Japan by Rail

The Yujo Community Center is a great place to start your adventure on the rails. It has English versions of the train and subway maps that are invaluable. The Airman and Family Readiness Center also offers a one-day train-riding class - more of a field trip, really - for those who want expert coaching.

Yokotans usually catch the train at Fussa Station, on the Ome Line of Japan Railway (JR East). There is a closer station at Higashi Fussa on the Hachiko Line but it is not the quickest way to Tokyo. Many of us park at the Fussa Gate and walk to the station. It takes about 15 minutes. Parking is limited near the station. The closest is the garage at the Seiyu, which charges ¥150 per half hour. (Store purchases of ¥3000 or more gets you a maximum of four hours free parking). Some of the other lots are run by Times Parking which charges up to ¥1000 per 24 hours. (East Side residents sometimes prefer parking at Moritown Shopping Center to catch the train at Akishima, a few stations closer to Tokyo on the Ome Line.)

DIRECTIONS TO FUSSA STATION: Walk out the Fussa Gate, cross Rt. 16 and continue straight. Cross the tracks and continue walking. Veer right through a "Y" intersection. Go through one traffic light and continue walking until you come to the second traffic light. The cross street at this intersection is called Yanagi Dori. Turn right. Up ahead on the left you will see Seiyu department store. The train station is also on the left, just before Seiyu. To reach it, turn left at the first street intersecting Yanagi Dori, and follow it as it curves around to the right.

Getting Your Ticket

When you get to the station, go up the stairs and you will see the ticket booth and ticket machines. Look at the charts to the left of the machines to figure out the fare to where you are going. The map will show the Ome Line leading into Tachikawa, the seventh stop from Fussa. It becomes the Chuo Mainline after Tachikawa and continues into Tokyo. Once you have found your fare, go to the ticket machine and put your money in the coin slot or the bill feed. The buttons will light up, indicating the tickets you can purchase for that amount. Push the button for the fare that you want. A ticket will come out of the machine along with change. Now go to the turnstile to enter the station. Insert your ticket and it will come out the slot at the other end. Keep your ticket because you need it to exit at your destination.

For a slicker travel experience, you'll want a Suica or Pasmo. These are rechargeable plastic cards you wave over a sensor at the turnstiles. You can use it on trains, subways, and some buses in Tokyo. Buy one from the attendant in the booth at Fussa Station, or from some ticket machines. The cost, as of late 2010, is ¥2000 for a card with ¥1500 credit already on it.

For full details: http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/pass/suica.html - category02.

Riding the Train

Walk down the stairs to the train platform. You will find that one side of the platform has trains that go toward Ome or Okutama, into the mountains away from Tokyo. The other side is for trains to Haijima, Tachikawa and Tokyo. A train schedule is posted on the platform and the electronic sign will tell you when the next train arrives. Two types of trains leave Tachikawa station toward Tokyo. One is Rapid (Kaisoku), which stops at almost every station and takes about 50 minutes to reach Shinjuku. The other is the Special Rapid (Tokubetsu Kaisoku), which makes about four stops before Shinjuku. It takes about 35 minutes to reach Shinjuku. On the schedule, the Special Rapid train times are highlighted. Some things to keep in mind: smoking is not permitted on the trains, and it is impolite to eat or drink. Don't play music without headphones, talk loudly, or disturb the people who are reading, sleeping or meditating. Posted signs request you put cell phones on silent mode and refrain from talking on them.

Getting Back to Fussa Station

Returning from Tokyo isn't too challenging. It takes about an hour and a half. If you are anywhere near Tokyo Station, consider going there to catch the train. It is the beginning of the line and you can usually get a seat. Go to tracks 1 and 2 to catch any train to Tachikawa, Toyoda, Takao or Ome. Unless you happen to get the Tokubetsu Kaisoku Special Rapid for Ome (about one per hour 10am-5pm), you will need to transfer at Tachikawa. When you arrive at Tachikawa, go to

Tracks 2 or 3 and catch a train for Ome, Okutama, or Kabe, all of which stop at Fussa. (Ome trains sometimes arrive and depart from Track 7; when changing trains, look up at the platform guides showing the trains coming in for the next train to Ome.) Remember the last train from Tachikawa to Fussa leaves about 12:40am. You will need to leave Tokyo in time to catch it or be prepared for a long walk, large taxi bill or long wait. The next train for Fussa leaves after 4am!

