

About Getting a Driver's License in Fukuoka Prefecture  
Kelsie Stewart (Fukuoka Prefecture, Nakama City ALT, 2013~ )

Getting a Japanese Driver's License is no walk in the park. The process takes time, money, and energy. That being said, driving in Japan brings a kind of freedom that the public transportation system just can't match. Access to obscure onsens, secluded waterfalls, visits to Costco... the opportunities are endless! An International Driver's License (I.D.L.) is good for a year but cannot be renewed unless you spend 3 months or more in the country where you received your previous driver's license. Since this is pretty much impossible for someone working on the JET Program, if you want to drive in Japan after your I.D.L. expires, you must conquer the beast that is the Japanese Driver's License Practical Test.

What's that? You're from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand or Canada?<sup>1</sup> And you can prove that you have resided in your country for a minimum of 3 months after license issuance? Well, count your lucky stars, you won't be needing to take the Practical Test as the Japan Automobile Federation (JAF) has deemed your country's driving license requirements as rigorous enough to take on Japanese roads. Please skip to the "The Driving in Japan and Passing the Driver's Test" Handbook link at the beginning of Section I for instructions on how to get your brand new Japanese driver's license.

If you're from anywhere else (read: the U.S.A., South Africa, Jamaica, and *any other country not listed as 'approved'*), buckle up and get ready to take the Practical Test, also known as the 'Driving Skill Check'. Don't be fooled. There is nothing 'Practical' about the Practical Test. You could have 20 years of experience behind the wheel with zero accidents to date and still fail several times. The trick is to memorize the route map and know exactly what the test proctors are looking for.

Being from the United States myself, I scoured the internet for resources about passing the Practical Test in Japan, studied fervently and managed to fail twice before changing testing locations, going to a driving school and passing on my third try. While the materials I found online were helpful in answering general questions, through my own experience, I learned a lot about local circumstances here in Fukuoka Prefecture which weren't covered in other online materials. Therefore, this manual is not a replacement for but a supplementary to the "The Driving in Japan and Passing the Driver's Test" Handbook.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Complete list of approved countries:** Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Taiwan and South Korea. Please note, you must have lived in that country for at least 3 months after the license was issued.

## **Fukuoka JET Driver's License Manual**

### *Table of Contents*

**I. "The Driving in Japan and Passing the Driver's Test" Handbook (by Melissa Fedak) plus A Commentary on the Practical Test in Fukuoka City Driving Center**

**II. My Experience Getting the Japanese Driver's License:  
A Recommended Course of Action**

**III. Other Fukuoka Prefecture JET's Experiences and Comments**

**IX. Additional Resources**

~

**I. "The Driving in Japan and Passing the Driver's Test" Handbook:  
A Commentary on the Practical Test in Fukuoka City Driving Center**

First, I must thank Melissa Fedak (Hiroshima ALT, 2003-2005) for her incredible work on the "Driving in Japan and Passing the Driver's Test" Handbook. The information in this Handbook is succinct, well-presented, and funny. That being said, there were times when my experience in Fukuoka was different, and sometime even contrary, to the advice given in this Handbook. This was the case particularly in Chapter 5: The Practical Test.

*After* going through the sections relevant for you in Ch. 1~5, please come back to this article for further comments on taking the Practice Test in Fukuoka Prefecture.

The "Driving in Japan and Passing the Driver's Test" Handbook:

<http://www.supermelf.com/japan/ajetdrivingbook/DrivinginJapanandPassingtheDriversTest.pdf>

.....

Welcome back!

