

3-2. Traffic rules in Japan you need to know

Although travelers from South Korea and Taiwan may be afraid of driving on the left in Japan at first, they will gradually get used to doing so when driving on ordinary roads. However, the driver may slip back into their normal habit at a critical moment, so it is important to remain calm but cautious while driving.

- 1 Left-hand traffic!**
Japan basically has a left-hand traffic system.
 - 2 Right-turning cars must wait!**
Oncoming cars driving straight and turning left have right of way in principle. Right-turning cars must wait for oncoming vehicles to go through/past before turning.
 - 3 Never fail to stop when a traffic light is red.**
When a traffic signal is red, not only cars going straight but also ones turning left must stop.
 - 4 Obey arrow traffic lights.**
Although a traffic light is red, cars which are turning in the direction of a green arrow traffic signal may make a turn.
- 26**
-
- 5 Always pay attention to speed limits! Legal speed limit is 60 km/h!**
Speed limits on roads without traffic signs are 60 km/h on public roads and 100 km/h on expressways.
 - 6 Pay attention to no-overtaking zones!**
Do not overtake in the no-overtaking zones.
 - 7 Bring your car to a complete stop at stop signs and in front of train crossings!**
In Japan, you must stop your car at stop signs, and it is a traffic violation not to stop completely. Drivers must also stop in front of train crossings.
- 27**
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- 8 Watch the traffic light in front carefully, and do not start to move before the traffic light turns green!**
There are traffic lights on busy streets, which stay green for longer than usual. In addition, there are a number of unique intersections which are set up so that pedestrians and vehicles are never crossing at the same time as the traffic signals for pedestrians only come on when all vehicles are stopped.
 - 9 Never drink and drive!**
Not drinking and driving is obvious but please note that sober passengers who travel with a driver who has been drinking, and who may have encouraged the driver to drink will also be punished.
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The basic points for driving in Japan are introduced here. Exclamation marks have been used for points which may differ greatly from the rules in travelers' own countries.

① Left-hand traffic!

Roads in Japan use a left-hand traffic system. Since right-turning cars may be waiting in the right hand lane of a two-lane road, keep driving in the left lane if you do not intend to turn right. Don't forget to use your indicators when changing lanes so that cars behind know your intentions.

Pay attention to the differences from your own country.



Taiwan



South Korea

② Right-turning cars must wait!

Drivers are asked to give way to oncoming vehicles in principle when the driver intends to turn right. Make right turns after oncoming cars have traveled past or turned left. Priority is given to left turns in Japan. There are no rules regarding giving way to right-turning cars

