuver.



MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS, and SMALL MOTORIZED BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS 50cc Traffic Compliance

Only one rider is allowed; passengers are not permitted.

The maximum speed limit is 30 km/h.

Riders must stay within 1 meter of the left side of the road.

Scooters are not permitted on expressways or highways.

For streets with three lanes, making a right turn at intersections requires a two-stage right turn. However, some intersections prohibit two-stage right turns, in which case a signal indicating this restriction will be displayed on the left side.



RULES OF THE ROAD

Pedestrians

No vehicle shall overtake or pass any other vehicle stopped at a marked crosswalk or at any other location to permit a pedestrian to cross the roadway.



Signs, Signals, and Markings

Overtaking

Japan rules toward overtaking and related road marking are not really different from many other countries.

White continuous line: forbidden to cross.

Yellow continuous line: forbidden to cross for overtaking.

White dashed line: there is no particular limitation. Overtaking is OK.

White/Yellow continuous line: mostly set before a special road or intersection.



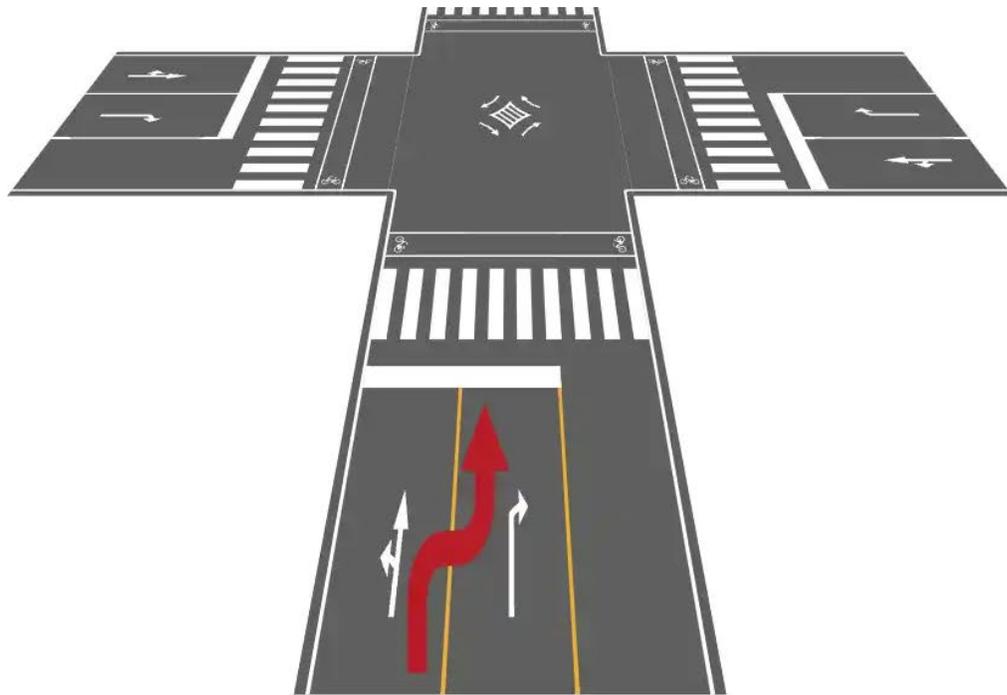
Signs, Signals, and Markings

Special Lanes

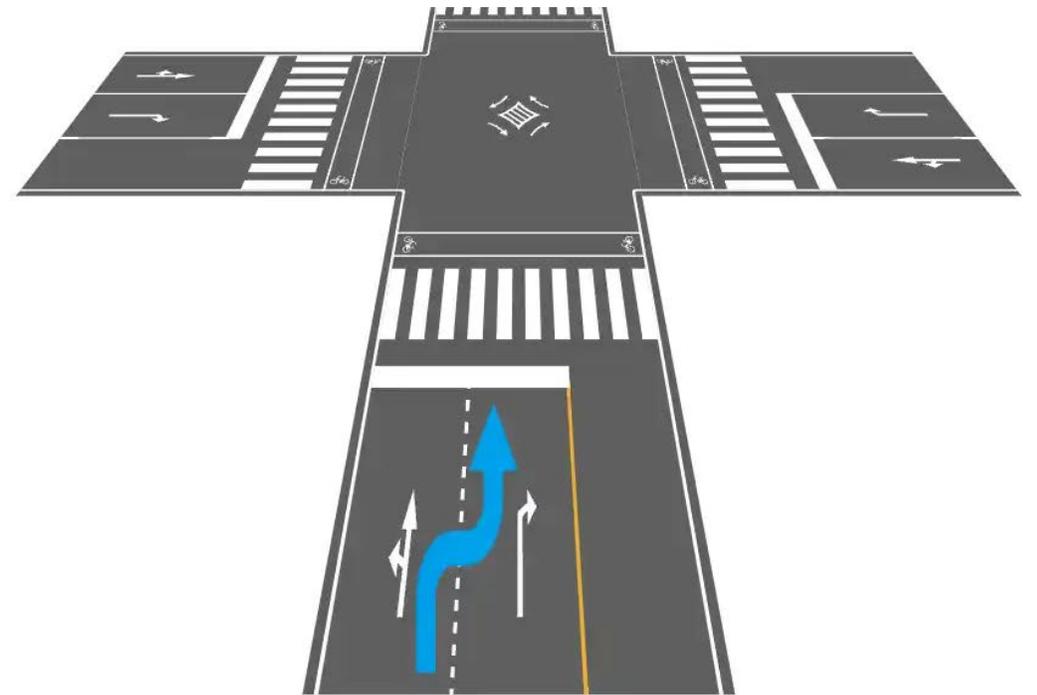
When approaching an intersection, traffic is typically directed by arrows painted on each lane. In general, the right lane is for right turns, the middle lane is for going straight, and the left lane is for left turns.

Following a different direction than indicated by the lane markings can result in a traffic violation. Therefore, it's essential to stay in the correct lane. About 30 to 50 meters before the intersection, a solid yellow line marks the lanes.

