

A very brief guide to driving in Joetsu

Speed limits

Small side-streets	30 km/h
Built-up areas	40 km/h
Expressways (high speed toll roads)	80-100 km/h
Most other roads	50 km/h

In practice, most people drive about 10 km/h over the posted limit (and limits are posted almost everywhere). Anything more than this is speeding, and you can and will be caught and fined. A couple of years ago an ALT was caught on her way to a meeting at the BoE, speeding because she was running late. There is very little crime in Joetsu, so the police have quite a lot of time to spend just cruising around looking for traffic violations. Be careful.

Gasoline/Petrol

There are two types of gas station, self-service (セルフ) and... not self-service.

The self-service stations are all computerized and very easy to get the hang of. You just touch the screen to select the type of gasoline you want, insert your money, and pump away.



The more traditional stations are kind of like America in the 50s. As soon as you drive in, there is a big commotion, and all the free staff will run up to the car, whereupon they will start wiping down the windows. One of them will approach the window. (S)he will ask you, almost always in this order:

What method of payment?

genkin = cash

kaado = credit card

What type of gasoline?

In almost all cases レギュラー (Regular)

Would you like your ashtray (*haizara* 灰皿) cleaned?

If you smoke in the car, this can be very handy.

You can ask for a full tank, or a specific amount (say 2000 yen):

- レギュラー、まんタンで → regular, mantan de
- レギュラー、2000円ぶん → regular, ni-sen yen bun

And it's always nice to add *お願いします* *o-negai shimasu* at the end.

Oddities

If you are American, you may be used to turning on a red light. This is not allowed. If you are allowed to turn there will be a green arrow light.



A diamond painted on the road is nothing to do with car pooling; it means you are approaching an intersection.

Sometimes you will see a flashing amber light just before a bend. This means there is a traffic light right around the corner, so you need to slow down in case it is red.

On some smaller streets, especially in the city, you will see intersections with just amber or red flashing lights, as pictured. The amber lights mean you can proceed cautiously without stopping. The red ones mean you have to stop before proceeding; they are basically like a stop sign. Be advised, though, that many drivers will just cruise through these, so it is always advisable to slow down at any lights until you are sure nothing is coming.



Late at night (usually after about 10pm), in quiet areas even on main roads, some of the regular traffic lights will change over to this system.

Signs

No, not the Mel Gibson crop-circle kind. I mean the boring kind. Most of the road signs will probably be fairly self-explanatory, but here are a couple. Many more can be found in your JET Diary.



Speed signs. Don't go more than 10 km/h faster than the posted limit.



Stop sign. It says *tomare* (止まれ), which means... stop. So that is what you should do.



Only go the ways indicated by the arrows. So if you see this one, don't go right.



Route sign. Tells you what route you are on. On major roads, this is posted quite often, but on minor roads it may not be at all.