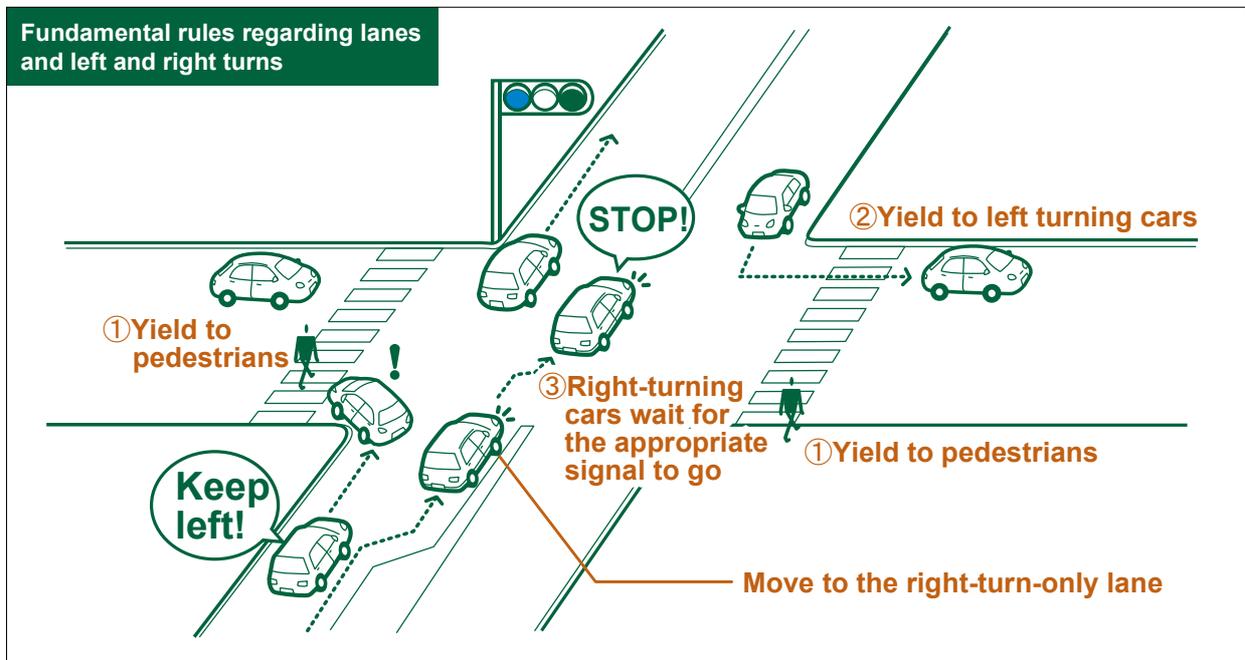
Pay attention to the differences from your own country.



Singapore

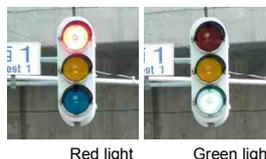


Taiwan



③ Never fail to stop when a traffic light is red.

In Hokkaido there are no roads or junctions where you “filter” left when the traffic lights in front of you are red. When the traffic light turns red, not only cars going straight but also left-turning cars have to stop. Wait until the traffic light becomes green.



Red light

Green light

Pay attention to the differences from your own country.



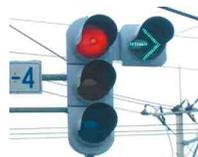
Hong Kong



South Korea

④ Obey arrow traffic lights.

When the traffic light is red, all cars must in principle stop. However, where there are arrow traffic lights provided below or at the side of the traffic lights, you may turn in the direction the arrow points when it is green. Right-turn arrow traffic lights are the most prevalent. When a right-turning arrow is shown, turn quickly while paying full attention to oncoming vehicles. Many intersections where this type of traffic light is provided have right-turn-only lanes.



Arrow traffic light

Pay attention to the differences from your own country.



Taiwan

5 Always pay attention to speed limits! Legal speed limit is 60 km/h!

As there are many wide and long roads with few buildings lining them in Hokkaido, it is easy to lose a sense of your speed, and drivers may press down on the accelerator without thinking. Speed limits are set at 30-50km/h in urban areas and 40-60km/h in the suburbs and on major roads. The speed limit is normally set at 70-100km/h on expressways but in adverse weather conditions such as high winds and blizzards, the limit can be lowered to 50km/h. Due to the large number of long roads, there are many public roads and expressways with long distances with no signs indicating speed limits or with electric signs that are showing no speed limits. On such roads, drivers are asked to obey the legal speed limits (60 km/h for public roads, 100km/h for expressways). Focus first on making a safe driving trip while paying attention to speed limits.



Basic speed sign



Electric speed limit sign

6 Pay attention to the no-overtaking zones!

Don't pass other cars in no-overtaking zones. It is because it is dangerous to do so that the zone was established. For example, the roads may have obstructed views or sharp curves ahead. Wait until the no-overtaking zones is finished and it is safe for a driver to pass others to pass other vehicles.



Unbroken yellow center lines indicate no passing zones.



Broken white center lines signify an ordinary zone.

