



Tsukuba!

No. 7

December 2025

English

Topic: Procedures Related to Driving in Japan

【車に関する手続きについて】

Note: All of the two-dimensional codes in this Tips lead to pages in Japanese. To view the pages in other languages, please use the automatic translation function.

Using a car is a convenient way for commuting, shopping, and leisure.

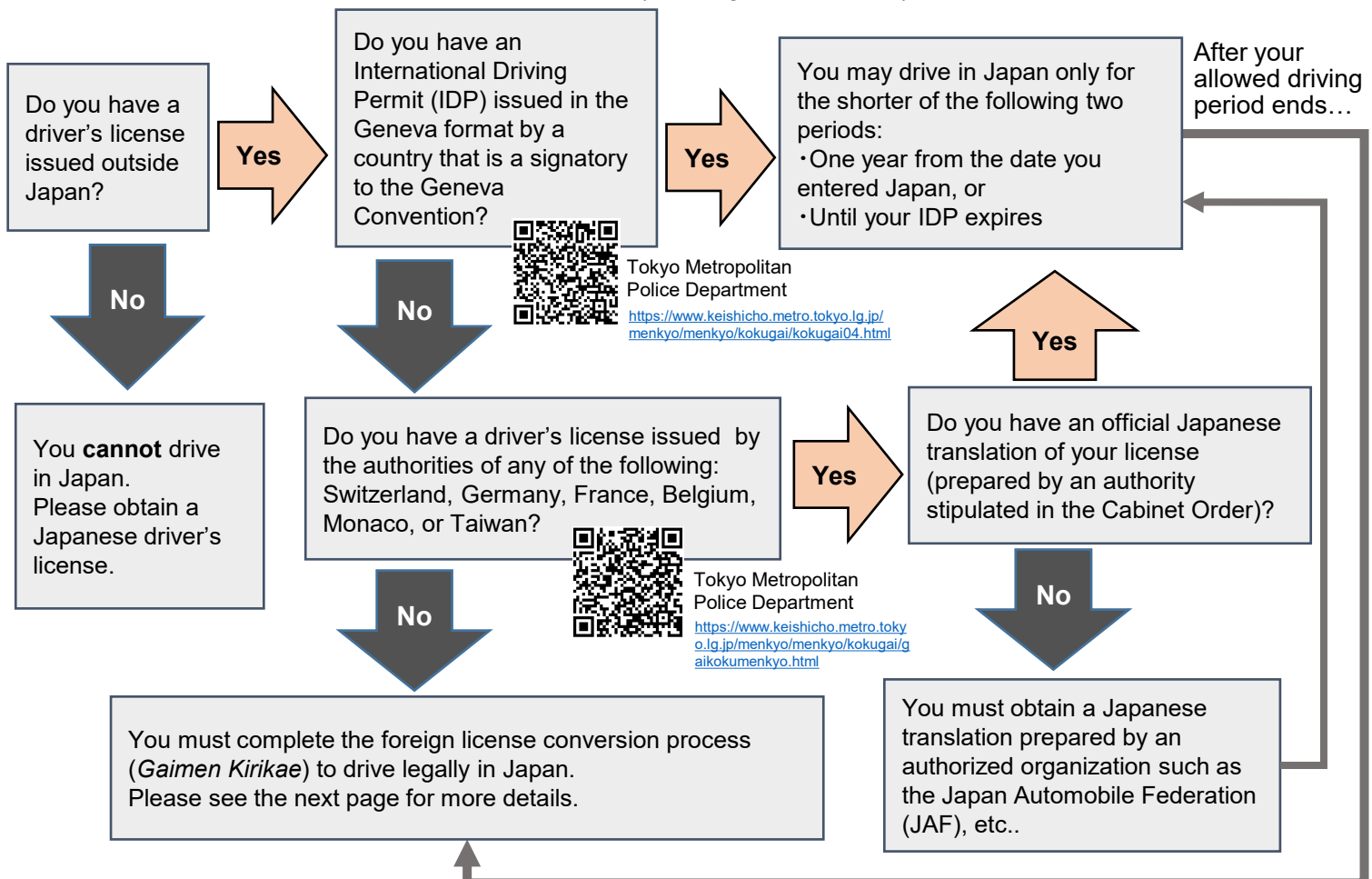
To drive in Japan, you must have a valid driver's license. If you plan to use a license issued outside Japan, there are specific rules you need to follow.

If you own a car, you also need to pay tax and join the appropriate insurance system.

This guide explains the basic information you need to know to drive safely and legally in Japan.

Do you plan to drive in Japan? (Assuming you do **not** have a Japanese driver's license)

If you plan to stay in Japan for more than one year, you should convert your foreign driver's license into a Japanese one (see page 2 for details).



Important !

If you are registered as a resident of a municipality in Japan and temporarily leave the country, the usual rules in this flowchart may not apply. Please check the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department website for details.



Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department
<https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/menkyo/menkyo/kokugai/ai/kokusaimenkyo.html>

How to Convert a Foreign Driver's License to a Japanese License in Ibaraki Prefecture

Converting a foreign driver's license to a Japanese license is called "Gaimen Kirikae" (Foreign License Conversion). To complete this process, you must meet certain requirements, pass a document screening, and pass the required tests.

① **Check Your Eligibility** Note: In principle, short-term visitors such as tourists are not eligible for license conversion. You can apply for conversion if you meet all of the following conditions and the age requirements for obtaining a license in Japan:

- You have a valid foreign driver's license.
- After receiving your foreign license, you stayed in the country that issued the license for a total of at least 3 months.

Note: You must prove this with passport entry/exit stamps and your license's issue date.

- You have an address in Ibaraki Prefecture.
- Your period of stay in Japan is valid.

For other requirements (such as age and eligibility), please check the Ibaraki Prefectural Police website.



Ibaraki Prefectural Police
– Eligibility requirements
https://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/kenkei/a03_license/exam/qualification.html

② Prepare the Required Documents

You will need: application form, examination ticket, questionnaire, residence certificate (*Juminhyo*), your foreign driver's license (bring all previous licenses if you have more than one), Japanese translation of your foreign driver's license (translations must be done by the JAF, the embassy/consulate of the issuing country in Japan, ZIPLUS Co., Ltd., or the Japan Drivers' License Support Association, etc.), passport (must include complete entry/exit records from the time you obtained your foreign license to the present), International Driving Permit (if you have one), two photos (height 3 cm × width 2.4 cm, taken within the last 6 months), Residence Card, and other documents as required.

Required documents may vary depending on the country or region. Please check the Ibaraki Prefectural Police website for details.



Ibaraki Prefectural Police – Foreign license conversion (Gaimen Kirikae)
https://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/kenkei/a03_license/exam/gaimen.html

③ Reservation and Examination Process

Online Reservation

You must make an online reservation in advance and prepare all required documents before visiting.

Document Screening

- Submit the documents listed in your online reservation instructions at the Ibaraki Driver's License Center.
- During the screening, you will be asked how you obtained your foreign license.
- You may be asked to submit additional documents depending on the screening results.
- If your documents are approved, you will take the knowledge test and skills test on the same day.

Knowledge Test

- You will also take vision and aptitude tests.
- The knowledge test is available in multiple languages.

Skills Test

- Only those who pass the knowledge test can take the skills test.
 - If you pass, you will receive your Japanese driver's license.
- Note: A fee is required for license issuance.



Important !

If you are not confident in Japanese, please come with an interpreter.

If you have any questions about the required documents or the tests, please contact the Ibaraki Driver's License Center in Japanese before your visit.

©Driver's License Center, Ibaraki Prefectural Police



Address: 3783-3 Nagaoka, Ibaraki-machi, Higashi-Ibaraki-gun, Ibaraki-ken

Phone: 029-293-8811 (available in Japanese only)

What do you need to own a car?

① You have to pay tax

In Japan, car owners have to pay taxes annually. The tax amount and payment destination vary depending on the type of vehicle.

Category	Where to Pay Tax	When Tax Payment Notice Arrives	Displacement	License Plate Color	Details
Standard Car	Ibaraki Prefecture (Prefectural Tax)	Prefectural Tax: Words printed on envelope 「自動車税(種別割)納税通知書在中 Motor Vehicle Tax Notice/ Notificação para Pagamento de Imposto sobre Veículos/ 机动车税納税通知書」	Over 660cc	White *Exceptions may apply.	Ibaraki Prefecture  https://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/somu/zeimu/fuka/jidousha/syubetsu.html
Kei Car (Lightweight vehicle with engine size up to 660 cc)	Tsukuba City (City Tax)	It arrives around May every year. Payment via QR code is available City Tax: Words printed on envelope 「軽自動車税(種別割)納税通知書在中 Lightweight Vehicle / Motorcycle Tax」	Up to 660cc	Yellow *Exceptions may apply.	Tsukuba City  https://www.city.tsukuba.lg.jp/soshikikarasagasu/aimubushiminzeika/gyomuannai/4/1/20406.html

- **As a general rule, the owner listed on the vehicle registration certificate as of April 1st each year is responsible for paying that year's tax.** (Note: If the vehicle was purchased on loan, the user listed on the registration certificate is responsible for paying the tax.)
- If the tax is unpaid, you cannot have the vehicle inspected (see ③ at the bottom of this page).
- When selling or transferring ownership of a vehicle, you have to complete the name change procedure (see page 4 for details).

② Get Insurance

To prepare for accidents, obtain both **compulsory automobile liability insurance** and **voluntary insurance**. If you injure someone or you damage property, you may have to pay high costs yourself without voluntary insurance.