Higashi-Fussa Station
The Hachiko Line is accessible from the Higashi-Fussa Station and train schedules are available from the Yujo Community Center. You will use this train to get to Hachioji, Yokohama or Yokosuka. It also connects with the Sagamihara Line to get to the Tama area. DIRECTIONS: Walk out the Fussa Gate and go right. At the first light, turn left. At the first street, Waratsuke Kaido (before the tracks) turn right. The station is half a block ahead on the left. This station is small and the ticket machine is often turned off. If so, just get on the train and buy your ticket either from the conductor, or from the fare adjustment window. They will figure your fare for you. When you return home, the conductor usually collects tickets as you leave the platform.

Some Helpful Kanji - Hiragana

TOKYO
_____□□_____□□□□□_____
SHINJUKU
_____□□_____□□□□□_____
TACHIKAWA
_____□□_____□□□□_____(aka "shake and fries")
HACHIOJI
_____□□□____□□□□□_____
FUSSA
_____□□_____□□□_____
OME
_____□□_____□□□_____
OKUTAMA
_____□□□_____□□□□_____

One-Day Tickets & Prepaid Cards
If you are going to be traveling all day in Tokyo, you might want to buy a pass for unlimited riding. You can get the pass at Fussa Station and it costs ¥1600 for adults and ¥800 for children. Ask for the Tokunai Free Pass. There are also One Day Free tickets for the subways that cost ¥700 for adults and ¥350 for children. You can get these passes at Shinjuku, other large subway stations, and the New Sanno Travel Desk. You can also check with the Yujo Community Center to get more information about these passes. If you owe some on your last ride, you will be told so by the fare-adjustment machine near the exit.

Seibu-Shinjuku Line
More adventurous souls might try taking the Seibu Shinjuku Line from Seibu Tachikawa or Haijima stations. It costs about half the fare of the Chuo/Ome Line. The station names appear on signs printed in romaji (English) along most of the route. Be warned, however, the trains themselves are usually labeled only in kanji. The train stops at Takadanobaba on the Yamanote Line. When you get off the train, follow the signs for JR Yamanote Line. Go upstairs and walk over, and across, to the next platform. Turn in your ticket at the window at the top of the stairs and tell the clerk your destination on the Yamanote Line to get a transfer ticket. Or you may decide to ride the train to the end of the line at Seibu Shinjuku Station. This station is separated by a short, slightly complicated walk from the west exit of the main JR Shinjuku Station. To get to the JR, use the underground tunnels and follow the signs in English. The Seibu Tachikawa station offers Kyuko rapid service in the morning before 9am, which only takes 45min to Seibu

Shinjuku. The regular trip takes about one hour, just a bit faster than the Ome and Chuo Lines. If you get off before Shinjuku at Takadanobaba you can catch the Yamanote easily without transfers at Tachikawa. Takadanobaba also gives access to the Tozai subway.
DIRECTIONS: To get to the Seibu Tachikawa Station, go out the East Gate and turn right. At the first light, turn left. The next light you come to will be a five-way intersection. Take a hard right and continue down this street until you cross the train tracks. Turn right just past the tracks and follow the little lane into the train station parking lot. Warning: There is no parking at this station, so have someone drop you off. Motorcycle, scooter or bicycle parking is available and Seibu Tachikawa Station is a close ride from the East Gate. You can always walk, if you are active. It takes about twenty-five minutes from the gate. If you are biking, there is a free place to park and a shorter walking route by going out the East Gate and turning right. Stay on this route until the road narrows and becomes one lane as you cross the Seibu Shinjuku line tracks (about seven minutes). Just after the tracks, you will see the bicycle parking on the right. Just before the tracks you could park a scooter with no problem. Then, to get to the station, follow the paved path parallel to the tracks on the outside of the fence. If someone is dropping you off, get out just before the tracks and the driver can turn around easily. Returning to Seibu Tachikawa can be tricky. Trains for different destinations depart from the same platform at Seibu Shinjuku or Takadanobaba station. Always get on one of the two front cars because the train sometimes splits at Kodaira or Hagiyama stations. The front part always goes to Haijima, the back part may go elsewhere. As with all trains, if you make a mistake, you can always get off, turn around and come back, so no real damage is done.

