

DISCLAIMER: This guide was made specifically with anecdotes and personal experiences for Miyagi JETs in mind. This is not a step-by-step guarantee of how to get a Japanese license.

Living in rural Miyagi and need to get to work?
Plans to rent a car and take a road trip out of the city?
Want to get an official form of ID that isn't your residence card?

In order to legally drive in Japan you need either an International Drivers License OR an official Japanese driver's license. Your IDP will expire after a year so we *highly* recommend those staying longer than a year to at least start the process for getting a Japanese driver's license as soon as possible. There are two ways to get a Japanese license; going to a Japanese driving school OR getting your license transferred (+ driving and written test)

The Japanese Driving Schools is almost a straight route to get a Japanese license. HOWEVER, we do not recommend it unless you cannot obtain a driver's license in your home country because it is entirely in Japanese AND it is expensive as it is a monthly fee that can cost you around 300,000 yen after the fact.

EVERYONE who wants a driver's license in Miyagi has to go to the Driving Center in Sendai. Japan has several treaties in place so if you're a citizen of the following places, so some of you lucky ones will only need the license translation portion and transferring process done and you will not have to take the writing AND the driving portion of the test (unless specified).

The Lucky 29 List:

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|---|--------------------|
| 1. Iceland | 4. England |
| 2. Ireland | 5. Italy |
| 3. SPECIFIC STATES IN THE US: | 6. Australia |
| ➤ Exempt from the Written and
Practical Test | 7. Austria |
| ■ Virginia | 8. Netherlands |
| ■ Hawaii | 9. Canada |
| ■ Maryland | 10. Korea |
| ■ Washington (state) | 11. Greece |
| ■ Ohio | 12. Switzerland |
| ■ Oregon | 13. Sweden |
| Exempt from ONLY the
Practical Test: | 14. SPain |
| ❖ Indiana | 15. Slovenia |
| | 16. Czech Republic |
| | 17. Denmark |
| | 18. Germany |

19. New Zealand
20. Norway
21. Hungary
22. Finland
23. France
24. Belgium

25. Poland
26. Portugal
27. Monaco
28. Luxembourg
29. Taiwan

THE PROCEDURE:

This is expected to take multiple entire work days to complete so please plan accordingly.

1. Getting required documents such as the translation of your license as well proof of residing in your home country. (this will take at minimum two weeks to accumulate so please mind your IDP expiry date)
2. Confirmation of required documents, examination and interview
 - a. Your Written, Vision, and Driving Tests will be *by appointment on SEPARATE dates other than your initial document check*, so you will not be able to do the written and driving test on the same day as you apply with your documents
3. Written Test (good for 5 months once you pass it once)
4. Vision Test (before every driving attempt)
5. Driving Test (probably the more difficult part)
6. **GOAL:** Get your license! (has additional processing fee. Bring at least 7000 yen to cover all costs)

DRESS CODE: As this is a formal procedure, please dress in semi-business wear or something that looks nice. A nice shirt and blouse with some professional looking bottoms will do. It is not required to pass but I heavily recommend it each time you go to the Driving Center as your image does carry some weight. You might not want *that one* T-shirt as your license photo for an entire year.

ABOUT BRINGING AN INTERPRETER: If you are not confident in your Japanese language skill please bring an interpreter. You may ask your supervisor for assistance as they may be able to accompany you. A friend who is more fluent in Japan is acceptable as well. Another option is to email the Miyagi International Association (MIA's [website](#)) directly and request an interpreter two weeks ahead of time. The interpreters they provide are all volunteers so there is a chance that they won't be able to find someone available for your date so please plan ahead! The Driving Center may or may not allow you to proceed depending on this.

GETTING TO THE DRIVING CENTER:

- By Driving - Carpooling is encouraged! Please follow the signs to the parking lot and try not to enter the driving course!
- By Bus - There is a bus stop directly in front of the Driving Center that you can take from almost anywhere in Miyagi but also from Yaotome Station.
- By Train - The closest train station is Yaotome Station and from the station it is over a 35 minute walk so I highly advise taking the bus especially during adverse weather.

BIG NOTE about the Driving Center, the window for transferring foreign licenses is only open from 13:00 - 13:30. A short window of time but if you're there you'll be let in. The office is in a tiny corner of the center tucked away near the vending machines if they haven't moved. There's a sign on a door with the hours of availability so look for that to find the office.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS TO BRING but not required.