7 Bring your car to a complete stop at stop signs and in front of train crossings!

Bring your car to a complete stop to safety check left and right

In Japan, it is a strictly enforced rule that you must bring your car to a stop at stop signs, and halfway stops are not permitted. A "stop" means that a car completely stops and the driver looks left and right. In addition, since V-shaped signs are peculiar to Japan, remember what they mean. Usually, no "Stop" signs are located on roads which cross other roads with V-shaped signs. In other words, cars are traveling at high speeds on the road you need to cross. In the event of an accident, full responsibility is apportioned to the driver who did not stop their car. Pay full attention and make sure you stop the car completely.

Pay attention to the differences from your own country.



Taiwan



South Korea

Each country's stop sign



Japan



Taiwan



South Korea

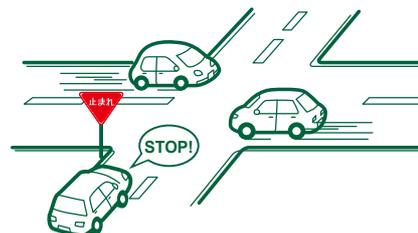


Singapore



Hong Kong

Standard layout of intersections with a stop sign



Completely stop a car in front of train crossings!

Drivers must completely stop their car in front of train crossings to confirm that no trains are coming from left and right and the car can move forward safely. If the traffic over the train crossings is backed up, the car will not be able to move over the crossing for a long time.

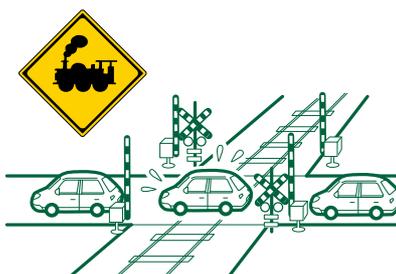


Diagram of cars not able to move over a train crossing

Pay attention to the differences from your own country.



Hong Kong



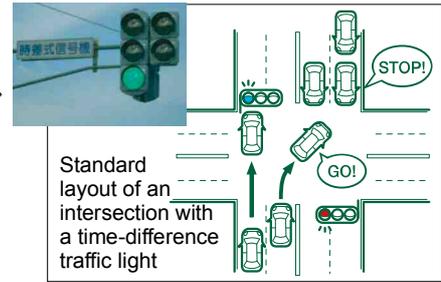
Singapore



Taiwan

8 Watch the traffic light in front carefully, and do not start to move before the traffic light turns green!

an intersection with a time-difference traffic light →

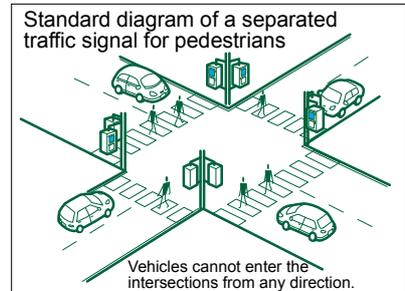


What is a time-difference traffic light?

When the traffic light for the lanes in your direction is red, the signal for the oncoming lanes is usually red, too. Time-difference traffic lights, however, are set to be green for busy lanes longer than for the other lanes.

What are separate traffic signals for pedestrians?

There are separate traffic signals for pedestrians in areas where there are many pedestrians in order to be able to keep pedestrians and vehicles separate. When traffic lights for vehicles are green, all the traffic signals for pedestrians are red. Then, when all the traffic lights for vehicles turn red, the intersections are open for pedestrians to walk.



9 Never drink and drive!

All over the world it is now considered common sense not to drive a car under the influence of alcohol. It is the same in Japan, however enforcement of the law and penalties for breaking it are stricter here. If alcohol is detected by a breath test, you will be penalized with imprisonment of up to three years or a fine of up to a 500,000 yen. Even more severe penalties are imposed for driving while intoxicated. In Japan, drivers who refuse to take a breath test are also punished. Sober passengers who ride together with a drunken driver as well as those who encouraged a driver to drink will also be punished. Never drink and drive.