Once you've got the basics, you'll definitely want to bookmark these two websites:
www.hyperdia.com/cgi-english
www.jorudan.co.jp/english/norikae
Both have free online route planners to plot your optimal itinerary.

Taking the Bullet Train
So you want to ride the famous Bullet Train but have no idea how to go about it? It's easy— after you take out a large loan from the bank, especially if you intend to bring the kids. Seriously, be aware that traveling on the Shinkansen is about equal to the price of flying. The easiest way to buy a ticket for the Shinkansen is to get a Japanese friend to help. Since that is not always feasible, there are other ways. One is to go to Tachikawa Station to the Shinkansen reservation office and buy your ticket with the help of an English-speaking agent. While you may not want a Green Car (first class) seat, you may prefer reserved seats in nonsmoking. The smart foreigner avoids traveling during the big Japanese holidays: Golden Week or April 29 - the first week in May; Obon which is usually the magical midweek in August when everyone heads home or abroad; and New Year's, when Japan closes down and everybody heads for the hills. One last caution: never wait until the last minute!

Driving in Japan

Taxis
Taxis in Japan are expensive and not worth the cost unless for a short distance or shared with other passengers. There are different sizes and types — the smaller, colored cars are usually cheaper. There is also an amount added for total travel time, and an extra 20% charged between 1pm and 5am. Tips are unnecessary. Remember some Japanese taxi drivers panic when they pick up foreigners. If possible, have your destination written in Japanese to avoid confusion. Also, as the left rear door on taxis open and close automatically, do not try to open or close that door yourself. You can call off-base taxis onto base: 0120-74-1158 Akigawa Taxi.

Traffic Accidents
If you are in a traffic accident:
1. Call the police (military and/or Japanese/110 for off-base emergencies, 119 for ambulances)
2. Get the names and addresses of participants
3. Contact your insurance company, etc.

As a driver in Japan, you are considered a professional vehicle operator. If you cause an accident, especially if there is bodily injury to someone, you may be charged for criminal negligence and go to jail. Since an accident usually involves more than one party, blame may be apportioned by percentages (40% your fault, 60% theirs, etc.).

Major Roads Near Yokota
Major roads include Route 16 which runs along Yokota, Yokosuka, and near Zama; Route 7 (Itsukaichi Kaido) along the south fence of Yokota; Route 20 (Koshu Kaido) along both sides of the Tama River; and Route 5 (Shin Ome Kaido) to the north. These roads extend from out past Yokota to Tokyo proper. To orient yourself locally, refer to the Fussa area to the west of Tokyo on http://maps.google.co.jp/maps?hl=en&tab=wl

The major expressways nearby are the Chuo, which runs from Tokyo to Nagoya, and the Kan Etsu, which travels through the mountains to the other side of Honshu. The Ken-O Do is also useful when heading north to connect the Kan-Etsu to the Tohoku and other expressways.
These English-edition atlases are useful (sometimes available at AAFES, the New Sanno, etc.):
-Road Atlas Japan
-Tokyo Metropolitan Atlas
-Metropolitan Expressway Guide
Free maps, including the Japan Expressway map in English, are sometimes available on request at larger rest areas in the expressway system.

