

# Exploring Kumamoto!

## Accommodation

There are plenty of options around Japan for every budget! Here is a brief overview of the different types of accommodation you can stay at.



Airbnb - The law in Japan recently changed regarding Airbnb, and now requires hosts to obtain a permit. As such, the number of listings has reduced by 80%. There are still some good deals, just nowhere near as many as in other countries.

Tatami Timeshare (FREE couch surfing) - A couch-surfing service run by AJET, exclusive to JETs. You sign up for the service and agree to host other JETs who may want to visit your area. You'll have little privacy, but it's a good way to make new friends and meet someone who knows about the area you're visiting.

Internet/Manga Café (¥) - Cheap, pay by the hour establishments. You can rent a booth for the night to sleep in, it can be uncomfortable with little privacy, but it can be ideal if you're on a budget. There are several of these in Kumamoto City, but outside of cities they can be rare.

Guesthouses (¥) - A good option especially in more inaka areas. Often run out of peoples' private property. Facilities and comfort vary considerably.

Hostels (¥) - Japan isn't as big into hostels as the west, instead favouring capsule hotels. You can still find some in the big cities though. They are generally clean and well maintained. A good way to meet fellow travellers.

Capsule Hotels (¥) - It's a pod with a bed outlet and usually a TV, with shared bathing facilities. Sometimes the bathing is in a communal bath (sento) in which case tattoos may be prohibited, so check in advance. Lockers are usually provided (bring your own lock!) and the sleeping areas are usually separated by sex. Capsule hotels can be really nice, or really seedy, but they're usually the cheapest option in cities.

Business Hotels (¥¥) - Cheaper than regular hotels but with much smaller rooms. They have all the usual facilities though; private bathrooms, TV, toiletries, complimentary tea and coffee etc. Breakfast and parking may be provided at an extra cost.

Hotels (¥¥¥) - Hotels can be booked online through many different sites. While you sometimes have to provide a credit card when booking, you usually pay at check in.

Ryokan (¥¥¥¥) - Traditional Japanese inns often located in traditional areas such as Kurokawa. They're usually quite expensive (over ¥10,000 per night) but a multi-course Japanese dinner and breakfast is provided, and it's usually really good! Many ryokan also have onsen attached, which are free for guests. As such, tattoos may be prohibited, so check in advance.

## Getting around Kumamoto

City Tram: There are 2 tram lines that run in Kumamoto city. They connect places such as Kumamoto and Kamikumamoto stations, the Kotsu Centre, Kumamoto Castle and Suizenji Park. The trams have a flat fare of ¥170 for adults and ¥90 for children. Make sure you have the correct change as there is none given!

Shinkansen: The most luxurious but also the most expensive way to travel! The Kyushu shinkansen runs from Kagoshima city in the south to Hakata station in Fukuoka city in the north. All Kyushu shinkansen stop at Kumamoto station. You can connect to other shinkansen lines at Hakata station. Reserved seats are more expensive than non-reserved seats, but non-reserved seats are almost always open (except during peak travel times like Golden Week, New Year's, and Obon). Book in advance at <https://www.irkyushu.co.jp/> for cheaper tickets! Unfortunately JETs are not eligible for the JR Pass – but visiting friends and family are.



Local Train Lines: These take longer than the bullet train but are much cheaper! There are 4 main local train lines in Kumamoto: the Hohi line from Kumamoto station to Higo Ozu (for Kumamoto Airport) which runs every 30 mins. This line used to run to Oita, but has been cut short since the earthquakes in 2016; the Kagoshima line which runs the length of Kyushu. This includes stops at Hakata, Kumamoto, Yatsushiro and Kagoshima; the Misumi line which runs from Misumi Station in Kamiyamakusa to Uto Station; and the Hisatsu line which runs from Yatsushiro to Hitoyoshi.

Cars: If you have a car, it is the easiest way to travel! Make sure you always travel with your International Drivers Permit (IDP) plus home license or Japanese license as well as your vehicle inspection certificate (車検証). If you don't have a car you can also rent one for a reasonable price. Reservations can be made by phone and online and pick up is usually near a main train station or airport. You must have an IDP plus your home license or a Japanese driving license to rent a car.

Buses: When there are no trains, your only hope may be the bus! The easiest way to find bus routes is by using Google Maps, but for timetables you can either go to the bus operator's

website or check the information posted at the bus stop. A cheap way to travel long distance in Japan is with a highway bus or a night bus. From Kumamoto Kotsu Center there are buses that run to Fukuoka, Kitakyushu, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, Kobe as well as airports and many other places! For these longer distance buses you usually have to book tickets in advance. This can be done online, by phone, by travel agent, at a major bus center, or sometimes at a convenience store.

