

# Traveling in Japan

**Visit a travel agency:** If this is your first time in Japan and you don't speak Japanese, the easiest way to arrange your travels, is to go to a travel agency with English speaking staff and have them help you. (Not the cheapest but saves you trouble). There are many travel agencies in the city. There is one inside the Kumamoto Bus Terminal (Kotsu Center). There usually are a couple of English speakers. There are also more agencies around the Kamitori and the Shimotori shopping areas in Kumamoto City, as well as inside malls and department stores.

**Plan your own trip:** Planning your own trip is both challenging and fun!

**Steps:**

1. **Decide on a destination.** Check the weather and season.
2. **Determine the best way of transportation.** Book your tickets.

a. **Train:**

JR Kyushu Railway (English): [http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/train/train\\_index.html](http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/train/train_index.html)

JR Kyushu Railway (Japanese): <http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/trains/>

Goo transit: <http://transit.goo.ne.jp/> for directions and routes, transfer information

b. **Plane:**

<http://www.skymark.co.jp/> To search for plane tickets

<http://www.skyscanner.jp/> To search for plane tickets

ANA: [www.ana.co.jp](http://www.ana.co.jp) All Nippon Airlines

see [www.ana.co.jp/eng/dms/fare/main.html](http://www.ana.co.jp/eng/dms/fare/main.html) for discounts (in English)

JAL: [www.jal.co.jp/en/](http://www.jal.co.jp/en/) Japan Airlines

c. **Bus:**

Bus is an easier (possibly cheaper) way to travel since you don't need to worry about transfers. You can find buses to most of the popular travel destinations. Book your tickets at the Kumamoto Kotsu Center (熊本交通センター). Some are first come, first serve, some by reservation only.

Kyushu Bus website: [http://www.kyusanko.co.jp/sankobus\\_top/](http://www.kyusanko.co.jp/sankobus_top/)

**Night Bus:** Cheap, time saving, not comfortable. Depart in the evening, and get there in the morning → jump right into sightseeing!

A company that runs night buses: <http://www.royalbus.jp/> I've taken their bus from Kumamoto to Kobe, it wasn't too bad. There are many other companies, use Google.

\* **Payment options:** If you don't have a credit card, you can use the pay at convenient store option for many things (plane/bus/concert tickets, online orders, etc.)

<http://www.amazon.co.jp/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=200847420> this link is for Amazon orders, but it gives you a good idea on how it works.

d. **By Car:**

Pros:

- Freedom to come and go as you want

- Some of the rest stops on the highway are really cool to visit. They sell local specialties (some are only sold at that location) and have fancy restrooms.
- Discover pleasant surprises along the way

Cons:

- Japanese highways are expensive. Travel with friends and save money!
- Some roads are tiny.
- Parking can be hard to find and expensive.

3. **Find accommodation.** Book your accommodation over the internet:

\* Youth Hostels: <http://www.jyh.or.jp/english/index.html>

\* Hostels: <http://www.hostelworld.com/>

\* Jalan (Japanese): <http://www.jalan.net/> for hotels, hostels, Japanese style inns, plane tickets..etc. →English (Hotels and Ryokans) [http://www.jalan.net/en/japan\\_hotels\\_ryokan/](http://www.jalan.net/en/japan_hotels_ryokan/)

\* Toyoko-inn: [www.toyoko-inn.com](http://www.toyoko-inn.com) nice and affordable hotel rooms, many locations across Japan. (Around 4-7000 yen/night)

\* SUPER HOTEL: <http://www.superhotel.co.jp/> similar to Toyoko Inn

4. **Research** your destination and plan your itinerary.

**www.japanvisitor.com** Wealth of information on many topics (in English).

<http://wikitravel.org/en>

[www.japan-guide.com](http://www.japan-guide.com)

## More on Trains...

There are some really cool trains in Kyushu. Below are a couple of them, but there are many more. Check out the websites for more information.

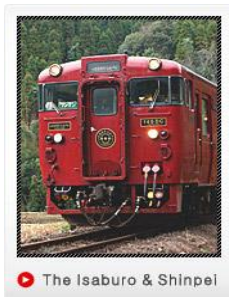
**To reserve a train ticket:** it's best to go to your local train station and talk to them directly. (Personally I find Internet booking quite confusing.) If you don't speak Japanese, try the Kumamoto Station information counter, there are some English speaking staff there.

**JR Kyushu Railway (English):** [http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/train/train\\_index.html](http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/train/train_index.html)

**JR Kyushu Railway (Japanese):** <http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/trains/> (more info on prices and other details)

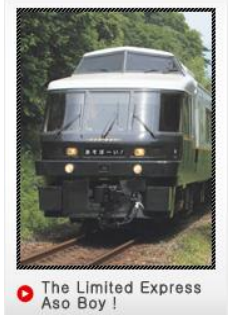


- Nostalgic steam locomotive
- Route: Kumamoto to Hitoyoshi
- Ticket price: roundtrip 4500 yen?
- Highlights: Beautiful scenery along the way.  
Nice wooden interior



The Isaburo & Shinpei

- “One of the Three Most Spectacular Window Views in Japan” – JR website
- Route: Hitoyoshi to Yoshimatsu
- Ticket price: around 2000 yen for reserved seat.
- Highlights: Beautiful mountainous scenery



The Limited Express Aso Boy!

- Route: Kumamoto to Miyaji
- Ticket price: 3000 roundtrip from Kumamoto
- Highlights: Amusement park like interior. Magnificent scenery of Mt. Aso



The Limited Express Yufuin no Mori

- “This resort train glistens like a fairyland of soft sunshine on a deep green European forest.” – JR website
- Route: Hakata (Fukuoka) to Yufuin
- Ticket price: from Kumamoto 11,400 yen
- Highlights: Beautifully designed interior with equally beautiful scenery to match. Yufuin is one of my favorite places that I’ve visited, I would recommend going there.

I’ve never been on any of these trains, but they look like fun. Here’s my general opinion on traveling by train:

Pros:

- Amazing scenery
- Food – “eki ben” (special bento box of that station)
- Charming stations along the way
- I like trains

Cons:

- Takes a bit of planning and preparation.
- Can get confusing and frustrating
- You may get lost

Other thoughts:

- Allow yourself plenty of time. Missing your train is no fun.
- Don’t take too much luggage; I’ve learned my lesson.
- Research your route and know when to transfer. I use this site: <http://transit.goo.ne.jp/> Ask people if you’re unsure.