Tokyo Expressways
After driving to the New Sanno twice, once getting totally lost, and once clutching our map so desperately it's no longer usable, I decided there had to be a way to figure out the expressways in Tokyo. Simplified, the expressways are laid out like a wheel with spokes. The C1, or Shuto Expressway, is the wheel. Most of the other expressways are the spokes and are numbered consecutively around the wheel. Therefore, when driving into Tokyo on the Chuo, Expressway #4, you will go into the wheel and follow it until your desired expressway takes you away. The numbered expressways (or spokes) run clockwise around the wheel, starting at the southeast section of Tokyo.
Exceptions include Expressway #1, which runs north and south on the east side of Tokyo. Expressways 1-South, 2, and 3 are south of the Chuo and 5, 1-North, 6, 7 and 9 are north of the Chuo. So, if you're driving to the New Sanno, you will take #4 (Chuo), which will run into C1 (Shuto), and follow the #2 signs which will take you to the New Sanno exit, which is Exit #201. If you're going to Narita, you will still follow the Chuo and Shuto, but will follow #7 signs directly to Narita. One easy place to get lost is in the Chiyoda Tunnel. This is where you will either take the right fork for Expressways 1-South, 2 and 3, or the left fork for Expressways 5, 1- North, 6, 7 or 9. If you take the wrong fork, you can just continue around on the Shuto and pick up the correct expressway again, although this might take some time.
For specifics and updates, check with the information desks at the Yujo Community Center or New Sanno. *Judy Harvey, Sherri Park*

Hachioji Bypass & Chuo Expressway
DIRECTIONS: Turn left out the Fussa Gate, setting your trip meter to zero, and carefully follow the signs for Route 16 until you see the signs for the Hachioji Bypass. At 3.2 km, Route 16 will take a left. At 4.7 km it will take a right. You will pass the big round bathhouse on your left and continue on the bridge over the river. If you are going to the Hachioji bypass, a sign will direct you to take a left at 7.4. Continue straight for a short way further to enter the Chuo Expressway on the left.
Brian Marriott 6/02

Way to Route 16 from the East Gate Turn right out the East Gate/0K, turn right at the first or second light 0.6K/Family Mart and follow the base perimeter road, turning right again at 2.5K/NishisunaNakasato. Stay on this road (Rt 220) past the South/Golf Course Gate, through 4 lights (over railroad tracks, then through an underpass under another set of tracks until the road

ends), turn left at the T (3.7K/Akishima Fire Stn). Turn right at the third light, 5.2K/ShowaKaikan Kita, and stay on this road through another light and over tracks. Bear left at the second light (need ?K/name of intersection?). The next light will intersect at Route 16 before it crosses the Haijimabashi Bridge.

If you live on other sides of Yokota, there are other shortcuts usually using Rt 29/ShinOkutama Kaido to parallel Rt. 16. All these shortcuts can eliminate 20-30 minutes from the traffic jam on Rt. 16.

GPS (story to come)
There are many brands (Japanese and western) of basically two types of GPS: one which uses phones nos. and one which uses addresses of your destination. There are drawbacks to both, I think the best is the kind that combines Japanese with romaji English. If you are going far, I suggest you back up your GPS driving plan with maps from Google Japan and or the Yujo. If your GPS only uses English (like some Garmin), the signs for your destination may only be in Japanese and vice versa. Also, some drivers have found themselves lost due to the elevated expressways above surface streets when the GPS could not differentiate.

Getting Your Car Fixed
Auto Repairs
AAFES garage: On Yokota's West Side
Ushihama's: A number of people recommend Ushihama's, between the Fussa and Terminal Gates (Shorin Dori Ent). The owner speaks English.
Auto Skills Center: 30-minute oil changes, minor repair services, parts ordering, do-it-yourself auto repairs, and auto repair classes. Located near the high school. Building 4086, Tel. 225-7623.
Auto Parts Stores
Autobacs: Autobacs is a chain of automotive parts stores. The closest can be reached by turning left out the East Gate then turning right at the first light. Go through one light until the road ends at the second light. Turn right. Autobacs will be before the next light on your right.
Driver Stand: On Yanagi Dori, two lights past Do-It. Drive straight out the Fussa Gate. Bear to the right at the "Y". Turn right at the second light past the "Y." Go straight for about 4.5 km. It will be after Sabaecho 2 Intersection, but before Sabaecho 1 Intersection. A second Driver Stand is on Shin Ome Kaido, just before the Yellow Hat (see below).
Yellow Hat: On Shin Ome Kaido, just beyond Outdoor World. Turn left out the East Gate. At the first light turn right. Go through one light until the road ends at the second light. Turn left. Drive straight through three lights until the road ends at the fourth light (Shin Ome Kaido, Mos Burger on the left). Turn right onto Shin Ome Kaido and drive for about 3.5 km. Yellow Hat is on the right with a large English sign, just past Drivers Stand.
Brian Marriott

