

Transportation

In Okinawa, public transportation consists almost entirely of buses. There is no train or subway system, and the monorail runs only from Naha Airport to Shuri Castle with 3 stations currently being constructed within Urasoe City. There are many, many taxis. People commute primarily by car or motorbike, but as Urasoe covers an area of less than 19 square kilometers, it's not difficult to get around on foot or by bicycle.

Buses

| | |
|-------------|----------------|
| Ryukyu Bus | (098) 863-2821 |
| Okinawa Bus | (098) 861-0385 |
| Naha Bus | (098) 868-7149 |
| Tōyō Bus | (098) 867-2313 |

There are four main bus companies in Okinawa. Ordinary buses have route numbers, which are coordinated between companies (e.g. there is only one route 86 bus line), so if you know the route number, you do not need to worry about getting on the wrong bus. The bus system may seem confusing at first, but once you get used to the bus lines, they can be quite convenient. When visiting an urban area, it may be easier and cheaper to take the bus than to park your car.

How to Ride the Bus

- Stand visibly by the bus stop, or the bus driver may not see you.
- Take a ticket (seiriken 整理券) upon entering the bus. The number printed on your ticket corresponds to the stop where you boarded, and will determine the fare you pay when you get off.
- Press the "stop" button by your seat when you are approaching your stop (this will cause a sign at the front of the bus to become illuminated if it is not already).
- When you get off the bus, put your fare (exact change) into the fare box along with your ticket. If you do not have change, use the change machine below the fare box.

Bus stops generally have the name of the stop written in both kanji and the Roman alphabet. Inside the bus, the display is in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean. Bus stops are usually announced as well, so you can listen for your stop, but some bus drivers do not announce every stop. If you do not know when to press the stop button for your stop, you can speak to the bus driver when you board (see useful phrases below). Also, the maps on the bus stops are only in Japanese, but if you know your route number, you can check the timetable to find out when the next bus will come. If all else fails, ask the friendly Okinawans around you for help!

Discount passes are available for adults and students, but are usually limited to certain routes. You can purchase these at the main bus terminal in Naha. A book of all the bus routes in Okinawa, and timetables for all the routes is available from the bus information counter in Naha Airport.

Useful Phrases for Riding the Bus

| | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Please let me off at ____. | ____ de oroshite kudasai. | ____ で下ろしてください。 |
| Does this bus go to ____? | Kono basu wa ____ yuki desu ka? | このバスは ____ ゆきですか。 |

Other Tips for Using the Bus

A yellow IC card called Okica may also be purchased at any bus terminal or monorail station to be used in bus and monorail transportation. This allows you to use the bus or monorail without having to worry about carrying loose change. The Okinawa Busnavi website is another useful tool when researching bus stops and timetables. Currently, only the Japanese language section has access to bus GPS tracking.



Taxis

Taxis in Okinawa are plentiful and can be readily found everywhere 24 hours a day. The starting rate is ¥500 for a standard taxi, but rates increase from 11:00pm to 5:00am. You'll notice that a rate-increase (warimashi 割増) light goes on to indicate this.

If you are traveling alone, or with one other person, it is far more economical to take the bus than a taxi. However, groups of three or four may want to take a taxi, for greater speed, comfort and convenience.

Calling a Taxi

If you are near a main street, wave your hand in the air as you see a taxi approaching. A red light in the front window indicates that the taxi is vacant, while a green sign indicates that a passenger is already inside. If you would like to phone a taxi, please check the following link (Japanese only):

<http://www.oki-taxi.or.jp/call.html>

Phoning a Taxi

| | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| I'd like a taxi, please | Takushī onegaishimasu | タクシーをお願いします。 |
| I am at _____. | _____ ni imasu | _____ にいます。 |
| I'd like to go to _____. | _____ made onegaishimasu. | _____ までお願いします。 |
| My name is _____. | Namae wa _____. | 名前は _____。 |

Giving Directions

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Left/Right | Hidari/Migi | 左・右 |
| Please stop here. | Koko de tomatte kudasai. | ここで停まってください。 |
| Go straight. | Massugu desu. | まっすぐです。 |
| It's near _____. | _____ no chikaku desu. | _____ の近くです。 |

Approximate taxi fares from Urasoe City Hall (during regular hours):

Kokusai Dōri, Naha: ¥1,400

Goya, Okinawa City: ¥3,000

Airport: ¥2,200

* It is not necessary to tip taxi drivers in Japan.