Column

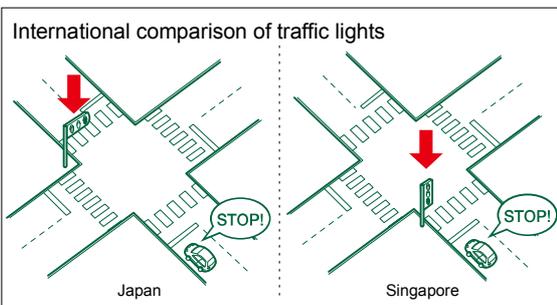
Position of traffic signals

International drivers should initially pay attention to the position where they should stop their car. Please note that traffic lights in Japan are located on the front side of intersections and you must stop your car rather far from

Pay attention to the differences from your own country.



Bite-sized information for your benefit

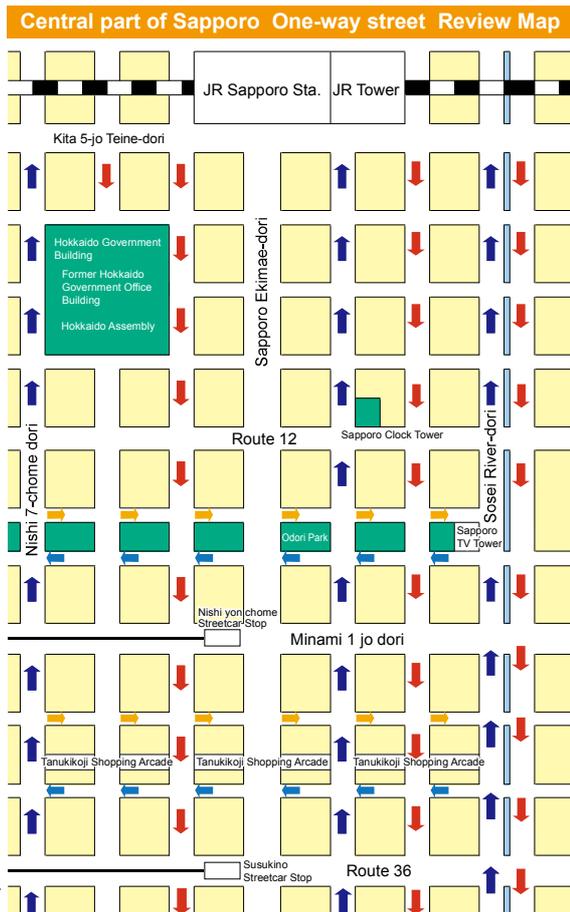
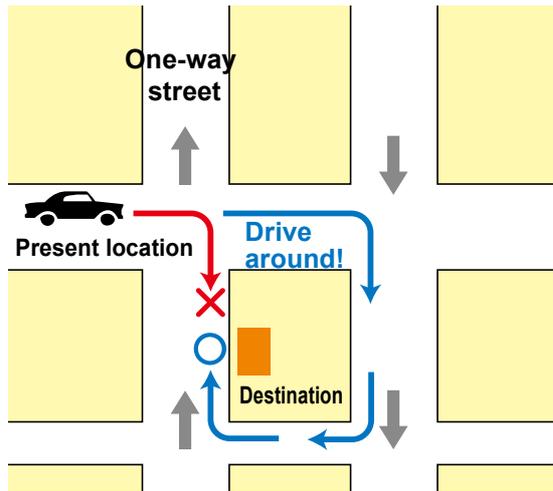


● Department of Environment and Lifestyle, Hokkaido Government
 “Basic knowledge of traffic safety”
 (Japanese, English, Traditional Chinese, Korean)
<http://www.pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/ks/dms/saftydrive/eng/index.htm>

● Sapporo Rental Car Association
 “Video Promoting Safe Driving”
 (Japanese, English)
<http://sapporo-renta.com/movie>

What do you do if you cannot make a turn because the road you want to turn into is a one-way street?