- FOLDERS: For your transferring and translation paperwork, I recommend that you keep them in two separate folders since translating and transferring require different materials. You will also receive a lot of information in form of pamphlets and papers so having a folder will just help keep things in one place.
- ADDRESS CARD: Bring a card with you as well that has your address in Japanese because you will be writing it multiple times. It's also just handy to have on your person as well. Your residence card may be taken away to be copied while you write your address so be careful! Kanji practice time yay!
- MEMO PAD AND WRITING THING: For notes or to help communication with the staff. Or just to doodle on while you wait. Definitely helped me when I went

FOR TRANSFERRING YOUR LICENSE:

official website [here](#)

- 外国免許証: A copy of your original license, clear color, front and back. Bringing the original isn't necessary but recommended
- 外国免許証の翻訳文: The translation you received from JAF (see below)
- 住民票: Your certificate of residence that can be bought at your local city hall
- パスポート: Passport to confirm dates and nationality
- 1 photo of yourself (3cm x 2,4cm) 写真1枚
- Proof of being living in your home country printed on your license for **3 months**. This is the part that is pretty finicky for both you and the driving center staff. You **MUST** have acceptable documents with listed dates that shows month and year. I recommend bringing multiple proof of residence!!! There is a chance of you having to come back another day if you are rejected at this stage.

- If you just graduated university or college prior coming on the JET Programme, your transcripts and/or proof of graduation can be used IF it lists the month and year of the classes you took. If it says “Spring 20XX” or “Fall 20XX” only, it may be rejected!
- Monthly pay stubs listing payout dates or working hours
- Tax payment information
- Bank statements; your monthly credit card payments for example

FOR THE TRANSLATION OF YOUR FOREIGN LICENSE:

official JAF info [here](#)

JAF now offers ONLINE application

Due to COVID-19, same-day processing may no longer be available as of this writing and all translations will be sent out via mail and will take around 1-2 weeks to be sent back to you.

- A driver’s license from your home country that isn’t expired (minimum of 6 months validity)
 - For the online application you need a clear front and back copy
 - You need to have had your license for at least three months prior to coming to Japan
- Your Japanese address (in Miyagi)
- 4000 yen for processing (Online Credit Card Payment only)
- Additional documents are required by country. Please go to the official website for more info.

~~If you go in person to apply you can bring your original license and the staff will copy it for you and return it on the same day.~~ JAF will cover return postage but will only mail to your registered address in Japan, so we advise you to wait until you arrive in Japan and settle in to do this step.

FOR THE INTERVIEW/ DOCUMENT CONFIRMATION:

If you’re part of the Lucky 29 list this will be the last step before getting your license. Please continue to the “THE END” section. Unless you’re from Indiana then please continue reading about the written test! (Sorry Indiana!) Everyone else, we’re in this to the end.

This is where an interpreter may come in handy. The interview portion is pretty straightforward. The process may have changed by the time of this writing but here’s what you can expect. You will be called into the office and go through a list of documents they will need. They will ask you questions pertaining to your past driving history.

Some examples may be included but not limited to:

- Did you go to a driving school in your home country?
- Were your driving lessons on the road or on paper only?
- Did you have an exam after your driving lessons were done? On a course or on-road test?
- How many hours did you record on your permit/provisional license before getting your actual license?
- Have you ever been in an accident?
- Have you ever received marks/demerit points on your license? (AKA. Have you had any infractions punishable by law?)

An important thing to note is that the MINIMUM requirement of proof of residing in your home country is THREE MONTHS,

BUT

if you can prove that you've had your license AND been residing in your home country for ONE YEAR then you will be exempt from being required to have the beginners mark on your car when you get your license.

FOR THE WRITTEN TEST:

The test is a 10 question test that you need at LEAST 7 questions correct to be considered passing. There are multiple versions of the test so if you come with someone to take the written test at the same time they will give different versions of the test to you. Note that these are usually machine translated from Japanese so wording may seem odd but the question and answers should be clear enough to infer.