Monorail

The new monorail, also known as the Yui Rail (Yui-rēru ゆいレール), was completed in 2003 and runs from the Shuri Castle Station to the airport. It is safe and smooth, and provides a lovely view of Naha from above. It is also a lot faster than buses, particularly during rush hour. The maximum fare is ¥330 (¥170 for children) and the minimum fare is ¥230 (¥120 for children).

One or two-day unlimited use tickets are also available. A one-day unlimited use ticket costs ¥800 (¥400 for children) and the two-day unlimited use ticket costs ¥1,400 (¥700 for children).

Ferries

Okinawa's outer islands can be reached by ferry or plane. You can take a ferry from Naha's Tomarin Port (Tomarin 泊港) to the Keramas, Kume, and other islands west of Okinawa's main island. Islands off the northern part of Okinawa's main island can be reached by ferry from ports in Motobu and Nakijin.

Long distance ferries to the Japanese mainland (Kagoshima, Osaka, Kobe, and Tokyo) and the Amami Islands leave daily from Naha Shinkō (那覇新港). As of 2008, long-distance ferry service to the Yaeyama Islands and Taiwan from Okinawa has been stopped.

Bicycles

(Jitensha 自転車)

Bicycles are for sale at most major department stores. Alternatively, there are several specialty shops which sell high-end bicycles in Naha. Used bicycles are for sale at Recycle Plaza (see Housing Chapter) as well as at several independent bicycle repair shops around Urasoe such as Cycle Shop Pipeline (on Pipeline Street in the Iso area). No licenses are required for bicycles, but to prevent theft, the bicycle must be registered in your name. The shop where you purchase a bicycle will do the paperwork for you. Unlike other types of crime, bicycle theft is common on Okinawa, so please secure your bike.



Converting a Foreign License to a Japanese License

Responsible Organizations: **Okinawa Prefectural Police Driver's License Center**
(Okinawa-ken Keisatsu Menkyo Sentā 沖縄県警察免許センター)
Address: 3-22 Tomisaki, Tomigusuku
Telephone: (098) 851-1000

Starting from April 2017, the License Center will begin operating under a reservation system. Please note that reservations can be made starting from 2 months in advance. Reservations may be made over the phone or in person, but any specific consultations must be made in person. Reservations and consultations may be made from 8:30am ~ 11:00am or 1:30pm ~ 3pm. Please note that you will be placed on a waiting list if you arrive at the License Center without a reservation.

Requirements for Japanese License Conversion

- Documentation proving that you have held a driver's license for at least 90 days, as well as documentation proving your emigration and immigration dates
- Your foreign driver's license is NOT expired
- Proof that you are registered within Okinawa Prefecture in the Basic Resident Registration System
- Your passport and residence card are NOT expired

Necessary Documents (Original Documents)

- Foreign Driver's License (proof that you have held a driver's license for at least 90 days)
- Driving record (if the license issue date is not recorded on the driver's license)
- Japanese Translation of foreign driver's license (translated by Japanese Automobile Federation)
- Passport (to confirm emigration and immigration dates)
- Residence Card and Certificate of Residency
- Two 3cm x 2.4cm ID photos (white background, no head covering)
- Proof of mid-long term residence (more than 90 days)
- Depending on your nationality, other documentation may be required (please consult with the License Center)

Basic flow of license conversion

1. Application and document verification
2. Payment of application fee
 - Automobile ¥2,550
 - Motorbike ¥2,600
 - Moped ¥1,500
3. Eyesight test, etc. and reservation for written test
4. Written test (Available in 10 languages, 10 questions, offered every Wednesday starting from 10am)
5. Practical test (¥1,450 for the first test, subsequent tests are ¥1,450 + the appropriate application fee)
 - Automobile Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings
 - Motorbike Every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month
 - Moped Practical test is not required
6. Payment for driver's license (¥2,050), license picture taking, and receive driver's license

The following countries are exempted from the written and practical test for license conversion:

Iceland, Ireland, England, Italia, Austria, Australia, Netherlands, Canada, Greece, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Finland, France, Belgium, Portugal, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Monaco, Korea, Taiwan, Maryland State, Washington State, Hungary, Hawaii State (effective December 20, 2018)

Applicants who cannot speak Japanese should have an interpreter accompany them. SOFA personnel who do not have a driver's license are not able to apply for a license conversion. All written tests must be reserved by the day before the test.