Japan by Air
Getting to Narita Airport

You can drive (either your own car or a rented van from Services); take the shuttle from the Kanto Lodge or the New Sanno Hotel; or go by rail. The shuttle is the easiest and probably the cheapest. If you choose train, you could take a Japan Railway (JR) Train to Shinjuku, Ueno or Tokyo stations and then catch the JR Narita Express, Tokkyu Wing express, or Keisei Skyliner trains. Reservations may be needed for the express trains and fares are about ¥3,000 per seat from Shinjuku. Buses also leave from Shinjuku and Tachikawa, but may be better to take the train because buses are sometimes stuck in traffic for hours.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS:
Before you venture off to Narita for the first time, consult your maps and check with the helpful people manning the Yujo Community Center desk about new roads and road closures. They

produce a handy flyer showing expressway routes to Narita. It's a long trip, between two and five hours one way. Follow the directions to the Chuo Expressway, and enter the expressway towards Shinjuku. Familiarize yourself with the Expressway number code. Follow #4 all the way into Tokyo. Ten km before you come to the actual turnoff you will start picking up another expressway, #7.Keep changing to stay in the lane marked #7. A number 7 will be posted directly over the lane you must follow. Expressway #7 will take you straight to Narita International Airport, making this route comparatively uncomplicated.

Another sometimes scenic route is via #3 and #2 across Tokyo's Rainbow Bridge toward the Higashi Kanto Expressway. Once at Narita, follow the signs for inbound passenger traffic. All parking is paid parking. Once you have met the arriving party and gathered the luggage, you may bring your car around to the entrance for easier loading. Retrace your steps to return to the base, or follow #7 to #4 and drive to the Hachioji exit, no. 5. You will see a sign telling you the exit is 8 km farther. Next, you will pass a rest stop on your left.
The next sign will tell you the Hachioji exits are in 1 km. There are two exits, 5 and 5-2. (Exit 5-2 is the exit for Yokota.) Stay on your left and follow the offramp around to the tollgates and pay your fees. Immediately after the tollgates, you will come to a fork, marked Hachioji to the left and Akishima to the right. Go right and follow the ramp around, where it runs into Rt. 16. Follow Rt. 16 back to the base. The toll for the round trip will be over ¥5000.

Meeting Arrivals at Narita
If meeting outside customs, confirm whether the arrival is at Terminal 1 or Terminal 2.
Narita International Airport Info: (0476) 32-2800; 0476345000
http://www.narita-airport.jp/en.

Narita Shuttle Bus
The simplest way to get to the airport is to take the shuttle bus that goes from Yokota to Narita International Airport every day except Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Three buses depart Yokota's Kanto Lodge at 9am, 11am and 1pm (starting from the East Side 30 minutes before). They arrive at Narita at about 12:30pm, 2:30pm and 4:30pm. They return from Narita at 4pm, 6pm and 8pm. A one-way trip for leisure travelers costs $25 per adult and $13 per child. You may sponsor a visitor to ride the bus, even if you cannot be there to pick them up in person (check details in advance and note you may need to meet your visitors at the Fussa Gate to sign them onto base). Look for an up-to-date schedule at the Kanto Lodge or the Yujo Center. For more information: http://www.yokotasupport.com/page.php?126 - gp.
Liz Ruskin 9/2010

Haneda Airport
If you fly within Japan, chances are your flight will originate at Haneda Airport. Haneda is on the southeast side of Tokyo, along the bay. TRAIN DIRECTIONS: Take the Ome/Chuo Line to its end at Tokyo Station. Transfer to the green Yamanote line and go three stops to Hamamatsucho Station (toward Shinagawa) and change to the monorail, which ends at Haneda Airport. Keikyu Railways also operates train service from Shinagawa Station to Haneda Airport. Note there is also more than one terminal at Haneda.

SPACE-A TRAVEL
If you'd like to go further afield, consider Space Available travel. Space-A can be either a cheap thrill or your worst nightmare. The three essentials are patience, flexibility and enough money to take care of yourself if you get stranded.
Space-A is a benefit provided by the Air Force Air Mobility Command. It allows active duty members, Department of Defense civilians, their "dependent" family members, and military retirees the chance to fly at virtually no charge. Be aware if you travel without your sponsor, you will be in a lower priority category. You can, though, move up a category if you take the trip as Environmental Morale Leave (EML). Don't be too pessimistic. Some planes leave here with seats to spare, especially while school is in session, and some of us have enjoyed multiple trips courtesy of Space-A.

