

So You Want To Get a Car

Buying a used car is not as cheap as \$1500 as it is listed in the orientation packet, it could be if you found a really good deal from a previous AET/foreigner leaving. Most likely you are looking at a cost of (~\$5000).

Another thing to consider is that Japan has many fees to calculate into the price of owning a car and the dreadful one is "shaken" (car inspection) which can cost \$800-\$1,200 upwards depending on the condition of your car. More info: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motor-vehicle_inspection_%28Japan%29

Also, we would personally recommend that AETs get their international driver's license permit ASAP even if they are not planning on buying a car--it is a really easy and quick process through the AAA offices or by mail. Just having it on hand if you decide to drive later on in the year is super convenient!

It SHOULD be valid for a year from what I have read extensively on the embassy sites, Tokyo police sites, Japan driving information sites but some AETs have disagreed with me saying it is only for 3 months. According to the Japan US embassy site, there have been some instances where Americans have received trouble since they are technically long-term "residents" and therefore, must take the Japanese driving license test.

But, this site: <http://japaninfoswap.com/international-drivers-licenses-in-japan/> has all the details on the laws enacted so I'm convinced it is OK for one year.

Either way, we guarantee it will save AETs a great deal of hassle (even IF it is allegedly only valid for 3 months) because obtaining a Japanese driver's license is time-consuming and very difficult. Previous AETs/foreigners in general usually fail on their first/second try.. and they will charge you more money for each attempt! You also have to get your US license officially translated, prep all the forms/documentation, take a written test in English, and do a complicated driving test with Japanese examiner/instructions.

Most AETs have not taken the driver's test because they don't want to waste their precious paid vacation days to deal with it which is another factor--it is only open on weekdays so you have to miss work! A recent AET took the test recently and passed on the first try which is really commendable but the instructor told him his driving was not great and he was like 2/8 people that passed the test that day.

Maybe getting a car might seem like a luxury you can live without but we think in the long run, if AETs decide to stay for over a year--a car would greatly improve quality of life as you get things done more efficiently, protect yourself from the elements, and explore the city more! Yes, you can definitely survive and get around on bicycles, buses, and trains but because Mito is more of a suburban area, it can be tiresome and inconvenient to get around depending on where you live especially during freezing winter temperatures of 20-30 degrees, and rain every 2 weeks or so--there hasn't been a month here without rain!