



# HELLO OKAYA

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This newsletter is distributed four times a year by the Okaya International Exchange Association, with the aim of providing local foreign residents with information necessary for daily life, as well as insight into aspects of Japanese culture. Please feel free to contact us with your feedback or any questions you may have.

## Winter Road Safety

Winter is finally here.

During this season, Suwa area is particularly freezing and driving condition from January to February is at its most dreadful due to snowfall and icy roads.

Everybody uses different modes of transportation in their daily lives to go to school or work, or to visit the hospital or to do the grocery. But have you ever had the unfortunate experience of getting into a road accident? In wintertime, roads can be very slippery, and walking alone can be very difficult. All the more reason to be extra careful when riding your bicycle, motorcycle or car.

Breaks may not also work on frozen roads, which can cause untoward incidents, so cycling and driving have added risks during winter. And what a great deal of trouble it is, if ever you cause any injury to pedestrians!

That's why we must be careful when driving and be extra cautious of school children crossing the roads or people going to work or the elderly going to hospitals.

It is important to pay attention to our surroundings at all times and to be concern not only of oneself but of others too.

In Japan, when you are on the road and riding a motorcycle, you will seem little and farther from the point of view of other motorists. Compared to cars, you run faster but you look smaller and other drivers can have a hard time noticing you. It is important to keep in mind that distance and speed perception can be affected when riding such vehicles and that utmost care is needed.

We also cannot stress enough the importance of following traffic safety laws in Japan, particularly driving under the influence of alcohol. Once you consume alcohol, your car can turn into a lethal weapon that can wreak havoc to others! Do not ever think that you have a high tolerance for alcohol, or that you have only drank a little, or there are no cops at this time of the day, or accidents will never happen to you. Driving while intoxicated is a serious offense that one should bear in mind and that precious lives can be at stake if this traffic rule is not followed.



Lastly, for foreigners who use the ubiquitous bicycle: did you know that it is classified as a vehicle by law? Since it is considered one, riding on the left side of the road is imperative. There are other rules too and breaking them will get you penalized. The fine can be 50,000 yen at most or not more than three months imprisonment. Needless to say, using a mobile phone while driving should be avoided at all times. Causing an accident, even with your bicycle, can saddle you with a really big responsibility, so you should think twice the next time you wear your thick ear muffs or use your earphones while biking (because it can distract your auditory senses).

We advise you to know the Japanese traffic safety rules and endeavor to keep the roads of Suwa area safe even in the cold wintertime.

## ☆Japanese traditions ~One point Japanese culture~

### The Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets

This generally refers to the poetry anthology entitled "Ogura hyakunin-issu," compiled by FUJIWARA no Teika (Sadaie). It gathered 100 waka (classical Japanese poems in 31 syllables), one each by the most outstanding poets from the Heian Period (794-1185) and the early years of the Kamakura Period (1185-1333). From the time of the Edo Period (1603-1867), these poems were widely used as poem cards. The overwhelming majority - 43 selections - are love poems, followed by seasonal poems - 32 selections. Seventy-nine of the poets are male, 21 female, and they express thoughts of love, nature and the seasons with a refinement unique to the Japanese people. It has become well-known as one of the principal works of classical Japanese literature. It is also one of the essential games of New Year.



### Cookpot dishes

Japanese culture, which can be called "a culture of harmony," places importance on harmony among friends. One cultural form for confirming harmony involves friends getting together to drink sake and eat, and *nabe-ryori* is appropriate for such gatherings. Soup stock and ingredients are put in a pot and heated; four or five persons sit around it, put soup and ingredients from the pot into their own bowls and eat. This enhances the bond of friendship and stimulates the discussion. There are all sorts of ingredients and soup stocks, as many flavors and ways of preparing, in fact, as there are households. Typical ingredients include fish, shellfish, a variety of vegetables and meats and soup stocks are seasoned by soy bean paste or soy sauce.

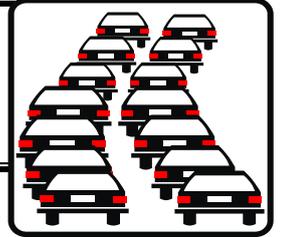


### Japanese Bath

In taking a Japanese, *furo*, one enters the bathtub only after first washing off outside the tub. Generally, the whole family uses the same tub of hot water, so they keep it clean. Until 40 or 50 years ago *furo* made of wood were common, but now they are almost made of tile, plastic or stainless steel. In the cold winter the *furo* warms the body and in the highly humid summer it washes away the constant stream of perspiration. The *furo* is indispensable to Japanese life. It is the optimum cure for a day's fatigue. Because today the majority of Japanese homes have *furo* and all manner of bathing remedies are being sold, the number of people who enjoy their baths by adding their favorite bathing remedy to the water is increasing.



