

# hokkaido *Life*

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

*The links in these documents contain information to make your life in Hokkaido easier and more enjoyable. Access each link and add it to your favourites list.*

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Even if you decide to buy a car in Japan (or if you're one of those lucky few that has an office that provides one for you), chances are that you'll have to use public transportation at some point in your JET career.

Here is some basic information about the different types of public transportation available in Japan, some helpful websites, and some useful Japanese.

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## THE TRAIN

### Train Timetables

To find train schedules, times and fares for all of Japan, I use [\[www.hyperdia.com\]](http://www.hyperdia.com). Click on the *English* button in the top left-hand corner and enter your departure and destination locations (in English!). For when such a luxury is not available, knowing how to read Japanese timetables is a must.

*Reading timetables is excellent for your kanji recognition skills!*

The first thing you need to do is ask someone to write down the kanji for your departure and destination stations. Then, if you have the larger version of the train timetable (your people in the front office almost always have it... ask your JTE!), you can look at the map in the front to find out what pages you need to look at for information. If you have the smaller version, you'll need to flick through the pages until you find the appropriate kanji (there is a map, but it doesn't provide page numbers).

Once you have the kanji and the page numbers, reading the timetable itself is pretty

easy. Find the departure station (it will be followed by a time; that is the time the train leaves the station), and then follow along the column until you come to the arrival station (it will also have a time beside it – the time the train arrives at that station). If there isn't a time listed next to a station, then the train does not stop in that town. Note that the times given for departure are generally incredibly accurate. It is very rare for a train to be late in Japan.

*In case you haven't already realized it, 'fashionably late' is not a popular concept in Japan!*

Don't be afraid to ask your office for help. Keep in mind that people here use military time for everything, so if you're wanting to go somewhere around six in the evening, make sure the person helping you knows that you're after 18:00 times, not 6:00 in the morning times.

Also, many stations in small towns have schedules available next to the ticket window - they will often have a page that lists all of the train and bus times from that particular area to all of the local towns. Like most schedules, stops are listed in order across the top of the page with times for each stop listed underneath. If a train is listed in bold, it is an express or limited express train that only stops at certain stations. If it's in normal type, it's a *futsu*, or slow train, which stops at every station and is normally half the price. If there's a little airplane symbol in the column, it means that the train is headed to the airport.

*Train times generally change in November and March, so make sure you re-confirm your times.*

## **Buying a Ticket**

To buy a ticket, either go to the JR office in your station or to a ticket machine. If you use a ticket machine, first find your destination station on the map above the machines. The map will often list both *kanji* and *romaji*. You will see a fare listed next to your station. Put in money greater than or equal to the value of the desired ticket and you'll see the buttons with available fares light up. Press the button corresponding to the value of the ticket (there are often stickers above prices for popular destinations). This is always for a *futsu* train (or, local train - also includes rapid trains in Sapporo).

If you want to ride the express or limited express trains, you'll have to purchase an extra supplement ticket. These vary according to how far you're traveling, so I usually buy express tickets at the JR office. You can also buy express tickets on the train from the guard or '*fare adjust*' at the end of your journey if nobody asks to see your ticket on the train.

*You can only adjust your fare to pay extra money that you owe - you cannot get refunds from these machines.*

If you go someplace often, you can buy a *yonkippu* (a booklet of four tickets), which allows you to ride the express train for the price of a slow train, so long as you use all four within three months of purchase. The tickets aren't starting point specific, meaning you can use an entire *yonkippu* booklet in two round trips.

Many smaller stations don't have machines or ticket windows. In this case, take a numbered ticket from the dispensing machine just inside the entry door on the train and pay at the end of your ride, either directly to the conductor (when going from small town to small town) based on the fare on the board corresponding to the number on the ticket you hold (like the bus!) or at the station when you get off the train (for bigger destinations).

The *Hokkaido Free Pass*, also known as - [[Hokkaido Round Tour Pass](#)] - is a rail pass providing unlimited usage of JR trains (including limited express trains) and most JR buses in Hokkaido on seven consecutive days.

The Japan Rail Pass is only available to tourists and must be purchased prior to entering Japan. For more information - [[www.japanrailpass.net/index.html](http://www.japanrailpass.net/index.html)].

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## THE BUS

### Bus Timetables

*If you can read train timetables, you can read bus schedules - the principles are the same.*

Bus timetables are usually displayed at individual bus stops and at the terminal. Often fares are listed down the side of the timetable or along the top. In some cities there is a set fare for riding within the boundaries of the city.