Where can you go? The Patriot Express flies to Seattle and Korea. There are also flights to Okinawa and Misawa within Japan, Guam, Honolulu, Anchorage, Travis (near Oakland/San Francisco) and Singapore (not an EML location). You're allowed to fly Space-A to the U.S. and anywhere in the Pacific Theater. You cannot take a connecting hop within the U.S. mainland, but if your flight makes multiple stops, you can keep going. Ask at the Yokota AMC Terminal for the list of scheduled flights. See www.amc.af.mil/amctravel for general information about Space-A, including luggage restrictions.

How to fly Space-A

The rules can get complicated, but it boils down to three steps.

Step 1: Get permission. This will be either in the form of a letter from your spouse's commander saying that you're "command-sponsored" for Space-A travel, or a form saying you're on unfunded Environmental Morale Leave. Your documents remain valid for three months, and you only have to name the country you're going to, so don't worry if you don't have all the details nailed down. You can find an example letter here: http://www.amc.af.mil/amctravel/travelprograms.asp. Alternatively, you can get an EML form. EML travel is higher priority and you can do it twice a year. Inquire about either at your sponsor's administrative section.

Step 2: Register yourself at AMC by signing up as early as 60 days before travel. The easiest method is to go to the service counter at the Yokota passenger terminal. Bring your letter or approved EML form and your passport. You'll get a stamp on your letter indicating the date and time you registered. This determines your priority within your category.

You can also email your form to 730ams.space.available@yokota.af.mil or fax it to 225-9768. You should get a confirmation message. Print it and keep it with your letter. (I met one woman who found out on the day of travel that her emailed registration wasn't in the system. She was able to get on the roster by showing the confirmation message.)

Step 3: Show up ready to fly. Actually, you should call first (225-5660 or 225-7111), a day or two before, to make sure the flight is still on as scheduled. Ask what time the Space-A roll call is. Then, schlepping your luggage and travel documents, go to the terminal at least half an hour before roll call. Tell the folks behind the service desk you're present and want to get on that flight. Ten minutes before roll call they will put up a roster showing all Space-A candidates and their priority. Make sure you're on that roster. Then cross your fingers and wait to find out if you made the flight.

Tips

--When you register for your outbound flight, register for your return trip, too. Send your travel letter to the terminal you'll be flying from to get back to Yokota. The Yokota Terminal can give you the email addresses and fax numbers. Why wait?

--Unless you know you're going on an airliner, wear full-on shoes. Sandals aren't allowed on military aircraft.

--Bring warm layers if you're flying on a cargo plane. Dress for comfort. It may be cold and loud on board.

--Find a bathroom before you board. All planes have a "latrine" but this could be nothing more than a bucket.

--Be prepared to pay about $28 in head tax if you're flying on the Patriot Express to Seattle.

Liz Ruskin 9/2010

SHORT-NOTICE FLIGHTS

Short-notice flights (or unscheduled flights) are sometimes your best bet if you are in a low category. Many people leave the terminal and only return for missions that are listed on the daily schedule. With a short flight, you can endure any type of plane, even cargo planes where you have to wear earplugs. If there are no flights or few probable seats, you can try another base. Use the DSN phone in the terminal to call other bases. For example, if you are trying to get to Guam through Kadena, call Kadena and first ask what time the flight from Yokota to Kadena is scheduled to land, then ask if there are any flights scheduled to Guam after that landing. Also get the phone number for billeting there, in case you get stuck for a day. Ask how many people are signed up for Guam to get an idea of your chances. Most of the people you speak with will be

frank and they will tell you if people are having trouble getting out to that destination. Sometimes "hopping" can be just as adventurous and beats sitting in the terminal for days.
But if you do get stranded, note some terminals have USO facilities where you can hang out. Fortunately, Yokota is a great place to catch flights.
Olney M. Meadows 3/02