Getting a Japanese License for UNLICENSED Drivers

Responsible Organizations: **Okinawa Prefectural Police Driver's License Center**
(Okinawa-ken Keisatsu Menkyo Sentā 沖縄県警察免許センター)
Address: 3-22 Tomisaki, Tomigusuku
Telephone: (098) 851-1000

If you do not have a license from your home country and you wish to get a Japanese license, you must go through the same licensing process as a Japanese national. As instruction and tests are conducted in Japanese, you must be able to speak a certain amount of Japanese to get your license this way.

Mopeds (Gentsuki Jitensha 原付自転車)

A Japanese moped license allows you to drive mopeds (2-wheeled vehicles under 50cc) without any special certification.

Necessary Documents (Original Documents)

- Residence Card
- Two 3cm x 2.4cm ID photos (white background, no head covering)
- Application forms (available at the License Center)
- About ¥10,000 to cover all expenses

You will need to bring these documents and take a written test. The test is offered at 1:00pm on weekdays, excluding holidays and the New Year holiday period. The test costs ¥1,500, which you must pay beforehand. Because the License Section is closed from 11:45am-1:00pm, you must arrive before 11:45am in order to turn in your paperwork and pay in time. A grade of 90% or over is passing, and it is a tricky test, so many people take it more than once. Subsequent re-tests have a reduced fee of ¥1,000. Those who pass the test must complete a short training course for a fee of ¥4,200, after which your license will be issued for ¥2,050. Please note that you must make a reservation for the training course beforehand.

Motorbikes (Jidō Nirinsha 自動二輪車)

There are two ways to get a license for a motorbike. If you already know how to ride a motorbike, you may take the practical test at the License Center in Tomigusuku. It costs about ¥4,050 and ¥3,100 for subsequent re-tests. If you pass, you will have to sign up for a supplementary training course to receive your license. This costs about ¥13,000 for either the standard or large motorbike license as well as ¥2,050 for the issuance of your license. Even if you already know how to ride a motorcycle, it is advisable to take a 50 minute practice test at the following driving school. Each test costs around ¥5,000, and will prepare you for the test course and requirements.

Itoman Jidōsha Gakkō (糸満自動車学校)

Address: 2278 Itoman, Itoman
Telephone: (098) 992-2138

You cannot make an appointment at the school, so you must visit directly and wait for a cancellation. Tell the staff at the school that you want to practice for "Ippatsu Shiken."

If you do not know how to ride a motorcycle, you will have to enroll in a training course at a driving school. Training courses last 2-3 months and cost upwards of around ¥150,000 - ¥250,000 depending on the type of motorbike license. Upon completion of the course, you will take the practical test at the driving school, rather than at the License Center.

Automobiles

Unlicensed drivers will have to attend driving school before they can receive their automobile driver's license. Tuition fees can cost upwards of ¥250,000 - ¥270,000 depending on the type of transmission (automatic or manual). Applicants will also be required to take and pass a written exam at the License Center that costs ¥3,350 and ¥1,750 for subsequent re-tests. Upon completion of the course, applicants will take the practical test at the driving school, rather than at the License Center.



Renewing your License

Responsible Organizations: **Okinawa Prefectural Police Driver's License Center**
(Okinawa-ken Keisatsu Menkyo Sentā 沖縄県警察免許センター)
Address: 3-22 Tomisaki, Tomigusuku
Telephone: (098) 851-1000

Licenses for all vehicles (moped, motorcycle, and automobiles) should be renewed before they expire. Generally, the renewal period is 3 months revolving around your birthdate, including both the month before and after your birthday. If you allow your license to expire, you will have to take the driver's test again to get a new license.