# Things you should know about cars



## Driver's License

### International driver's license (license issued outside Japan) and non-Japanese license holders:

★In order for a person owning a foreign driver's license to drive in Japan, that person must possess one of the following licenses:

- ① a Japanese driver's license.
- ② an international driver's license based on the Geneva treaty.
- ③ a driver's license from a foreign country which follows driving standards similar to Japan. The Swiss Confederation, the Federal Republic of Germany, the French Republic, the Italian Republic, the Kingdom of Belgium and Taiwan are the only six admitted at present. This license must be attached with a translation prepared by the embassy or consulate of the concerned country or the Japan Automobile Federation (JAF).

### ★Validity Period of License

Japanese Driver's License	Within the validity period written on the license
International Driver's License	One year from the date of its issue or for one year from the date of original entry into Japan – whichever period is shorter.
Driver's License issued in Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, or Taiwan	If anyone, who registers as a resident or as a foreign national in Japan, leaves and reenters the country within three months, the above-mentioned one-year duration will not restart. (After the one-year validity period, you can only use your international driving permit again if you leave Japan for more than three consecutive months)

### ★Switching a foreign driver's license

If your license is not from a country with permission to drive in Japan, you must switch your foreign license to a Japanese driver's license.

### Switching a foreign driver's license to Japanese driver's license

- ① Home address must be registered in Nagano prefecture. (Non-Japanese nationals must be registered residents of Nagano Prefecture)
- ② The applicant's foreign driver's license must be valid (expired licenses cannot be transferred)
- ③ The applicant must be able to prove that he or she stayed in the issuing country for at least three months in total after obtaining the license.



### ★Testing Centers

- ① Tohokushin Driver's License Center (Nagano City) 704-2 Kawanakajima-machihara, Nagano City (20-minute walk from JR Shinonoi Station)
- ② Chunanshin Driver's License Center (Shiojiri City) 73-116 Ooaza Souga Azakikyougohara, Shiojiri City (0.8 km from Shiojiri Station West Exit, abt. 10-minute walk or 3.5 km from Shiojiri Interchange, abt. 10 min. by car)

### ★Required documents for application

- ① Foreign driver's license
- ② Japanese translation of the above-mentioned driver's license -- Translation should be done by the embassy, consulate or Japan Automobile (JAF) (JAF Nagano Branch 026-226-6975)
- ③ International driver's license (if you have one)
- ④ A copy of your alien registration card and proof of residence (issued by your local city/town/village office)
- ⑤ Passport (bring your old passport with you to prove the duration of your previous stay outside Japan)
- ⑥ One photograph (taken within the last 6 months; size: 3cm x 2.4cm)
- ⑦ Others:  
Japanese Driver's License or Expired Japanese Driver's License, Temporary Driver's License, Identification Card, Foreign License Receipts, Issuance Certification, Driver's record or driver's license other than the above-mentioned foreign licenses

## ★Fees

Switching fee	Regular	2,400 yen
	Motorcycle license	1,650 yen each
Issuing Fee		1,650 yen

※ The application for changing a foreign license to Japanese license is by appointment, so please call the testing site for any inquiries beforehand.

## ★Contact for Inquiries

Tohokushin Driver's License Center (Nagano City) Tel. 026-292-2345  
Chunanshin Driver's License Center (Shiojiri City) Tel. 0263-53-6611

## Buying a Car

### ■ Things to consider when choosing a car

#### ★Budget

Be sure to buy within your means. Up to how much can you spend for a car? Apart from the cost of the car itself, there are other things that you must also consider. You will definitely incur cost when you register your car or when you have it delivered to your place, not to mention the mandatory periodic maintenance checks and other miscellaneous fees. Think about the total cost of purchasing a car and check whether you have the capability of paying for it. If you are considering a loan, make sure that you can afford the down payment and the monthly installment fees.

#### ★Car Type

Consider a minivan if you will use it with your family. If you are more concerned about the practicality and ease of use, consider a compact car or other sedan. When you have a good idea of what kind of car best fits your needs (think about the purpose of your vehicle and the number of passengers you will most likely have), choosing what type of car can be easier. Do not forget to factor in the car size and fuel consumption. You should also consider cars requiring less maintenance. Carefully weigh in your requirements before deciding which vehicle to buy then go to the car dealer, and discuss the car specs while you test drive. Be aware of the model and accessories. What stuff can't you live without? Are the car features really important for you?



### ■ Procedures in purchasing a car

Buying a car is not as easy as you think. Paying for it does not necessarily mean you can immediately use it. It involves different kinds of procedures. Basically, you can just have your dealer handle most of the paperwork for you but you need to understand the importance of such procedures.

#### ★The Parking Space

In order to register your car, except for some places, you must provide a parking space for your car, and get a certification of such from the police station. Depending on the place of your residence, if you buy a light automobile (yellow-plate kei car), the certification may or may not be required. (To be sure, just ask your local police station.)