Crossing this solid yellow line to change lanes is a violation. If you find yourself in the wrong lane, continue in the direction of the arrows. Be sure to slow down and confirm the correct lane well before reaching the intersection.



LANE SWITCH NOT PERMITTED



LANE SWITCH PERMITTED

Signs, Signals, and Markings

Toll Highways in Japan

In Japan highway signs are green, while general road or public highway are blue.

Depending on the country, it might be opposite situation, therefore pay close attention.



Expressway



General road

Signs, Signals, and Markings Traffic Lights

Japan traffic lights are typically overhead, particularly in urban areas. They are mounted horizontally across lanes in green (which can appear blueish), yellow, and red order.

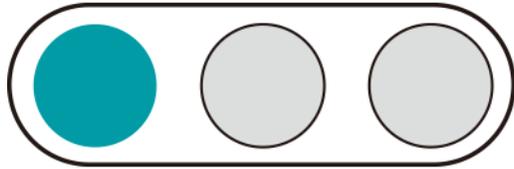
Always follow the direction of the green arrows. If they align with where you're heading, you're good. Otherwise, if the main light is red, it's a universal signal to stop and wait.



Signs, Signals, and Markings

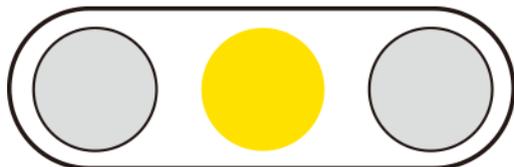
Traffic Lights

Green Light



Pedestrians may proceed and cross. Vehicles other than lightweight vehicles, and streetcars/trams may go straight or turn left or right. Mopeds making two-step right turn may go straight ahead to the point for turning right, and change the direction they are heading. Lightweight 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.

Yellow Light

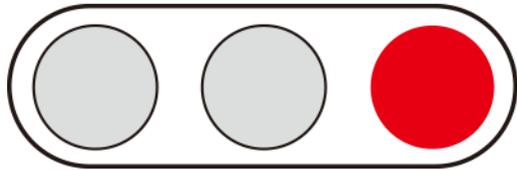


Pedestrians must not start to cross. A pedestrian who is already crossing the road must finish crossing quickly or else turn back. Vehicles and streetcars/trams may not move further than the stopping point. However, if a vehicle is rapidly approaching the stopping point when the signal changes to yellow, and cannot stop safely, it may continue to proceed.