Ok, now that you've applied for the JAF Translation of your previous driver's license<sup>2</sup> you're ready to prepare for your Practical Test. Here, I would like to address some of the test-taking advice given in Ch. 5 of the Handbook, adding comments from my own

---

<sup>2</sup> If you haven't done this, I suggest you do it as soon as possible as it takes a couple weeks to come by mail. You can also have it done in person if you can visit a local JAF counter. For details, see: <http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/switch.htm>

Practice Driving Test experience. *It's best to read this section in conjunction with the Handbook.*

- **"Before You Start the Engine"**

In addition to the recommendations stated in the Handbook, I also recommend the following tips:

Upon sitting in the driver's seat, consider giving the Test Proctor a smile and a healthy "Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!" ("I look forward to your guidance" or "Pleased to meet you!"). Your Test Proctor may be just as nervous about giving a test to a non-Japanese person as you are of taking the test. In the same line of thinking, before cranking the engine, it's polite to ask, "Hajimeteii desu ka?" ("Is it ok to go ahead and start?") These Japanese niceties are certainly not required but may soften the experience a little. The proctors are human too.

*Technical note:* The test cars in Iizuka City and Fukuoka City had electric mirrors therefore I was unable to adjust my mirrors before cranking the engine. If you get this kind of car, I recommend adjusting your mirrors immediately after cranking the engine, before releasing the emergency brake.

- **"Stay Left"**

This was the biggest difference between the Handbook and my actual experience. If you are turning left, yes, **stay in the left lane** (do not cross into the right lane, should you be turning into a double lane road). The rule here is **you must be 70cm from the edge of the road when turning left**. The Handbook advises to "stay really left" even while driving straight, however, according to the test Proctor in Iizuka and my driving teacher at the Hakata Driving School, the driver must stay in the CENTER of the lane when you are driving straight. This makes sense as staying on the far left of the road while driving would be dangerous to cyclists.

- **"Pump Those Brakes"**

In my experience, when I pumped my brakes hard before the curve (note: not *in* the curve but *before* the curve) during my first and second attempt, the proctor jerked forward as though I had given him whiplash even though before the pumping (and long before the curve), we had already gotten down to about 20 kph. In other words, he was exaggerating his body language to tell me I was breaking too hard. I later confirmed this when I was told afterwards that one reason I failed was for going too fast in and around the curve.

I asked my Hakata School driving teacher about this and he said the meaning behind the brake pumping is so that the person behind you can see the blinking brake lights and know you are slowing down. Hard, exaggerated break pumping was not necessary. When I passed the exam, I braked gently long before entering the big curve and then pumped the brakes fairly lightly (but enough so you could feel it) just before entering the big curve. When it comes to curves, take them slowly, gracefully, and, if possible, with no gas or braking whatsoever.

- **"The Crank"**

For me, *entering* the Crank was the hardest part of the Practical Test. The best tip I can give here is to emphasize the point that it's best to turn into the Crank at the very last moment. If you can't make it in on the first try, or you don't turn sharp enough while in the crank, you have 3 chances to back up and try again. Don't hesitate to use these chances because as soon as your tire falls off the curb or if you touch a pole on the side, it's an auto-fail. Don't forget to turn your head and look behind you while turning. One reason the person in front of me failed was for only looking in the mirror while backing out of a tough spot in the Crank. This all being said, the Crank really isn't so bad. If you've spent any time getting around the narrow, one way roads of the typical Japanese neighborhood, this section shouldn't be a big problem for you.

- **"Avoid the Triangle!"**

There is often a triangle or diamond shape in intersections. The correct place for your tire to be is almost touching, but not touching, this shape. In other words, drive as though you are *hugging* the inside the diamond/triangle. Don't run over it; line up the tire alongside it. For example, you are turning right at an intersection: After turning on your blinker and checking for other cars, pull out into the intersection and turn with the passenger front wheel just centimeters from grazing the shape. If you're turning left, you don't need to worry about the triangle/diamond because you should be trying to turn tightly.

- **"Speed Limits"**

Drive slow, but not painstakingly slow. A speed limit sign should be posted somewhere on the course. I would say it is probably around 25kph. You can fail for going too slow. The proctor told the person who took the exam before me more than once, "When you need to go, please put on the gas."