Q. What's the difference between compulsory automobile liability insurance and voluntary insurance?

Types of Insurance	Enrollment	Insurance Coverage
Compulsory Automobile Liability Insurance	Mandatory	Provides minimum coverage for injuries to others in an accident
Voluntary Insurance	Strongly Recommended	Covers vehicle repairs, medical/hospitalization expenses for yourself and others involved



What should I do if I get into an accident?

If you hit an object, vehicle, or person while driving, call 110 to contact the police.

Even minor accidents must be reported.

Regardless of the accident's severity, leaving the scene may result in penalties, and failing to contact the police could invalidate your insurance coverage.

If anyone is injured, call 119 for an ambulance and provide first aid immediately.



③ You are required to have your vehicle inspected!

A **vehicle inspection** is a check to ensure that your car is safe to drive. It is required by law, and all vehicle owners must comply. Driving a vehicle that has not passed inspection, or whose inspection has expired, is illegal and may result in penalties. Vehicle inspections can be carried out at dealerships, inspection centers, gas stations, auto stores, and other authorized locations.

◎ Timing of Vehicle Inspections



- When you purchase a new standard passenger car or kei-car (Lightweight Vehicle), the first inspection is required 3 years after purchase.
- After that, inspections are required every 2 years.



④ Securing a parking lot

Owners of standard vehicles are legally required to secure a parking space off public roads and submit an Automobile Storage Location Certification Application (Garage Certificate) to the police.

Additionally, owners of Kei Car (Lightweight Vehicle) residing in designated areas must also submit an Automobile Storage Location Notification to the police.


Category	Document Name/ Designated Area within Tsukuba City	When to submit	Where to submit	Details
Standard Car	Application for Vehicle Storage Location Certificate/ Throughout Tsukuba City	When purchasing a new vehicle When changing the owner When changing the address	Tsukuba Police Station	Ibaraki Prefectural Police  https://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/kenkei/a06_shinsei/street_traffic/depositary01.html
Kei Car (Lightweight Vehicle)	Notification of Vehicle Storage Location/ Throughout Tsukuba City, excluding the former Kukizaki-matchi	When purchasing a new lightweight vehicle When changing the owner When changing the parking location of a lightweight vehicle When converting a vehicle from commercial to private use When the owner of a lightweight vehicle moves into a designated area		Ibaraki Prefectural Police  https://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/kenkei/a06_shinsei/street_traffic/depositary02.html

⑤ Updating your vehicle registration certificate

Every vehicle has a document called Vehicle Registration Certificate that contains information about the vehicle and its owner. If the owner's name or address changes, you must update the information on the certificate.

For standard vehicles, this procedure is handled at the local Transport Bureau. For lightweight vehicles, it is handled at the local Light Motor Vehicle Inspection Association.

◎ When a Tsukuba City resident changes the information on their vehicle registration certificate

Category	Where to apply	When you become the registered owner through a sale or transfer	Details
Standard Car	Tsuchiura Vehicle Inspection and Registration Office	Transfer registration (change of ownership) required (within 15 days)	MLIT  https://www.jidouhat-bureau.go.jp/jidouhat-bureau/kenkei/index.html
Kei Car (Lightweight Vehicle)	Light Motor Vehicle Inspection Organization Ibaraki Office Tsuchiura Branch	Vehicle tax and lightweight vehicle tax are generally levied on the owner listed on the vehicle registration certificate. If the owner on the certificate changes, the new owner becomes responsible for the tax for the following fiscal year onwards. By law, failure to register within 15 days may result in a fine.	

Don't lend your name for car registration!

Registering a vehicle in your name on behalf of someone else -such as a friend or family member- is called name lending. If you lend your name, you may be held responsible for accidents or traffic violations, and you could also be liable for taxes and insurance premiums. To avoid any trouble, the person who actually uses the vehicle should register it in their own name.

○What is a temporary license plate?

A temporary license plate is a provisional plate required for vehicles with expired inspections or unregistered vehicles to operate on public roads. To use a temporary license plate, you must have compulsory automobile liability insurance.

•Where to Apply: Tsukuba City Hall, 1st Floor, Citizen Services Division /

Each Citizen Services Office (available in Japanese only)

•Fee: ¥750 per vehicle

Check the Tsukuba City website for required documents.



Tsukuba City

<https://www.city.tsukuba.lg.jp/kurashi/shomei/karinum/1001839.html>

Note from Translator/翻訳者から一言

When I traveled to the United States, I was surprised to learn that cars drive on the right side. I was also shocked that in the U.S., it's allowed to turn right at a red light. These unfamiliar rules made me more cautious while traveling.

アメリカは右側通行で、赤信号でも右折して大丈夫だと知り驚きました。日本とは異なる交通ルールに戸惑いながらも、安全に気をつけて旅行を続けました。