

DRIVING IN OKINAWA

Okinawa offers a distinct driving experience. Unlike the United States, people drive on the left side of the road. The slow lane is on the left, and the fast lane is on the right, although there usually isn't a significant difference between either. Most new arrivals find the change takes some getting used to; however, you will quickly master it. Pedestrians must also adjust and should look to the right before stepping off a curb, but drivers must yield to pedestrians in a crosswalk. You also will have to learn the international road signs and know Japanese road signs. When Japanese school children wish to cross the street, they will hold their hand up, palm toward the traffic, and proceed to cross the street. All speed limits are marked in kilometers per hour and, except for the Okinawa Expressway, there is no authorized speed zone beyond 60 kilometers per hour, or about 37 mph. The maximum speed limit on base, unless otherwise posted, is 40 kilometers (25 mph) per hour. Speed limits in base housing areas of 40 kph and 25 kph in school zones are strictly enforced.

Many roads are much narrower than standard American roads, traffic congestion is more the rule than the exception, and coral dust-laden roads are slick when it rains. Roads are packed with mini-cars, economy cars, vans, trucks, buses, motorcycles and construction vehicles. Combine them with several thousand taxis of all sizes and you have one of the highest vehicle/road densities in the world. Defensive driving is an absolute necessity. Drinking and driving and illegal drugs are dealt with very severely by both Japanese and Military authorities. Seat belts and child-restraint devices are mandatory. You will encounter some difficulty finding parking on Okinawa. Always park in designated parking areas, otherwise it can be extremely costly. Off base, if your car is towed, you will pay upwards of \$200 at a local police station to retrieve your vehicle. You will also pay a parking charge that varies with the length of time your car has been stored. The cost for illegal parking can sometimes be more than you paid for your car!

[Driver's Handbook](#)

LICENSES

In order for a U.S. Marine, civilian or dependent to drive on Okinawa or mainland Japan, you must obtain a valid USFJ-4 EJ, US Forces Japan Operator's Permit.

1. You must have a valid Stateside or U.S. territory driver's license or approved country's driver's license as per USFJI 31-205. At the time of applying for a license, a background check will be performed.
2. You must be on Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders to qualify to apply for a USFJ Operator's Permit.
3. If you are Active Duty under the age of 26, you must complete or show proof of attending a Driver's Improvement Course.
4. Unaccompanied E-4 and E-5 personnel must wait 30 days and E-3 and below must wait 60 days before they can apply for a USFJ Operators' Permit. Battalion or Squadron level approval is required in writing for all E-5 and below personnel to apply for a USFJ Operators' Permit. Time requirements may be extended or waived at the commander's discretion.

NOTE: If you are under the age of 18 and hold a valid driver's license, you will receive On-Base Only permission to drive until you reach the age of 18. If you have never been licensed before, you must get permission from your sponsor and attend a formal accredited driver's education course.

To receive a motorcycle license on Okinawa you must complete an approved motorcycle training course. Courses are available on Okinawa.

GETTING AROUND

While many opt for private vehicles, they are not the only form of transportation to use during your tour here. There are public transportation options, such as shuttle services, on-base and off-base taxis and island wide buses.

[The Green Line Mass Transit System](#) (TGL): TGL provides "no fee" safe, dependable, reliable transportation to the Marine Corps community on Okinawa. Buses run a camp to camp service and an inter-camp service to all command, consolidated administration, medical, dental, support, MCCS services buildings and commissaries and post exchanges. Camp to camp routes are less than 1 hour to and from TGL central hub at Camp Foster. At the hub, passengers connect for continuous travel to other camps or to TGL inter-camp shuttles which takes travelers within walking distance of most facilities. TGL operates 7 days a week including holidays and provides transportation as far north as Camp Schwab, or as far south as Camp Kinser.

TGL services the WestPac Inn and WestPac Lodge and serves the Military community in Okinawa. All valid Military I.D. card holders or civilian employees with a valid base I.D. or pass may ride. TGL provides transportation only from camp to camp and does not pick-up or discard passengers off base.

[PUBLIC BUSES:](#) Sometimes shuttle transportation just isn't flexible enough to meet your personal transportation needs. If that's the case, Okinawa's vast public bus network is an excellent option worth considering. It won't cost you any insurance or other fees, except for the very reasonable fare.

[TAXIS:](#) Taxis are another source of public transportation. Although significantly more expensive than a bus ride, one advantage taxis have over buses, is that most that have base access will accept Japanese and American currency. (Look for the green stripe on the side of the taxi that says "Authorized on Base".) They usually carry a currency exchange rate chart with them, so it's not necessary to know Japanese, and you can always look at the chart yourself if you want to confirm the fare charge.

[MONORAIL:](#) The only train system in Okinawa, Japan, is located in Naha City and is known as the Yui Rail (Okinawa Urban Monorail). The monorail was opened in 2003, with the purpose of connecting Naha Airport to the rest of the city and providing a means of public transportation besides the bus system.

The current length of the rail is 12.8km, starting at Naha Airport and ending at Shuri Castle Station with a total of 15 stations. Each monorail train has 2 cars with 65 seats and the capacity to hold 165 passengers. There are future plans to expand the monorail but none have come to light as of yet. Riding the monorail is a practical way to get around Naha for sightseeing.