Available Languages: English, Spanish, Persian, Korean, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese

Senpai Tips for the Written Test:

- You can go to the JAF website and read about Japanese traffic laws and even take safety quizzes to prepare for the real written test!
<https://english.jaf.or.jp/driving-in-japan/traffic-rules>
- Use your best logical thinking. If there is an arrow, you go in the direction of the arrow. If there is a red slash, that
- A big cultural question that gets most people is what to do in an earthquake. What is taught to new drivers is that you first turn off the car after pulling over safely with your hazards and leave your car keys in the ignition and get to high ground. You leave your keys in the car for the emergency response workers to easily move your car away. Please check out the JAF's webpage about disaster preparedness here:
<https://english.jaf.or.jp/safe-driving/disaster/protect-in-an-earthquake>
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FOR THE DRIVING TEST:

Prior to the actual driving portion you will be sent to a waiting room above the driving course. From there you can see the entire course and watch your fellow testers and see how they do. You may even make a new friend up there! You will receive a map of the driving course and the route when you sign up for your driving test date. This might be different from what others receive as it is based on the license you're going for. Different courses include taxi certification, truck driving, motorcycle license, etc. These other course takers will be on the SAME driving course as you but the route will be different so if you see another car on the course as you please be aware it is someone else trying to get their license too! You may also have someone else in the back seat of the car if you sign up around the same time.

It is rare for most to pass on their first try but not impossible! Unfortunately, each attempt will set you back about 4000 yen so less attempts are desirable. Those who did pass on the first try often said they drove slowly and exaggerated their body movements in the car. For example, leaning forward in the car to check around corners or turning their heads a full 90 degrees when checking for turns.

Senpai Tips for the Driving Test:

- A former JET has recorded the driving course for basic drivers with blinker indicators for us! Please use it for reference! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXBEiOuHRMU>
- As mentioned above, exaggerate your head movements when checking turns, checking lanes, and even when you begin to drive. A common tip is to blink three times in each direction then proceed.
- DO NOT FORGET THE EMERGENCY BRAKE. I've heard many test takers rev the engine and startle both themselves and the proctor as they attempt to start driving without disengaging the emergency brake. It's not a guaranteed fail but you don't want to start the test out on a bad look.
- Drive as slow BUT CONSISTENTLY as possible! Maintain an even 50KMPH throughout the course. If the proctor asks you to speed up, remember to verbally respond as you increase speed.
- *Allegedly*, most proctors are assessing more than just your driving skills. They are also judging your demeanor while driving. Constantly checking your mirrors and lane when appropriate will show you're being aware. Robotic driving just to pass the test usually resulted in a failure in my experience.
- Always stop before the solid line! The proctors are very picky if you cross that line!! Remember to stop before the line, THEN slowly proceed.
- Go in with the mindset that mistakes will happen but you will get through it! If you make a mistake just keep going because if you dwell on the mistake you will not be focused on the path ahead.
- One thing some people forget about during the test is the seatbelt. Seatbelt should be buckled at the beginning of the test AFTER adjusting your seat and stay buckled at the end even when you're just sitting in the car.

- Remember to greet the proctor! Good manners goes a long way! Respond to the proctor when they give you instructions during the actual driving portion as well; a simple “はい” or “OK” will be okay.

THE END?

If you took the driving test:

At the end of the driving test you will park the car at the start by indicating a left blinker and engage both the pedal brake AND the emergency break. Then while STILL BUCKLED you will have a conversation with the proctor about how you did. This is an important part of the test because you will not know if you passed or not just based off this conversation. You must wait until the end to know which is nerve wrecking. Acknowledge the feedback and try not to argue too much even if you think you did everything perfectly. You will then receive either a **pink** slip or a **blue** slip. You might have already assumed what each means.

PINK

Please try again next time. The proctor will hand you this slip and offer their condolences. Respectfully thank them for their time and return to the waiting area in front of the office. If it is not busy you may be seen quickly. The staff will take your pink slip and you will have to pay the processing fees. After that they will show you the scheduling calendar and ask when you'd like to come in next. This may not be for another three weeks so please try to take the driving test well before your IDP expires. This is not the end though! Think of the next time you take the test as just another opportunity!

BLUE

Congratulations! You've passed the driving test! Pat yourself on the back and treat yourself to some konbini fried chicken (or perhaps a cake) as a reward! But don't leave before paying your processing fees and getting your photo taken! You must wait awhile for the license to be printed and checked.

Receiving the Shiny New Card:

After waiting for everything to be processed you will receive your long awaited Japanese Driver's License. Your validity will be highlighted in a bright green and be valid for one year! Please check the information carefully and admire your nice photo! You can now flash your shiny new license when people ask for identification and your coworkers will be in awe that you were able to navigate the system that is the Japanese Driving Licensing Center.

I wish you all luck! I believe in you!

- MAJET 2023 Vice President, Jayne Dinh