Signs, Signals, and Markings

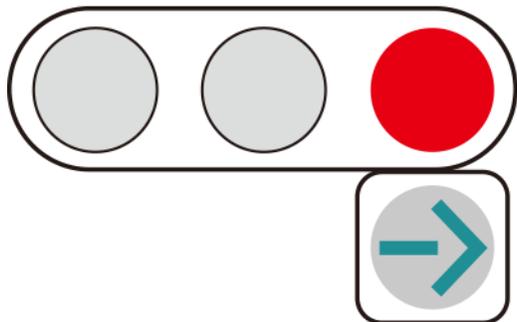
Traffic Lights

Red Light Light



Pedestrians must not cross. Vehicles and streetcars/trams may not proceed past the stopping point. A vehicle or streetcar/tram, when already making a left turn at an intersection, may continue to proceed even if the signal light on the left is red. A vehicle or streetcar/tram, when already making a right turn at an intersection, may continue to proceed even if the signal light on the right is red. In this case, the vehicle or streetcar/tram, must not obstruct the traffic of vehicles or streetcars/trams approaching on a green light. However, lightweight vehicles and mopeds making a two-step right turn must stop after crossing the road and wait at that point while the signal light on the right is red.

Green Arrow Light

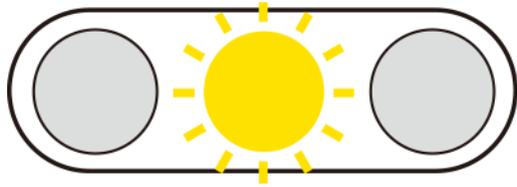


Vehicles may proceed in the direction indicated by the arrow even if the signal light is yellow or red. (Vehicles may also make a U-turn when the signal arrow is indicating a right turn.) However, in the case of a signal arrow indicating a right turn, lightweight vehicles and mopeds making a two-step right turn may not proceed.

Signs, Signals, and Markings

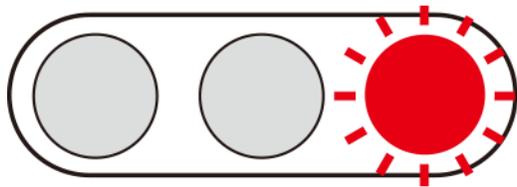
Traffic Lights

Flashing yellow light



Pedestrians, vehicles and streetcars/trams may proceed carefully, paying attention to other traffic.

Flashing red light



Pedestrians may proceed carefully, paying attention to other traffic.
Vehicles and streetcars/trams must stop at the stopping point before proceeding.

Signs, Signals, and Markings

Driver Stickers

Certain drivers are required or recommended to display a required sign on their vehicle, like on their dashboard or at the rear side. If you're visiting Japan and thinking of renting a car, it may help to know and understand driver's stickers and symbols.

NOTE: In order to qualify for a Beginner or New Driver sticker SOFA members must not, at any point, have had another driver license issued to them prior to being issued a SOFA license (i.e. U.S. driver's license or approved country). Otherwise, SOFA members are not eligible for the sticker.



Signs, Signals, and Markings

Driver Stickers



These symbols identify a driver over the age of 70 years



These symbols identify a driver over the age of 70 years



This symbol identifies a driver as being a new driver having one year or less of experience.



This symbol identifies a driver or passenger who is handicapped.



This symbol identifies a driver as being hearing impaired. This driver must install an oversized rearview mirror to reduce blind spots.

Signs, Signals, and Markings

Road Signs

4-Way Intersection Ahead	Side Road Intersection	"T" Intersection	"Y" Intersection	Round About
				
Sharp Right Curve Ahead	Right Turn	Right then Left Curve	Right Turn then Left Turn	Windy Road
				
Railroad Crossing	Railroad Crossing	School, Daycare Ahead	Traffic Signal Ahead	Road is Slippery
				

Signs, Signals, and Markings

Road Signs

Risk of Falling Rocks	Uneven Road Surface	Merging Traffic	Reduction in Number of Lanes	Road Narrows
				
Two-Way Traffic	Uphill Steep Slope	Downhill Steep Slope	Road Construction	Crosswinds
				
Risk of Animal Crossing	Beware of Hazards	Direction (refers to the route, facility or place indicated by the sign)	Left Turn permitted on red	
				

Signs, Signals, and Markings

Road Signs

Closed to vehicles and Pedestrians	Closed to all Vehicles	Do not enter	Road Closed for all Vehicles Except for Motorcycles	Road Closed for Large Sized Trucks and Special Duty Vehicles
				