#### ★Registration

You cannot drive unless you get your vehicle inspection certificate and license plate from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport by submitting your Certification of Parking Space. This is the car registration process. In reality, aside from registration, you need to apply for compulsory automobile liability insurance and pay the car acquisition tax, car weight tax and car tax. Kei cars (light automobile) are registered at the city/town/village office and the procedures may vary depending on where you are. At any rate, you will get a vehicle inspection certificate and license plate after the registration. Furthermore, you need to have a car check-up (shaken) every 2 years thereafter (3 years for new cars) and pay the annual car tax. Even when it's time to throw away your car, there is a procedure that you still need to follow.

## Insurance and Taxes

### ■ Insurance

#### ★Compulsory automobile liability insurance and voluntary insurance

According to the Automobile Liability Security Law, you need to enroll your car under a compulsory automobile liability insurance (or what they call mandatory insurance) and purchase an additional, optional insurance. The mandatory insurance is an insurance scheme established by the country to compensate victims of traffic accidents at a minimum level. Cars that are not enrolled in this scheme are not allowed on the road and this ensures that the injuring party has the capability of compensating the victim. The optional insurance is for the amount of compensation that the mandatory insurance cannot cover, e.g. when the traffic accident results in death or physical impairment of the victim. Insurance covers the person, damage to property, physical injury and passenger casualties. Since the enforcement of the revised insurance law, a more reasonable insurance system has been widely established in insurance companies.



## ★Car Insurance

After your car purchase, the car insurance you bought will cover your vehicle's repair costs caused by accidents. In other words, while insurance for the other party and their property covers the reparations, car insurance will insure compensation for the car of the covered person. The coverage amount depends on the year, and current market value of the car model. The premium will be calculated based on the latest market price data of the insurance company. The higher the price of an equivalent new car or the more damage it gets, the higher premium it gets.

You can change the scope and exemption of the coverage. The "General Vehicle Insurance" covers all damages that were specified at the contract. Even though insurance is expensive, it can cover even hit and run accidents or damages you caused on your own car. And there's also the cheaper "Economy Vehicle Insurance," but it does not cover damages you caused on others.

With car theft on the rise recently, people who are enrolled in the "Economy Vehicle Insurance" do not get compensation if their cars get stolen. People who drive luxury vehicles and popular models should carefully consider this when they sign their contracts.

## ■Taxes

### ★Automobile Acquisition Tax and Consumption Tax

When you buy a car, you will need to pay the car acquisition tax and consumption tax. Acquisition tax of cars for private-use will be based on the price of the car; five percent for cars for private use and 3% for business cars and kei cars (light automobile with yellow plates). However, the cost to be levied for new cars (excluding parallel-imported ones) is 90% of the option price and the dealer's marked price. It will be tax-free if the car price is not more than 500,000 yen.

### ★Automobile Tax

During the time of your ownership, your car will be imposed with car weight tax and car tax. As the name implies, car weight tax are taxes imposed based on the weight of the vehicle. Although tax is calculated annually, tax payment is done in advance when you have your car checkup (shaken). Based on the Automobile Recycle Law, starting 2005, when you dispose of your car (in the proper manner), if your shaken is still valid for more than one month, you are entitled to a corresponding weight tax refund.

Car tax is imposed on the owner every April 1st of the year and the tax amount is set according to the engine volume. If you dispose of your car or relocate to other prefectures, you can get a partial refund of the tax you paid (the amount you paid from the following month up to the end of the fiscal year) since car tax is calculated by month. On the contrary, when you buy a car, the car tax will be calculated from the following month up to the end of the fiscal year. For kei cars (light automobiles), however, monthly calculation is not applicable.

### ★Taxes imposed on cars for private use

Engine Capacity	Tax amount
Above 3000cc and below 3500cc	58,000 yen
Above 2500cc and below 3000cc	51,000 yen
Above 2000cc and below 2500cc	45,000 yen

Above 1500cc and below 2000cc	39,500 yen
Above 1000cc and below 1500cc	34,500 yen
Below 1000cc	29,500 yen
Light Automobile (Kei Car)	7,200 yen

## Car Inspection (Shaken)

### ■Validity Period

According to the Road Trucking Vehicle Law (Article 61 "Valid Period of the Vehicle inspection certificate"), shaken has a fixed validity period. In other words, if you miss the periodic inspection, you will not be allowed to drive on the road. The time period for private-use vehicles is 3 years for new cars and 2 years for the old ones (regardless of the age of the vehicle). You can have your car checkup (shaken) 1 month before the expiration of validity period. If you have the "shaken" done within one month before the expiration, the next 2-year (1-year for freight cars) validity period will start from the expiration date. If you do it earlier, say more than one month before, the succeeding period will start from the day you have your car checkup.

### ■Where to go for "shaken" and how much?

You can have your car checkup (shaken) at your car dealer, maintenance shops or auto-part shops. The big bulk of the "shaken" cost goes to the legal expenses, handling and maintenance fees. Although the taxes and insurance fee portion are fixed, legal expenses may vary according to model, engine size and volume of the vehicle. On the other hand, the handling and maintenance fees may vary depending on the car dealer or maintenance shops.