

A Guide to Japan trains - from a beginner!

"Konnichiwa friends! Welcome or welcome back to the phatlifeproject and if you're watching this there is a very good chance that you're planning a trip to Japan and that is indeed the case well then you're gonna need to get real familiar with the train system and how it works REAL fast as it is going to be your lifeline to exploring the land of the rising sun.

Lucky for you, today's video is going to be a beginners guide to the Japan Trains! by a beginner FOR a beginner!

Japan's railway system is known for being the world's most reliable and punctual train system, and you will surely feel for yourself how convenient this smoothly running system is.

In todays video I am going to be covering everything you need to know from a 101 to understanding how the Japan train network is laid out, how to locate the platform you need to be on despite language barriers, the travel pass that you're going to need to pay for the trains all the way to apps that I recommend you download to optimize your travel experience

Basically by the end of this you're gonna be navigating the Japan trains like a seasoned local

So lets get into it!

Japan Train Systems 101

One look at a Japan train network map can give you an instant headache but in this section I'm going to show you a much simpler way to understand the train system be it in Osaka, Kyoto or Tokyo

Lets use the tokyo subway as an example -

The tokyo subway system mainly comprises of 13 lines, operated by the Tokyo Metro and Toei

As we zoom in on the Tokyo Subway route map you can see a couple of things

One, that 9 stations are covered under the Tokyo Metro Line and four under the Toei line

Every line is noted by an alphabet, for example the Ginza line is noted with the letter G

Now if you zoom in on the stations along the ginza line you will also see that every station is noted with a number

For example the asakasa mitsuke station is G-05

The number and alphabet combination is in my opinion a really clever and useful way of identifying the station stops for a couple of reasons

For one, some of the station names can be quite hard to pronounce or remember if you are not a native Japanese speaker

and so if you're giving directions to a travel buddy OR asking someone for directions the alphabet and number combination just works a lot better

Secondly the numbers also make it easy for you to figure out if you're on the correct platform for your trip!

You see, you will see signs that look like this at every platform

This red one states that it is going from M07 to M25

So lets say I am headed for The Kasumigaseki station which is M15, as M15 is within the M07 to M25 range this means I am on the platform that is headed in the right direction of my travels

Thirdly, Google Maps will also use the same alphabet and number combination to identify station stops which leads me quite nicely into the section where we talk about how Google Maps is going to be your best friend whilst navigating your way through tokyo

This part is particularly important when you're at some of the bigger stations such as Tokyo, Shinjuku and Shibuya

Lets use this example here, the first thing you want to look for is the entry point which in this case is C4

This is important as you will either NOT be able to find your platform or be walking for a long while to get to your platform if you dont enter at the right entry point

Once you've located the C4 entry you want look around for signage for the Oedo line which is easily identifiable by the color and then see if you can find the Nerima slash hikarigaoka words usually located underneath the name of the line to make sure you are headed for the platform that is going in the direction of your trip

Sometimes either can be heard to locate so another option would be to see if you can find the platform number

They are all things that sound simple enough but it could honestly take a bit of getting used to if you're new to the network

As such I would recommend you allocate an extra 10-15 minutes to whatever Google Maps recommends in terms of travel time

What is a Japan IC Card?

Alright so you've worked out how Japan trains work, lets now talk travel cards which is something you're gonna need to ride the trains

And if you have been researching for your trip you no doubt would've already come across the JR Pass

Do you need it? to cut a long story short unless youre planning a LOT of INTERCITY trips

examples of intercity trips include tokyo to osaka, tokyo to Kyoto etc that will require you to ride their bullet trains known as shinkansens then the JR Pass is not going to be worth it because their prices went up by as much as 70% since last year

So if you only plan to do one or two INTERCITY trips and apart from that would be just in the one city like say Tokyo then its most probably going to work out cheaper for you to buy the bullet train ticket required for the intercity trip independently and then just get a Japan IC card such as a SUICA or PASMO to cover the rest

What is a SUICA or PASMO?

So what is a SUICA or PASMO?

They are both known as **IC cards** and are essentially prepaid e money cards that can be used across various modes of public transportation such as trains, buses, and subways in Japan. These contactless cards simplify the payment process—just a quick tap on a card reader at the ticket gates, and you're set to go!

But that's not all, as they are e money cards you can also use the same balance to make purchases at convenience stores, vending machines and I even used it to rent a locker at the train station

There is also no notable differences between the SUICA and PASMO, they are essentially the same thing

Where to Get SUICA or PASMO?

Sounds great Steve, so where can get one?

well, you can usually get them at the arrivals of both Narita or Haneda airport

I myself got the SUICA but did you know that there is a regular SUICA and a Welcome SUICA?

The welcome suica is made for people who do not plan to return to Tokyo, it is valid for 28 days and you will essentially lose whatever balance you've got on it once the 28 days have lapsed

The Regular SUICA however is valid for 10 years from its last use but will require a deposit of 500Yen

Similarly there is a PASMO passport and regular PASMO

The PASMO Passport is like the welcome SUICA - 28 days validity and you will lose any remaining balance on it after the 28 days

The regular PASMO has a 10 year validity from its last use but will require a 500Yen deposit

The availability of both the SUICA and PASMO cards are unpredictable at the moment due to the chip shortage issue in Japan however if you do happen to not be able to find one do not fret

Did you know that you can easily activate and top up a DIGITAL SUICA or PASMO card within your Apple wallet?

Simply search for SUICA or PASMO within your Apple wallet and top it up using Apple Pay and then you're good to go!

Apps You Need

Alright you've got your hands on the travel card, lets now talk about some apps that will help you on your travels

Theres nothing more annoying than tapping your card at the entry station gates only to find out that you have run out of balance

If you want to find out your SUICA or PASMO card balance while youre on the go you need to download Japan Card app, simply place your card under your phone like so and voila

If you didn't already know this you're welcome

You already know about Google Maps and if you do happen to be using a JR Pass or regional pass instead of a SUICA or PASMO it may be worth knowing if your pass can be used on a particular route

Enter the Japan Travel app that not only gives you the route options, you can also filter for routes that are covered under your travel pass as you can see here

Pretty nifty huh?

Conclusion

I do hope that this has helped demystify the Japan train system for you and has given you everything you need know in order to use the trains like a seasoned traveller

If it has dont forget to give this video a thumbs up - it really helps pacify the youtube gods and makes my day as a content creator

Don't forget to subscribe for more useful travel guides just like this and turn on notifications so you 'll know the moment that video drops

also if this has helped you or if you have any further questions feel free to drop me a comment as I do love hearing from you

I do hope that you have a fantastic day ahead or that you've already had a good day

I'll see you very soon in the next video, ciao!