## **II. My Experience Getting the Japanese Driver's License, A Recommended Course of Action**

Story time! My I.D.L. expiration date had come and gone. With my supervisor's help, I scheduled a test with my closest Driving Center: the Iizuka City Driving Center. I studied, I watched videos, I drew up cartoons, and practiced every scenario I could imagine in my head. The written test and the eye test was a breeze. The written test included questions like, "Should you drive after just one alcoholic drink?" (Big surprise: **NO**). Sometimes the translated written test uses strange Google-translate-esque sentences so watch out for confusing English. The eye test was simple. I recommend learning the Japanese for 'up' (ue), 'down' (shita), 'left' (hidari) and 'right' (migi) so you can communicate to the person testing you which direction is being tested of you. Gestures could also work.

I failed the Practical Test at the Iizuka City Driving Center my first time for several reasons: took the curve too fast, didn't turn tight enough when turning left, didn't signal according to the correct standards, etc. My Proctor wouldn't really speak to me, was pretty strict and I left thinking "Eh, I'll get 'em next time". I took the course map home



with me, memorized it, wrote up a play by play of the course and reviewed how I could do better. I even got a Japanese friend to go through a Japanese textbook with me on the Driving Rules in Japan. Less than a week later, I took the test again and failed again. Why? Pretty much the same reasons. This time, the Proctor (same person but a little nicer this time, I think he pitied me) explicitly told me, "You must (actually) practice before you can pass." It was true. I needed to physically practice and get a feel for the course before I would feel confident in passing. Unfortunately, The Iizuka Driving Center does not offer a chance to rent a car in order to practice the course and because the center primarily serves as a Driving School for Japanese people, there weren't any classes available that would be appropriate for me.

After feeling frustrated and hearing the experience of other Iizuka JETs, I decided to take a completely different course of action. I went to the Hakata Driving School at the advice of some other JETs (check Additional Resources for a link), paid for 2 hours of course practice with a teacher and got to practice an almost direct copy of the real Fukuoka City Driving Center course. The driving school teacher himself told me the folks at Iizuka's Driving Course were known for being strict and that I'd have a much easier time at the Fukuoka City Driving Center. By the end of the second hour, I could pretty much do the Fukuoka City Driving Course by heart. I also asked the teacher for a copy of the Hakata course map to go over at home.

The following Monday, I took nenkyu and went to the Fukuoka City Driving Center, no appointment. I stood in the lines, paid my fees and walked the course with my map and notes in hand between the allotted hours of 12:00 and 1:00. Just before my turn, I sat in the back of the car and watched someone auto-fail by dropping off the curb during the Crank. Then came my turn. A different person sat behind me while I took the test. The course was almost an exact replica of the one at the Hakata Driving School. I took it very slow and steady. The test was over before I knew it. After I finished my turn, I sat in the back again while someone else took the test. After the three of us finished, the proctor told me the golden words, "Congratulations, Ms. Stewart". I breathed a sigh of relief. It was finally over! Of the 20 or so people who took the test that day, I was the only person who stayed after to take photos for the real license. I think that means I was the only person who passed. Before leaving, I spoke with someone who said this was his 6th try.

Hindsight being 20/20, this is my recommended course of action to pass the Practical Test:

1. Get all your paperwork together (Passport, previous driver's license, Residence Card (zairyuu kaado), the translation of your driver's license by JAF and inkan).
2. Schedule a 2 hour class (or more if you feel you need the practice) at the Hakata School of Driving.
3. Go to Driving School. The driving teacher probably doesn't speak English so if you don't speak Japanese, I recommend bringing someone to help translate.
4. Take nenkyu to go to the Hakata Driving Center (I went in late August and I did not need an appointment but check to see if you need one just in case.)

5. Pay the necessary fees, etc. at the Driving Center (There are English signs to direct you).
6. Walk the course from 12:00-1:00 to practice.
7. Take a deep breath and do your best!

