



COMPLIMENTARY SITE MINI GUIDE • 2026

JAPAN TRANSPORTATION GUIDE

Trains, metro, Shinkansen, IC cards & luggage without the confusion

Practical, traveller-ready information designed to make the journey easier to navigate.

zephyrustraveldesign.com

A quick guide for real travel

Japan’s transport network can look intimidating on the first day and become remarkably easy once you understand a few patterns. This guide focuses on the tools and habits that reduce friction for first-time visitors.

IC CARDS Tap in, tap out and simplify daily transport	SHINKANSEN Fast intercity travel with clear luggage rules
CITY TRANSIT Metro, local trains and station navigation	LUGGAGE Forwarding services and oversized baggage

Zephyrus note: practical details can change. Always re-check opening hours, transport rules, fares and local conditions before travel.

1. Your everyday tool: an IC card

Rechargeable transport cards such as Suica, PASMO and ICOCA simplify many local trains, metro lines and buses. They can also be used for small purchases at many convenience stores, vending machines and other participating businesses.

- Use the same card across many compatible transport systems nationwide.
- Keep enough balance for the final tap-out.
- Digital/mobile options may be available depending on your phone and account setup.
- An IC card is for convenience; it does not replace every long-distance or reserved-seat ticket.

2. Local trains & metro

Large stations can be complex, but signage is usually strong. Focus on line name, direction, station code and exit number rather than trying to memorise an entire station.

- Stand clear of doors and let passengers exit first.
- Queue where floor markings indicate.
- Keep phone calls to a minimum in carriages and speak quietly.
- Do not spread luggage across seats or aisles.
- Leave extra time for major hubs such as Tokyo, Shinjuku, Shibuya, Kyoto and Osaka.

3. Shinkansen: what you really need to know

The Shinkansen connects major cities quickly and reliably. Many trains have both reserved and non-reserved seating, while some services or peak-period arrangements may require reservations.

Situation	Best approach
Tokyo - Kyoto - Osaka	Tokaido Shinkansen is the main high-speed corridor.

Situation	Best approach
You want a specific departure	Reserve a seat in advance.
You have a large suitcase	Check the oversized baggage rule before booking.
You miss your train	Ask JR staff immediately; ticket conditions vary.
You want to eat onboard	Food and drinks are generally allowed on Shinkansen.

4. The oversized baggage rule

On the Tokaido, Sanyo, Kyushu and Nishi-Kyushu Shinkansen, baggage with total dimensions of more than 160 cm and up to 250 cm requires a seat reservation that includes an oversized baggage area or designated storage arrangement. There is no extra charge for reserving the appropriate seat, but bringing oversized baggage without the required reservation can result in a fee.

- Measure length + width + height before travel.
- Reserve the luggage-compatible seat when buying the ticket.
- Baggage exceeding 250 cm total dimensions cannot be brought onboard under the standard carry-on rules.

5. Travel lighter: luggage forwarding

Japan has highly developed luggage forwarding services, often called takuhaibin. Sending a suitcase between hotels can make intercity days significantly easier, especially when using crowded stations or making sightseeing stops before check-in.

- Ask your hotel reception whether they can arrange forwarding.
- Allow enough time for delivery; same-day options are route-specific.
- Keep medication, documents, chargers and one change of clothes with you.

6. Airports, taxis and route planning

For airport transfers, compare dedicated rail services, local trains, buses and taxis based on arrival time and luggage. In cities, rail is usually the default; taxis are useful late at night, with heavy luggage or for short door-to-door trips.

- Use a navigation app but still confirm the line and destination displayed at the station.
- Download offline maps and keep hotel addresses saved in both English and Japanese where possible.
- Do not build tight connections through unfamiliar stations on your first day.

7. The Zephyrus first-day setup

- Get data access working before leaving the airport or station.
- Set up or purchase an IC card.

- Save your hotel route and nearest station exit.
- Check whether any intercity train needs a reservation.
- Decide what to do with large luggage before the first city change.

Keep this guide handy

Save this complimentary mini guide to your phone before departure. It is a quick-reference resource, not the full Zephyrus destination guide.

Useful official resources

- [JNTO - IC Travel Cards](#)
- [JNTO - Shinkansen](#)
- [JR Central - Oversized Baggage](#)

Full guides & personalised guides

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Source & edition note

Built from Japan: Beyond the Attractions (Zephyrus, 2026), especially the Japan Ready Pack and transport etiquette sections. IC-card, Shinkansen and oversized-baggage details were checked against official JNTO and JR Central information in September 2026.

More destination Food & Transportation Guides are coming soon.

Zephyrus guides are expanding to new destinations with practical, cultural and locally focused content designed to make every journey easier to navigate and richer to experience.

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