One-way streets can be frequently found in downtown areas and on busy streets. To reach your destination, you will have to pass the one-way street and drive in a round-about way to your destination. In the central part of Sapporo, one-way streets run from south to north alternating. Drivers should learn the layout of roads at least in the central part of the city.



What do you do in such a case?

Column

Buckle up to save your life! Never forget.

It is the responsibility of not only the driver but also passengers to fasten their seatbelts. In 2008, passengers became legally required to fasten their seatbelts, even in the back seat. All children under 6 must be seated in child seats. Since rental car companies rent child seats at relatively low prices, make sure to reserve them in advance.



Bite-sized information for your benefit



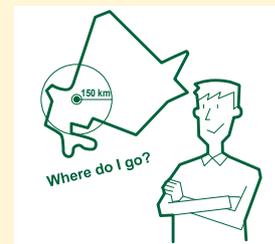
Quick Tip

For comfortable driving in Hokkaido



The total distance you cover in a driving trip should not exceed 150 kilometers per day.

That is, if a driver plans their driving routes by themselves, the total distance of the trip should not exceed 150 kilometers per day. The total number of hours spent driving should also be less than three to four hours on public roads. Even if you include time for meals and sightseeing, the total driving time should not exceed the figure above. Design the trip with spare time built in to take side trips. In addition, it is recommended to calculate the distance between the places where you intend to stay and plan with that information in mind. Careful selection of places to stay will have an important effect on your driving trips.



Avoid driving at night!

It is hard to find destinations in places you do not know at the best of times but as drivers face increased difficulties in finding landmarks in darkness after sunset, the chances of getting lost increase. Hokkaido roads in the suburbs usually have no or few street lights, and they may be darker than you imagine. Be careful especially about driving in autumn and winter when the hours of daylight get shorter.



When a penalty sticker is affixed to your car

As parking violations are stringently policed in Japan, be sure to park your car in appropriate parking areas or assigned lots when leaving your car, even for a short time. When a penalty sticker is affixed to your car, payment of a fine between 10,000 yen and 18,000 yen will have to be made (in the case of passenger cars).

When a parking fine sticker is attached to a rented car

1. Reporting to a police station

Report to the police station indicated on the parking sticker immediately.

2. Pay the fine

When you go to the police station, complete the necessary documents and you will receive a payment notice. Pay the illegal parking fine at the nearest financial institution (bank etc) and get a receipt.

3. Report to the rental car company

Present the completed forms for the penalty and your receipt. Penalties may be incurred for failing to make the required notifications.



Make a phone call to the number shown here.

Memo You must inform the rental car company of any parking fines!

When a parking fine sticker is affixed to a car, the owner is contacted and informed of the violation through the license plate (in this case, the rental car company). Go through the formalities by following the instructions of the police before returning your rented car.



Make sure you know the areas in which parking is banned

There are many people from other countries who violate the parking regulations in Japan. According to a survey by rental car companies, the arrest rate for illegal parking by people from abroad is eight times the rate of Japanese. Check the areas where parking is banned by checking traffic signs and lane markings.

The policing of on-street parking is very stringent. Where, then, should a driver park their car?

The policing of parking and penalties for violation became very stringent after revision of the law in June 2006. A driver cannot park their car just anywhere, so please park your car after checking the parking signs. When a parking fine sticker is affixed to your car, payment of a fine between 10,000 and 18,000 yen is required (in the case of passenger cars). From the start, park your car in parking lots.

Column

Small soba noodle shops or curry-and-rice restaurants in regional towns may provide no or few parking lots. Even in these cases, never park your car on the road. As the shop may provide parking lots a little further from the shop, ask the shop staff for information.



No Parking signs

No Parking and No Stopping



This sign indicates an area where parking and stopping is prohibited. Drivers cannot park or even stop their car on roads with this sign. The upper "8 - 20" means the restriction is applicable from 8:00 to 20:00. Parking is restricted all day if the sign displays no such numbers.

