

JAPAN

MIGRATION'S 2016-2017 NOTES ON CRUISING IN JAPAN

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PREFECTURES

Familiarize yourself with the Japanese *prefectures* (like a *state* or *province*).
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prefectures_of_Japan

There are many reasons for this. First of all, Japanese people refer to prefectures a lot when talking about places—the same way an American would refer to a state—and many prefectures have the same name as a well-known place within that prefecture (for example, Okinawa, Hiroshima, Osaka). It can be confusing if you think someone is referring to a city or island and not a prefecture. Secondly, when using the internet for purchasing or reservations (see *car rental* below), the prefecture is often a necessary piece of information. Lastly, it's just fun to learn about the country you are in!

BICYCLES

Bicycles are wonderful for travel in Japan. Harbors may be a long walk from the nearest train station, but a very easy bike ride. You can buy folding bikes in Japan for a reasonable price.

CAR RENTAL

Get an IDP -- *International Drivers Permit*-- before you arrive in Japan. Not all foreigners need one (those from Belgium, France, Germany, Monaco, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Taiwan are exempt). Though it is possible to get an IDP when you are abroad, it is much easier for US citizens to get their IDP while in the USA.

Make reservations in advance and use websites for better prices. We had good luck with these sites, but do compare.

Nissan -- nissan-rentacar.com/english/

TooCoo! -- www2.tocoo.jp/en/

Orix -- car.orix.co.jp/eng/

Beware of tolls! The toll roads and bridges are VERY expensive -- shockingly so. Petrol is expensive also.

FUEL

It is very difficult to buy plastic fuel jugs (jerry jugs) in Japan, so bring your own. Many service stations won't fill plastic fuel jugs, so you may have to try several before you can fill yours.

Trucks usually deliver diesel to your location. The fuel was always very clean (we know because we filter everything that goes in our tank). Be ready, as the truck was always on time. We never had a problem filling our plastic diesel fuel jugs at the same

time we filled the boat's tank. Have enough cash at hand... though occasionally we were able to use a credit card. Sometimes they give you a gift before they leave!

LP GAS (Propane)

It is very difficult to find someone to fill foreign tanks. Go to small mom & pop shops. Do not go with a Japanese friend. Japanese are more likely to bend the rules for *gaijin* (foreigner) if there is not another Japanese there to witness it.

We managed to get LPG at:

Shodo Shima, Kagawa Prefecture— We went to a small outfit located here:

goo.gl/maps/dTedS6w7RZ82

Tannowa Marina, Osaka Prefecture – The marina handled it for us

Hagi Port, Yamaguchi Prefecture – The marina handled it for us

LANGUAGE

Alphabets: There are 3 alphabets: Katakana, Hiragana, & Kanji (four if you count Romaji, which is when Japanese words are spelled with English letters). We recommend that you learn Katakana first. It will be most useful because you will understand many of the words, as Katakana is used to spell words taken from foreign languages. Hiragana has the same sounds as Katakana but different letters. Kanji are the Chinese ideograms and difficult to learn as there are so many of them (but it is worth learning 20 to 100 of the most-common Kanji -- especially those related to restaurants and food). The challenge is that most sentences include characters from all three alphabets. However, there are many signs that are only in Katakana, which is why we believe one should start with Katakana.

Don't pronounce the 'u' in most words when they are written in Romaji.

For example: Restaurant: *resutoran* is pronounced *restoran*

Thank you very much: *domo arigato gozaimasu* is pronounced *domo arigato gozaimas*

Diesel: *dizeru* is pronounced *deezer* (the r is the combined r/l sound that is hard for *gaijin* to say correctly – let your tongue touch the roof of your mouth just behind the ridge that is behind your teeth).

Before arriving, when you are in a place with good internet, download a Japanese dictionary to your phone or tablet. We liked Takaboto. Also download the Google Translate Japanese dictionary for *offline* use because it will be very important to have access to a dictionary when you do not have an internet connection.

MONEY

As always, ATMs are the best way to get cash. *Don't bother going to a bank.* Use 7-Eleven. They have easy-to-use ATMs and they *always* worked with our bank card.

Other convenience store (*conbini*) ATMs often work, but 7-Eleven is pretty much a sure thing (at least with US bank cards).

Once you get to Japan, make sure you always have plenty of Japanese currency. For the world's 3rd largest economy, it is absolutely unbelievable how many businesses do not accept credit cards. Even fairly large supermarkets in medium-sized towns often are cash only. Also, the majority of restaurants are cash only. Home Centers always take credit cards.

WHERE TO GO

This is by far one of the most difficult aspects of cruising in Japan because there are so many ports and fascinating places. We thought a year would be plenty, but it wasn't even close to enough time for us. Use these factors:

1. The general direction you want to travel.
2. When and where interesting festivals are being held. Use tourist guides and the internet to find information. You will definitely want to experience the many local and seasonal festivals.
3. Typhoons. You need to be close to good shelter during the most typhoon-prone months (May – October). This is usually pretty easy unless you are in the southern islands. Remember though, typhoons can strike Japan in any month of the year.

If possible, don't rush through the southern islands (Okinawa and Kagoshima Prefectures). They are fantastic, not heavily touristed, and have excellent clear water diving and snorkeling.

CHANGING STATUS OF YOUR YACHT

When you enter Japan, you are classified as a *Foreign Trade Ship*. You can change your yacht's status to *Non-Foreign Trade Ship* to avoid having to check in with Customs at every port. Do this at the Customs office in Ishigaki (or your first port of call) using Form C2240. It may take some work to get the officers to understand what you want to do. But persist.