If this course of action just doesn't work for you (you live too far, etc.), I would recommend at least trying to get a course map from a JET in your area for the Center where you plan on taking the test. As a side note, I personally do not recommend taking the driving test in Iizuka City.

### **III. Other Fukuoka Prefecture JET's Experiences and Comments**

"I got my license at the Chikugo Driving Center. I would say it was medium (in difficulty). I took the test 4 times, each time I took it I learned more and more of the "rules." Each time I failed, the police officer explain what I did. The "rules" I learned were incredibly stupid and I never see them in practice. I took 1 lesson from my local driving school which costed about 5000yen. There were other non-Japanese people there too." - Anonymous

"I was tested in the Keichiku Driving Center. I studied everything I could find on the exam before arriving. The day of my exam, I was given the driving course map to study with my specific order of turns, stops, etc. I failed my first time and as far as I understood, it was because I stopped too late. I think this had to do with driving the huge taxi-like car after driving a kei car (microvans, etc.) for the past year. The second time, I was tested with the same test course and passed.

I had a different examiner the second time so I can't be sure if my driving was better or if I just had a lenient judge the second time. I consider myself lucky for having to take it only two times." - Laurel Corral, American JET ALT, 2nd year.

"The situation for Canadians is pretty easy. I had to get my international license translated at JAF. I took it to the driving center with a friend that spoke Japanese and got my license after some questions and an eye test.

If your license was recently renewed before coming and shows that it's less than 3 months, I would recommend bringing your driving history so that they don't have to guess or make you do a driving test." - Ivan Ho, Canadian JET ALT, 4th year.

"I took my practical test at the Chikuho Driving Test Center (in Iizuka). I had been driving for 5 years in my home country (Trinidad) and thought that was enough so I took the test without much preparation and failed the first time. After that, I was urged to go to driving school but didn't. I studied the course on my own, got English materials on driving in Japan, asked advice from others who took the test and watched many YouTube videos in preparation but still failed.

Finally I took a 1 hour lesson at the Hakata driving school. A free shuttle bus was

available directly from Hakata station to the driving school and back. At the school I learnt many important Japanese pointers to passing the test. Some pointers were very specific and strange to me so I would not have known about it had I not taken classes. I took the test two more times before finally passing. I had three different proctors at different times and they each had different things they wanted me to improve on. The best thing I did was decide to go to driving school. Each one hour lesson costs between 4000-6000 per lesson depending on whether I was paying in cash or using a money transfer(furikomi).

For me, the problem I was having was that the Japanese practical road rules were so counter intuitive for me, I had to train my mind and body to do things I wouldn't normally do. For example, when turning the steering wheel I had to make my hands cross each other like an 'X', do not press the brakes on a corner and take left turns so close I feel like I might hit the curb! I'm grateful for what I learnt at the school and highly recommend taking a class or two before attempting the road test." Tsai, JET ALT, 4th year.

"I was a JET in Iizuka from 2012-2015, and got my license at the Chikuho Driving Center in Iizuka. It took me five tries. I had been driving for 9 months with my International Drivers Permit, so I was pretty used to driving in Japan, and still I failed the test 4 times. After failing 3 times, I did a one hour lesson at Iizuka driving school. I got some good pointers there (like how slow is "slow" and that you should hit the brakes three distinct times before you take a curve). One thing I would recommend is getting a trusted Japanese friend or coworker to accompany you to the test, and especially to probe the proctor with questions about why you failed. I took my Japanese teacher, and she got a lot of good information out of the proctor that he simply didn't bother telling me.

Also, it's important to realize this process will likely not be completed in one trip to the driving center. If you need to schedule nenkyu in advance to take the test, make sure you leave room for multiple attempts. I began taking the test in May, and finally got my license in June. I know a lot of us love doing things right the first time, but failing is usually a large part of getting your license in Japan. Try not to get frustrated, and just keep at it!" Joel Thielen, JET ALT, 3rd year

## **IX. Additional Resources**

- Hakata Driving School (Japanese) website. My driving teacher did not speak English. Even though I did not understand 100% of what he was saying to me, just practicing the course over and over was worth it for me. I took a two hour class. One hour to hear his general advice about driving and taking the test and one hour to practice the course.