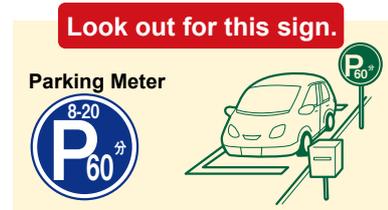
No parking zone



This sign indicates a no parking zone. On roads with this sign, a driver cannot park the car except to let off passengers or take on or drop off things. The upper "8 - 20" means the restriction is applicable from 8:00 to 20:00. Parking is restricted all day if the sign displays no such numbers.

Use pay parking meters!

If you wish to park your car temporarily, use pay parking meters. It is relatively easy to find and use pay parking meters. Parking spaces are marked with white enclosing lines drawn on the streets in the area where the sign at right is posted. The meter is operated on an advanced payment system for up to 60 minutes, after which it is considered to be illegal parking.



- 1 Park your car in a designated space.
- 2 Insert coins in the parking ticket vending machine.
- 3 A parking ticket will be dispensed.
- 4 Affix the parking ticket inside the windshield so that it is visible from outside.
- 5 Check the expiration time for the ticket. You need to be careful as it will be a parking violation if your car is parked more than 60 minutes.

Use both private and public parking facilities!

Parking fees vary among locations. In this handbook you will be given information on parking fees in Sapporo's city center, the hardest place to find parking in Hokkaido. The department stores and shopping malls you may visit will have contract parking lots. Be sure to check in advance if they offer free parking if you spend a certain amount of money in their shop. Fee structures vary from one parking lot to the next. Some parking lots charge a flat all-day rate (about 1,000 – 2,000 yen) whether you park for a short period (around 20 minutes) or hours.

Regarding the current going rates (as of March 2014), fees around Sapporo Station are roughly 100 yen for 20 minutes and 300 to 400yen an hour, whereas in the Odori area, fees range from 100 yen for 15 minutes and 400 to 500 yen an hour. Needless to say, there are cheaper places to park outside the center city area.

Public Underground Parking Lots

There are three large underground parking lots in central Sapporo. They are so large and spacious that you can easily find a parking space but if you do not remember to note where you parked (such as noticing the number on the column nearest your car) you may be unable to find your car, so be careful.

Sapporo Station North Exit Underground Parking Lot
 ¥170 per 1/2 hr.
 8:00 – 22:00



Kita Ichijo Underground Parking Lot
 ¥190 per 1/2 hr.
 7:30 – 22:00



Sapporo Odori Underground Parking Lot
 ¥380 per hr.
 08:00~22:00



Multilevel/Tower Parking Garages

There are no large parking lots in the city center where there is a lack of space. Most parking lots are either multilevel or tower parking lots.

Multilevel Parking

Get a ticket at the entrance gate. Drive into the lot, ascend the spiral ramp and park in an available space. To exit, drive your car down the spiral ramp, insert your ticket and money in the machine.



Tower Parking

Following the attendant's instructions, cars need to be driven onto a platform that will be lifted like an elevator. To retrieve your car, give the ticket you received from the attendant when parking back to him/her and your car will be brought back down to the main level.



Self-Service Coin Parking

There are inexpensive self-service coin parking lots that allow you to park near the street. After you park your car, wheel-clamps will automatically rise into place to keep your wheels from moving. To remove your car, go to the car park pay meter, enter the stall number where you parked using the numeric keys and pay the parking fee. This will automatically release the wheel-clamps.



Other

There are, of course, the good old conventional parking lots with a pay booth at the entrance with an attendant sitting inside and you leave your car key with him/her. If you wish to obtain information on the area, it may be a good idea to use this type of parking lot so you can ask the attendant questions.



Japanese only

Handy Website

Sapporo Parking Information System

<http://parking-info.jp/sapporo/pc/index.php>

It is a Japanese only website, but the maps and photos are helpful.