Road Closed for Large Sized Passenger Vehicles	Road Closed to Two Wheeled Vehicles	Road Closed for light Vehicles except bicycles	Road Closed for Bicycles	Road Closed for Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles
				
Two-Person Riding is Prohibited	Left or Through Traffic Only	Left Turn Only	Through Traffic Only	Right and Left Turns Only
				

KNOW THE RULES Road Signs

Proceed Only in Designated Direction	Proceed Only in Designated Direction	No Right Turn	No Left Turn	No Passing
				
No Parking or Stopping (Restriction applies from 0800 to 2000)	No Parking (Restriction applies from 0800 to 2000)	Parking Limited to 60 minutes Only (Restriction applies from 0800 to 2000)	Road Closed to transportation of Dangerous goods	Weight Limit 5.5t
				
Height Limit 3.3m	Width Limit 2.2m	Maximum Speed / Speed Limit	Minimum Speed	Automobiles Only
				

KNOW THE RULES Road Signs

Bicycles Only	Pedestrians and Bicycles Only	Pedestrians Only	One-Way Street	One-Way Street
				
Bicycle One-Way Street	Bicycle One-Way Street	Vehicle Lane Classification Light Vehicle Left/ Two Wheeled Vehicle Right	Vehicle Lane Classification Light Truck on Left	Vehicle Lane Classification Heavy Trucks on Right
				
Bus Exclusive Lane	Dedicated Bicycle Lane on Left	Bus Preferred Lane	Large Truck Exclusive Lane	Direction Designated Lane
				

KNOW THE RULES
Road Signs

Direction Designated Lane				
Proceed Slowly. This does not assign a right of way at intersections like a yield sign does in the US.	Proceed Slowly. This does not assign a right of way at intersections like a yield sign does in the US.	Stop	Stop	

KNOW THE RULES Road Signs

Stop Main Road has Right of Way	Proceed Slowly Main Road has Right of Way	Bicycles may ride side by side	Passing is allowed on track	Parking is allowed
				
Vehicles may Stop here	Primary Road	Designated Center Lane	Detour to Left	End of Restriction
				
Stop Line Designated	Pedestrian Crosswalk	Pedestrian Crosswalk	Road Closed 0800 to 2000 from here to 100m ahead	Road Closed, Use Alternate Route
				

ROAD MARKINGS

Lane Markings

No Entry on the Right- Hand Part of the Road for Overtaking. indicate vehicles passing the either lane must not enter the other lane for overtaking.



No Entry on the Right- Hand Part of the Road for Overtaking. indicate vehicles passing the either lane must not enter the other lane for overtaking.



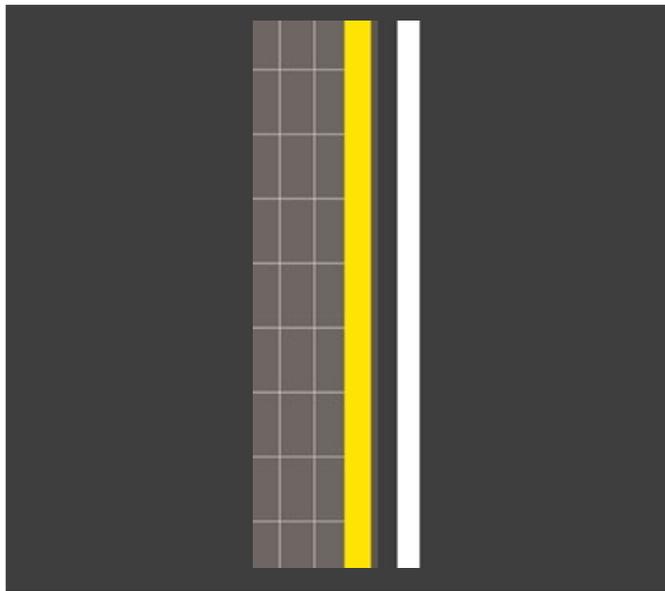
Indicates vehicles passing the in the left lane must not enter the right-hand part of the road for overtaking.