Necessary Documents (Original Documents)

- Driver's License
- Driver's License Renewal Notice
- Driver's License Renewal Application
- Residence Card
- ¥3,300 for a mandatory short training course

Take the above documents to the License Center on weekdays from 8:30am ~ 11:30am, or 1pm ~ 4:45pm and schedule for the mandatory short training course. If you choose to not take the training course, your renewal will become invalid.

Buying, Selling, and Disposing of Vehicles

Buying a Vehicle

If you wish to purchase a car, motorcycle, or moped, you will need a valid Japanese driver's license or IDP, your residence card, and a personal seal. If you are buying a white plate car, you will also need a proof of parking space (shako shōmeisho 車庫証明書). To get one, you must get a document from your landlord or rental agency showing your parking space. Your landlord may charge you a hefty sum for this document. Once you have the document from your landlord, bring it to the License Center. They will verify that it is correct, and prepare a proof of parking certificate for ¥2,200.

Automobile Acquisition Tax (Jidōsha Shutoku-zei 自動車取得税)

When an automobile is purchased, regardless of whether it is new or used, the purchaser must pay an acquisition tax. If you purchase a car through an auto dealer, they will take care of the paperwork for you.

Selling a Vehicle

Responsible Organizations: **Okinawa Land Transportation Office** (Okinawa Riku-un Jimusho 沖縄陸運事務所)
Address: 512-4 Minatogawa, Urasoe, Okinawa 901-2134
Telephone: (050) 5540-2091

If you wish to sell your vehicle, you must change the name on the vehicle registration. This process is called meigi henkō (名義変更). Visit the Land Transportation Office together with the buyer of your vehicle. Bring along both people's personal seals, proof of insurance, proof of vehicle inspection, proof that you have paid the yearly vehicle tax, and both people's resident cards and licenses. If you are selling a white plate car, you will also need both people's Personal Seal Registration Certificates, and the buyer's proof of parking space (shako shōmeisho 車庫証明書).

Disposing of a Vehicle

If you want to get rid of your vehicle, you must contact a private vehicle disposal company. Vehicle disposal is called haisha (廃車).



Vehicle Inspection & Insurance

Vehicle Inspection (Shaken 車検)

Cars must be inspected every two years (once a year for cars over 12 years old). Inspection is quite pricey, and will probably cost ¥100,000 plus any repairs your car might need. For this reason, it is good to confirm how much shaken is left if you wish to purchase a used car. Car inspections are carried out by private companies, so please check the phone book for a certified car inspection provider near you. Motorcycles of 400cc and above also require inspection.

Accident Insurance

All vehicle owners are required to purchase "Compulsory Liability Insurance" (jidōsha songai baishō sekinin hoken 自動車損害賠償責任保険). This insurance covers you (up to a certain sum) if you kill or injure a third party while driving. If you purchase your vehicle from a dealer, the dealer will take care of this for you.

The insurance will be good until your shaken expires and you have the vehicle inspected. You must keep your insurance certificate in the vehicle at all times. It is advisable to also take out "Optional Liability Insurance" (jidōsha nin-i hoken 自動車任意保険). With only the compulsory insurance, you will almost certainly be faced with paying some damages yourself in the case of a serious accident. Optional insurance not only covers third party injury or death to a higher amount, but also can cover property damage, injury, and death of passengers or drivers of your car. If you want to purchase optional insurance, talk to the dealer where you are buying a car.

Vehicle Tax

(Jidōsha-zei 自動車税)

Every year in May, all vehicle owners must pay a vehicle tax. You should receive a notice (nōfusho 納付書) in the mail telling you when and where to pay your taxes. The tax must be paid by the due date or you will not be able to drive legally on the roads of Okinawa.

The amount of the tax depends on what type of vehicle you own. The tax for yellow-plate cars, light motorcycles, and mopeds is under ¥10,000. This tax is collected by the city. The tax for white-plate cars and large motorcycles is considerably higher, depending on the engine size, but ranges from ¥30,000-¥100,000. This tax is collected by the prefecture.