<http://www.hakatads.co.jp/price.html>

- Scroll down to the "Kyushu" section. Go to the 4th comment down. Someone has typed out a play-by-play of the Fukuoka City Driving course. I printed this out and read it

aloud to myself while I was walking the course on the day of the test, directly before the actual test.

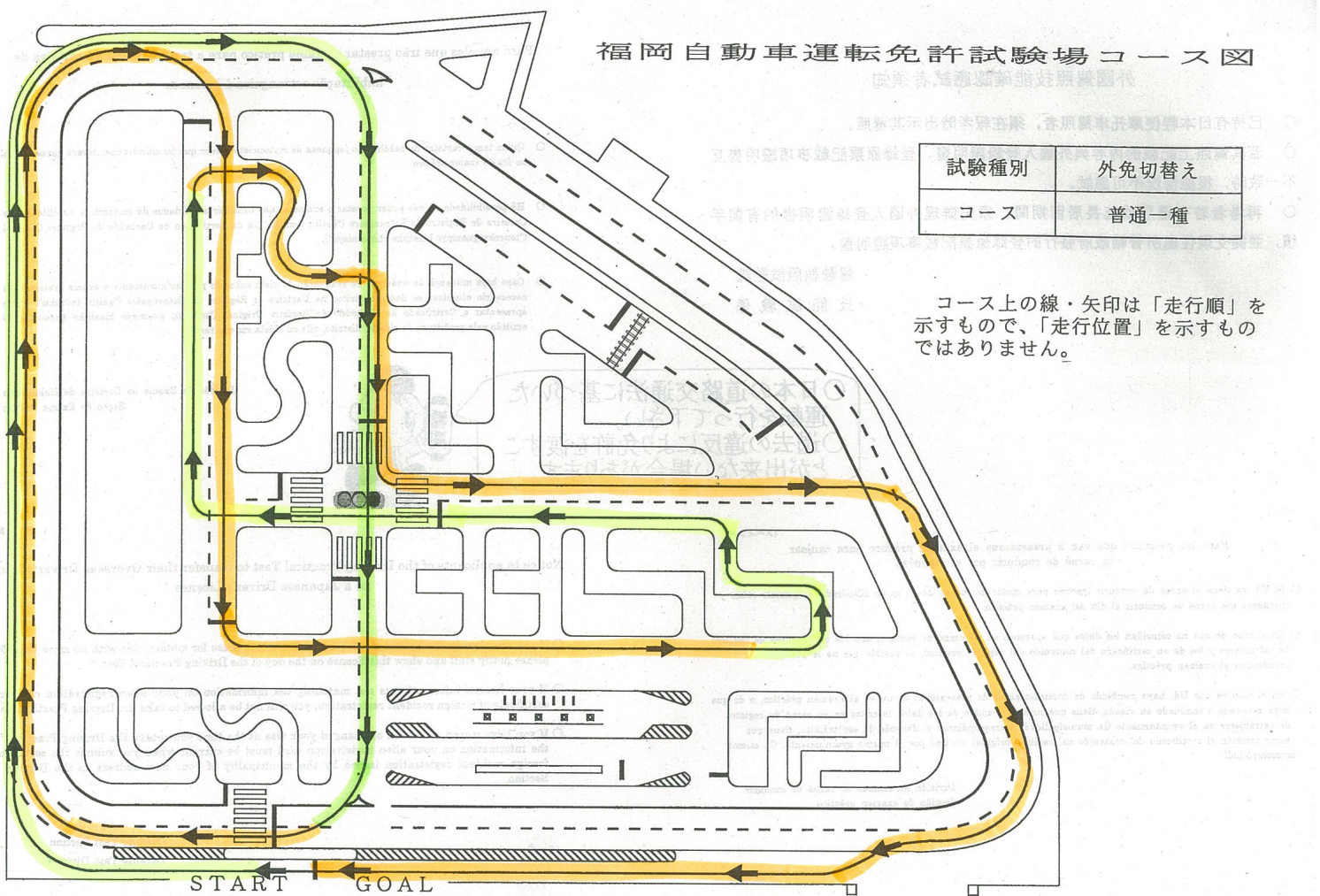
<http://www.supermelf.com/japan/ajetdrivingbook/>

