
2017-18 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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Trains

Andrew Hampson
Linfield College

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Trains



The Japanese transport network is dominated by a complex network of trains, typically divided into two groups. The standard trains (such as the one pictured) usually have around ten cars and travel rather quickly, close to 50 or 60 MPH, and are used to connect individual stations across the country. These commuter trains are used by the Japanese from all walks of life. The second major category of train here in Japan is the shinkansen, or bullet train, and these are more expensive for average consumers looking to travel great distances in little time. I personally have not taken a trip on a shinkansen due to cost and a lack of time to travel any great distance across the Japanese landscape, although this may change as winter break approaches.

The commuter trains are very cost-efficient as a travel resource, and I use these trains four to five days a week for local travel to some of my favorite study spots. Japan has numerous cafes that make great study locations, and I would highly recommend these as a way to get out of your residence (which can become increasingly boring after a while). Nearby Machida is only 23 minutes away by the local train, and you can find just about everything you need for life in Japan within the town of Machida.

Train etiquette in Japan is extremely important to familiarize yourself with. Japanese trains are a place of peace and quiet, and it is essential to remain silent as much as possible. Folks traveling an hour or more tend to nap on the train, and we do our best to give these folks a chance to catch a much-needed rest. This is especially the case with older gentlemen, or “salarymen,” who are often coming home from some serious daily overtime shifts. Seating is limited on the train, and unless there are available seats, I would suggest standing to let the Japanese sit down. In my first week here, I actually had a few encounters with Japanese people looking at me with an upset face as I was sitting in a seat that should be given to older or non-foreign riders (this initial assumption was later confirmed with my Japanese classmates). The trains are smooth and quiet enough that you will not have trouble keeping your balance. If you are sick (and especially coughing), purchase a mask from the convenience store and wear it — otherwise, expect some unhappy passengers.

When used properly, the train is a huge resource. I am missing my car less and less, and wonder why the United States has been so slow to catch up to the amazing public transit network found in Japan.

Take care,
Andrew Hampson