If you look at a bus timetable you may see two sets of times, one in blue and one in red (or even asterisks next to a few of the times, especially near schools). The figures in blue are workday times, and those in red (or that have asterisks) are times for Sundays and holidays. Sometimes the times written in red will have a note saying they don't run on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the month, Sundays, or Holidays. I know it sounds complicated (not to mention a bit weird), but hey, I don't make the schedule... I'm just trying to help you understand it!

### Buying a Ticket

Some bus companies have voucher schemes where you can buy books of tickets called *kaisuken*. Instead of using coins to pay your fare when you get off, you use vouchers. If you use the bus often, these are a good deal, so ask the driver about

them (umm... maybe not while he's driving). You can also buy *yonkippu* between major destinations on buses, meaning you can ride four times for a reduced price (this usually saves you 100円 - 200円 per trip). *Yonkippu* tickets for buses don't expire.

## On The Bus

At a bus stop, get on in the middle of the bus. There is a machine dispensing numbered tickets next to the door (the machine often does not give tickets at the first stop on the line). As soon as you get on the bus, take a ticket.

As your journey progresses, you'll see the numbers on the display at the front of the bus change. When you hear the name of your stop, push the button (it says とまります on it) and the driver will stop. Look at the number on your ticket to determine the fare. For example, if it says '3', check the display and see what amount of money is listed under stop 3. This is the amount you pay. Put the ticket and the corresponding amount of money into the box next to the driver when you get off.

Buses in Japan announce the next stop, so listen carefully for yours. If you're unsure as to whether the bus you're on stops where you want to go, just ask the driver as you get on. Even if your Japanese isn't very good, you can always say the stop name and ask "OK?" and he'll get the message.

You can almost always change coins into smaller change and notes into coins on buses. There is a machine next to the driver. This machine *does not* calculate the fare and then give you the appropriate amount of change. So if your fare is 360円, and you only have a 500円 coin, you need to change the coin into smaller change and then feed the box next to the driver.

Onboard change machines can usually only change 1000円 notes, but sometimes larger bills on express buses. If you only have larger notes, sometimes the driver will be able to make change for you, but don't count on it. For some reason, most of the change machines will not accept the silver-colored 500円 coins, but the driver will offer to exchange this for you if it's going to be a problem.

*If in doubt, ask! I can comment on this from personal experience - a foreigner with money in his/her hand looking confused trying to get off the bus will inspire someone to help.*

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## THE SUBWAY

The subway (for travel within Sapporo ONLY, seeing as it's the only place that actually has a subway in Hokkaido) operates in much the same way as the train. The only difference is that you *can* buy cards for unlimited one-day travel from ticket offices, ticket machines, and the occasional, randomly placed, vending machine.

- 1 Day | Weekday *chikatetsusenyou 1 day kaado* 地下鉄専用1 DAYカード 800円
- 1 Day | Weekend *donichika kippu* ドニチカキップ 500円
- With You Card *uizuyuu kaado* ウィズユーカード 1000円

This is a good way to save money and not have to deal with buying separate tickets every time you use the subway. At some locations, you can only buy *donichika kippu* tickets at the actual ticket counter.

*Uizuyuu kaado* tickets can be purchased at any station and used until you've taken enough subway rides to spend the value of the card. You do not add money to these cards - you simply buy new ones. 1000円 cards have 1100円 worth of subway rides on them - you get about 100円 free for each 1000円 that you spend. As you put the ticket in the ticket gate, it prints the amount you have left on the back of the card, so you'll always know.

[\[www.urbanrail.net/as/sapp/sapporo.htm\]](http://www.urbanrail.net/as/sapp/sapporo.htm) - has an excellent English language map of the subway network and general information about the Sapporo subway.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you want to buy a combined *bus/train/plane* timetable for all of Hokkaido, they are available on a monthly basis at kiosks, newsagents, etc. for about 500円.

For *all* forms of transport, there are special schedules for weekends and holidays. Be aware of any special symbols (or color coding) next to transportation times.

*Around New Year's Eve/Day, all rules go out the window and if you REALLY need to get somewhere, you'll probably have to call the transport company or have your office do it for you.*

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As always, the official [hajat/forum](#) is where you will find all the answers to any questions you may have regarding life in Hokkaido.

*HAJET kindly asks you to use paper wisely and only print this document if you really, really must. LOVE HOKKAIDO, LOVE THE ENVIRONMENT!*

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## USEFUL RESOURCES

HAJET | Forum  
Go Japan  
Japan Rail Pass  
Hokkaido Free Pass  
Hyperdia

[www.hokkaidojets.org](http://www.hokkaidojets.org)  
<http://gojapan.about.com/>  
[www.japanrailpass.net](http://www.japanrailpass.net)  
[www2.jrhokkaido.co.jp/global/english/](http://www2.jrhokkaido.co.jp/global/english/)  
[www.hyperdia.com](http://www.hyperdia.com)

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