Be aware that you will not be able to buy duty-free fuel if you change your status. You *must* remember to change your status back to a *Foreign Trade Ship* before you leave Japan. At that time you will be able to buy duty-free fuel -- usually the day before your departure.

PHONE/DATA SIM

This is a moving target. In 2016 it was impossible to purchase a voice/SMS/data SIM if not a resident with a work or military visa and a permanent address. However, we did buy an SMS/data-only SIM in Ishigaki at the GEO (gay-oh) store (goo.gl/maps/FcVZQe19bSx). The store is about a 50-minute walk from the harbor or a pleasant bike ride.

We went to GEO and purchased an OCN card. There are various levels of data and you can choose which you want -- the prices were very reasonable. A nice woman at GEO helped us fill out the online form to register. We made *extensive* use of Google Translate to communicate. You are required to provide a mailing address as OCN will send you a packet of information (though it contains nothing you need to use your SIM immediately). Since we knew we were going to Ginowan Marina in Okinawa, we used their address as our home address. All went well and we were up and running with SMS and data in about an hour.

Note: In Ishigaki you *might* be able to use this technique to get a SIM that includes voice. At the time we were there, OCN sent the voice SIMs through the post (as opposed to the SMS/data-only SIMs which were available in the store). One could have the SIM sent to Ginowan -- although unless you purchased a SMS/data-only SIM also, you would have no data until you got to Okinawa. Later in our

visit, we tried to register for a voice SIM in more urban locations and were thwarted every time. Also, note that if you send anything to Ginowan, you must go to the marina office and look through a box of mail to find your envelope – the office will not tell you if something has arrived for you.

In Japan, you can rent a voice/SMS/data SIM but it is very expensive. Buying a SMS/data-only SIM is very reasonable and the coverage and speed was pretty good. Like in many countries, rules, providers, services, and costs are changing rapidly, so this information will be outdated soon.

MOORAGE

Marinas tend to be very expensive. However, some of them will give free or discounted berthing to foreign yachts. *Always ask!* It is very useful to email ahead of time.

Fishing Ports are almost always free. When you arrive, someone will often direct you to an open space that is not being used by a fishing boat. If not, guess, and be willing to move. Walls can be rough and tides can be big. Have strong fender boards. It is useful to have a couple of 2-meter lengths of chain with shackles to connect between your mooring line and the rings on the quay. This will keep your mooring line from chafing on the concrete. If you have never done this before, you will want to study a bit in advance about how to tie a boat to a wall with large tides; it does take some getting used to. Again, have good quality fenders and strong fender boards. Please don't succumb to the abhorrent Japanese practice of buying and using Styrofoam fenders. Take care of the ocean!

ENGINE OIL

Keep your plastic 4 or 5 liter jugs from your old oil because most oil is sold in metal cans or poured out of 20-liter cans. You will want your own containers.

ATF (Automatic Transmission Fluid)

Difficult to find and expensive.

PARTS

The marine industry is not big. There are not a lot of well-stocked chandleries for sailboats, but many for fishing boats. Yuukou Marine is a great resource. The website (www.yuukoumarine.jp) is in Japanese, but you can email and ask in English. The company is owned by a very helpful Canadian. They ship anywhere in Japan and shipping is not expensive and very fast. Their store in Nishinomiya (Kobe) is very well stocked. They can also handle sail repairs.

BOAT CARDS

As you probably know, business cards are important in Japan. People *love* to receive your boat card. Have plenty.

GIFT GIVING AND RECEIVING

Gift giving is a huge part of Japanese culture. You will receive many gifts and it can be overwhelming. You will want to reciprocate, but, to quote a *gaijin* couple who have lived in Japan for many years, “You will never win the gift war with the Japanese”. Do the best you can. Invite people onboard for a coffee and

biscuit—that is a very special event for people who probably have never seen a foreign boat. Carry small boat gifts (see below). Home-baked goods (cakes, brownies, cupcakes, etc.) are often appreciated. Do give something, and try not to feel guilty for not giving enough!

BOAT GIFTS

Having a small gift with your boat name, logo, or country flag is very useful when you have visitors aboard. Pens, hats, shirts, keychains, drink coolies, etc. are all very much appreciated.

ASSISTANCE

Japanese people will want to help. This is wonderful, but can sometimes be overwhelming or distressing. For example, if you ask a very old lady where a shop is located, she may insist on walking you there. Also, there are times when being a *gaijin* who does not speak the language is wonderful. You are allowed to break rules because it is assumed you do not know what they are.

It is sometimes surprising how difficult it is to get things done in such an industrialized country. Be very patient as anger will get you nowhere in Japan. It *may* help to have a Japanese friend assist you, but sometimes it is a hindrance. The Japanese are less likely to bend the rules in the presence of another Japanese person (for example, filling a foreign LPG bottle). Additionally, though you try carefully to explain what you need, there is a lot lost in translation. The Japanese might think they know what you want and be completely wrong. But once they are on a quest, they will do everything in their power to fulfill it. So be careful what you ask for. All this, by the way, is done with kindness and good intentions.

GARBAGE/TRASH/RUBBISH

There are practically no public rubbish bins in Japan. You will see a few in the train stations and outside of convenience stores. Be aware of this if you take food for a picnic, or buy an ice cream on the street. Carry a small plastic bag in your backpack so you have somewhere to put your rubbish.

As for the boat's garbage, good luck with this. The rules are complex and change in every locale, and the signs are very difficult to decipher. We wish we could share some more useful information, but we have none. Do be careful about asking Japanese people what to do if you have large amounts of garbage as there is a good chance they will take it to their home and sort through it for you.