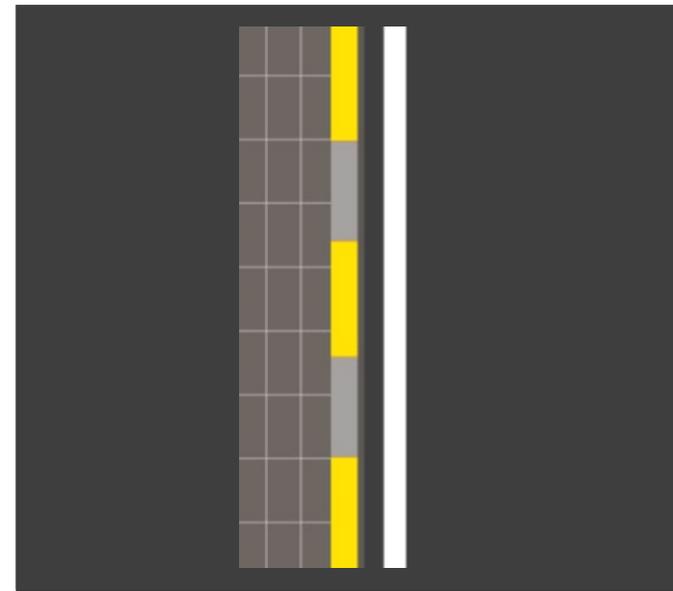
ROAD MARKINGS

Curb Markings

Solid painted line on curb indicates no parking or stopping



Dashed painted line on curb indicates no parking

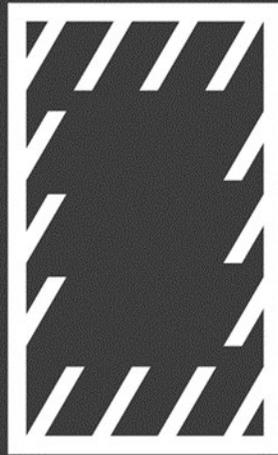


ROAD MARKINGS

No U- Turn	No Entry Zone	Max Speed Limit
 A yellow road marking consisting of a vertical line with a downward-pointing arrow at the top, and the line crossing itself to form an 'X' at the bottom.	 A yellow oval road marking with five white diagonal stripes running from the top-left to the bottom-right.	 A large yellow road marking of the number '40'.

ROAD MARKINGS

Safety zones are no stopping zones generally located in front of fire stations, hospitals, and police stations.



Intersections with high volume of pedestrian traffic may look similar to this.



This symbol serves as an indicator that you are approaching a crosswalk.



Non-Standard Signage on Military Installations

While on U.S. military installations in Japan, you may encounter non-standard road signage, including modified Japanese signs or U.S.-Japan hybrid signs. Regardless of the signage, always proceed as directed and drive carefully.



Driving in Okinawa

Embrace the Journey, Respect the Road

Driving in Okinawa

Essential Tips for Safe Travel

Exploring Okinawa Behind the Wheel

Distinctive Driving Culture: Okinawa's roads offer a unique experience, combining breathtaking coastal views, lush landscapes, and bustling city streets. Driving here requires adapting to the island's slower, more relaxed pace.

Local Road Rules: In Japan, driving is on the left side of the road. The left lane is for slower traffic, while the right lane allows faster movement, though speed differences are minor.

Speed Limits and Road Structure: Speed limits are measured in kilometers per hour (km/h) and rarely exceed 60 km/h (37 mph), except on the Okinawa Expressway where the limit is 80 km/h. Roads are generally narrower and traffic can be dense, particularly in urban areas.

Driving in Okinawa

Understanding Traffic and Transportation Dynamics

Adapting to Local Traffic Patterns

Heavy Congestion: With no subway or extensive rail system, most people rely on cars, making traffic congestion common, particularly around military bases and urban centers.

Relaxed Driving Pace: Okinawa's slower lifestyle is reflected in driving habits. While U.S. roads might see more urgency, Okinawan drivers generally travel at a leisurely pace. Adopting a relaxed mindset can make driving less stressful and help you blend in with local drivers.

Cultural Courtesy: Courtesy and patience are core values in Okinawa. Respecting other drivers and practicing calm, polite driving will help you navigate more smoothly and even earn respect from locals.

Driving in Okinawa

Mastering Traffic Lights and Navigating Intersections

Navigating Okinawa's Intersections and Road Conditions

Traffic Light Timing: Prepare for longer wait times at traffic lights, as cycles are often extended. This may seem unusual, but it allows for smoother traffic flow in busy areas.