Ferry! You may not think it, but sometimes it's easier to take a ferry! There are car ferries and passenger ferries available in Kumamoto. Passengers without cars can also use car ferries and bicycles are also accepted onboard. If you drive, prices vary depending on the number of passengers you bring on board. The ferry websites have reasonable English websites, so it's easy to do a little research before you travel. Some ferry routes in Kumamoto include:

- Kumamoto Port (west of Kumamoto City) <--> Shimabara (Nagasaki)
- Nagasu (Tamana) <--> Taira (Nagasaki)
- Oniike (Amakusa) <--> Kuchinotsu (Nagasaki)
- Tomioaka (Amakusa) <--> Mogi (Nagasaki)
- Ushibuka (Amakusa) <--> Nagashima (Kagoshima)
- Shinwa (Amakusa) <--> Nagashima (Kagoshima)

Ferries from other places in Kyushu are also available, this website has details about domestic ferry journeys in Japan: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2355.html> International ferries are also available, such as the JR Beetle from Fukuoka to Busan in South Korea!

## **Airports**

Kumamoto Airport: A small airport that is serviced mostly by JAL and ANA. Useful for flights to Osaka, Nagoya and Tokyo (and Amakusa!) It has some international flights, but these tend to be expensive and less frequent. It also has a lovely English website. (<http://www.kmjab.co.jp/eng/index.php>). The airport can be accessed by the Kyushu Sanko Airport Limousine from Kumamoto Station (1 hour, ¥800) or the Kotsu Centre (50 min, ¥730). Alternatively, you can take the Hohi line from Kumamoto Station to Higo Ozu (30 min, ¥400), then take the free shuttle which runs every 15 minutes. Parking at the airport costs ¥800 per day.

Fukuoka Airport: A large international airport that is also serviced by budget airlines. It takes a little time to get there, but has many more options than Kumamoto airport! It can be accessed by taking any train to Tenjin or Hakata station then transferring onto the Kuko subway line which stops at the domestic terminal. There is a free shuttle bus between the domestic and international terminals. Alternatively, the Hinokuni highway bus leaves from the Kotsu Centre every 30 minutes and takes around 2 hours, depending on traffic. This bus drops you directly at either terminal and costs ¥2060 each way.

Kagoshima Airport: If you live in the south of Kumamoto, it may be easier to access Kagoshima airport. This airport is again mostly domestic flights but has a few more options than Kumamoto airport. Kyushu Sanko and Kagoshima Kotsu both provide bus routes from Kumamoto via

Yatsushiro and Hitoyoshi to Kagoshima airport, although it might be easier to take advantage of the ¥300 per day parking across the street!

## Travel Safety

When you are leaving the area you live and work in for an extended period of time (more than a day or two) you should adhere to some travel safety guidelines.

Firstly, tell people (especially people at work) where you are going! In case of an emergency or natural disaster, people will need to know where you are you need to be easily contactable.

Secondly, fill out the correct forms. If you are using paid holiday or going abroad, there are different forms to fill out.

Third, be prepared! JET accident insurance covers you for certain things on trips abroad while you are on your JET contract, but check the details of the JET Accident Insurance Policy Guide before travelling. (<http://jetprogramme.org/en/jpai-outline/>)

## Online Resources

[ajet.net/community/tatami-timeshare/](http://ajet.net/community/tatami-timeshare/) - Tatami Timeshare. Free JET couch-surfing!

[booking.com/](http://booking.com/) - My go-to accommodation booking site. Free cancellation is usually provided.

[japan-guide.com/](http://japan-guide.com/) - Contains a wealth of information about traveling in Japan.

[Kumanago.jp/en](http://Kumanago.jp/en) – Tons of tourist information about Kumamoto in English!

[Travel.rakuten.com](http://Travel.rakuten.com) – Leading Japanese booking website. If you have a Rakuten credit card this is a great place to spend your points (must use the Japanese site to redeem points though)

[Tripadvisor.com](http://Tripadvisor.com) – Great for reviews of attractions but a little lacking on information.

[Hyperdia.com](http://Hyperdia.com) – Provides timetables and prices for trains, very useful. There is a map on the Japanese site, but not the English site, so you'll need to know the names of the stations you're going between.

[Skyscanner.com](http://Skyscanner.com) – Flight search engine, great way to find the cheapest flights!

[Google Maps](http://Google Maps) – Good for getting directions and finding train/bus routes as well as GPS. Not always up to date with road closures though. Remember, it knows your location even if you don't have an internet connection! This can be very handy when traveling abroad!

<https://www2.kumagaku.ac.jp/teacher/~masden/tolls/> - Explanation of how to calculate the tolls for using the toll roads.

<https://www.couchsurfing.com/> - Stay with and host people from all over the world, usually for free.

<https://kumamoto-guide.jp/en/> - Official guide to Kumamoto City in English.

<http://www.explore-kumamoto.com/> - A good website in English with lots of lesser known attractions and festivals, mostly in the north of Kumamoto.

[http://c-ihighway.jp/web/map\\_kyushu.html](http://c-ihighway.jp/web/map_kyushu.html) - Up to date information about highways in Kyushu.

<https://www.welcomekyushu.com/> - Good for interesting places all over Kyushu. It also has up to date information on festivals and weather warnings.