Intersection Caution: Be cautious when your light turns green. Some drivers may still be clearing the intersection, so verify it's clear before proceeding.

Limestone Roads and Weather: Many Okinawan roads are limestone-based, making them slippery in wet conditions. Rainy days require extra caution with speed and braking to avoid accidents.

Unmarked Intersections: Japan doesn't use four-way stops. At intersections without traffic lights, the main road has the right of way. Patience and caution are crucial, especially for drivers unfamiliar with this setup.

Driving in Okinawa

Navigating Parking and Common Violations

Parking in High-Demand Areas

Limited Parking Availability: Due to space constraints, parking spots can be scarce, especially near popular sites and military bases. Look for legal parking to avoid fines or penalties.

Airport Parking Tips: At Naha International Airport, use designated zones for quick drop-offs and garages for longer stays. Remember, airport parking is cash-based (yen only), so plan accordingly.

Handling Tickets: If you receive a parking ticket, pay it promptly at a local bank or post office within the 14-day grace period to avoid added penalties.

Driving in Okinawa

Local Merging Habits and High-Risk Intersections

Understanding Okinawa's Unique Merging and High-Risk Areas

Different Merging Etiquette: Unlike the U.S., some Okinawan drivers may come to a complete stop before merging. This habit, while cautious, can surprise drivers unfamiliar with it, so stay alert and ready to adapt.

Motorcycles are restricted to the far-left side of the roadway on Highway 58 from Naha Port to Kadena Circle as well as roads 329 except within 100 feet (30 meters) of making a right turn.

High-Risk Intersections:

Isa Intersection (Highway 58): Near Camp Foster, this spot sees frequent rear-end collisions due to complex merging and traffic flow.

Michi-no-Eki Intersection (near Kadena Gate 3): Popular with tourists, this intersection is often crowded with tour buses and pedestrians, increasing accident risks.

Kokusai Street Intersection (near Kadena Gate 1): Known for high pedestrian and cyclist activity. Vigilance is key to navigating safely here.

Importance of Defensive Driving: Given Okinawa's narrow roads, wet conditions, and busy intersections, defensive driving is essential for safety, especially during the rainy season.

MCB Butler



POV OFFICE INFORMATION

CAMP FOSTER BLDG.5831 RM 118 DSN:645-7219

MON, TUE, THU & FRI 0730 -1600

POV EXAM 0800 & 1000(CHECK IN 30 MIN PRIOR) RENEWAL, DUPLICATES,
REINSTATEMENT & MISC. CUSTOMER SERVICE 1230 – 1600

CAMP COURTNEY BLDG.4319 RM124 DSN:622-6202

MON - FRI 0730 -1600

POV EXAM 0800 & 1000(CHECK IN 30 MIN PRIOR) RENEWAL, DUPLICATES,
REINSTATEMENT & MISC. CUSTOMER SERVICE 1230 – 1600

SERVICE AVAILABLE

- POV TESTING
- RENEWALS/DUPLICATE LICENSES AND RETEST

*TRANSFERS (ALL PERSONNEL TRANSFERRING A VALID SOFA LICENSE ISSUED BY
ANOTHER U.S. MILITARY INSTALLATION IN JAPAN); PLEASE CONTACT 645-7219.*

Kadena Air Base



OBTAINING A SOFA LICENSE

A Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) U.S. Forces, Japan Operator's Permit (USFJ Form 4EJ) stands as a contract of sorts between the Government of Japan (GoJ) and the United States allowing licensed military members, DoD civilians, and their families to drive while stationed in Japan.

We only issue Operator's Permits to Air Force, Space Force, DoDEA, AAFES, and DECA personnel. Marine Corps, Army, and Navy personnel must contact Camp Foster Base Safety Office, DSN: 645-3369 for respective permit issues.

Please note that individuals who are obtaining a SOFA permit for the first time or renewing a SOFA permit that has been expired for more than 30 days will be required to take the test in person. Please be advised that we will not disseminate any SOFA tests after 1530.

IWAKUNI
MCAS



SOFA Certification

- Hours of operation:
- Monday - Friday : 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Closed holidays)
- Location:
- Legal Assistance/SJA Building 608
- Phone:
- DSN: 253-5591