- A rundown of the Driving Course in Fukuoka City with a photo of the Driving Course.

<https://teasmartgarden.wordpress.com/2007/08/15/passing-the-drivers-test-or-i-am-so-cool/>

## Photos:

Item 1: Scan of the Fukuoka Center Driving Center Course Map.





# 《外国免許から日本免許への受験方法》

The switch procedures from a foreign driver's license to a Japanese driver's license

## 1. 必要条件 The requirements for getting a license

- ① 有効な免許であること〔規格に合わない免許は受け付けられません〕
- ② 免許取得後3ヶ月(90日)以上の発給国での滞在が証明できること

To switch your license to Japanese license, You are required to show us the certification of your having stayed in the country where you got the license for more than 3 months.

免許更新直後に来日した場合や、国によっては「免許発給日」が記載されていない場合があるので注意！  
「免許発給日」が記載されていない場合は、その国からの免許経歴証明が必要になる場合があります。特に、アメリカ・オーストラリア等

## 2. 試験項目等 Driving test

- (1) 適性試験 Aptitude test (運動能力・視力・聴力)
- (2) 交通知識の確認 Traffic rule test (筆記)
- (3) 運転能力の確認 Driving skills test

実技を受ける方は運転に適した靴が必要です。  
(ハイヒール・サンダル・スリッパは受験できません)  
自動二輪技能受験の方はヘルメット・手袋・長袖上着・運転に適した靴等が必要です。

普通1種免許の場合  
両眼で0.7以上片眼0.3以上の視力必要

実技は日本のルールで！



## 3. 必要書類 Required documents

- ① 外国免許証 Driver's license (更新した古い免許も有れば持参してください。)
- ② パスポート Passport (以前の古いパスポートが有れば持参してください。)

パスポートに出入国の日付が記載されていない場合(IC passport)は、その日付を証明する物が必要になります。

- ③ 外国免許証の翻訳文 Translation of the foreign license (翻訳は下記の①または②に限りです。)

①「領事館」(アメリカ領事館は除く) ②「日本自動車連盟」(JAF) 福岡市早良区室見5-12-27 Tel 092-841-7731

- ④ ★日本人＝本籍地記載の福岡県の住民票

★外国人＝在留カード 又は 特別永住者証明書 (2015/7/8までは 外国人登録証 でもOK)

2012/7/9～ ➡ 国籍等記載の住民票 (「省略なし」の住民票)

- ⑤ 写真 Photograph (3cm×2.4cm)のサイズ 2枚

無帽・無背景の身分証明書用のものに限り。試験場に3分写真機が設置されていますのでご利用下さい。

- ⑥ 手数料

Issuance fee

免許の種類とその数・合否によって金額が異なります。

(実技試験の有無によって異なりますが現在のところ、普通免許は6,150円、原付免許は3,750円の手数料が必要です)

- ⑦ 日本の運転免許証をお持ちの方は、有効期限が過ぎていても持参してください。

《外国免許が有効であれば日本の免許の有効期限が3年以上過ぎていても、同一免種である限り原則学科・技能試験は必要ありません。》

- ⑧ 国際免許証

(無い場合は不要です。)

パスポートは免許取得前後の出入国の日付が記載されているのが必要です。免許取得後の滞在期間を見ます。

## 4. 受付時間 Receipt ⑦窓口

月曜Mon.～金曜日Fri. (年末年始、祝祭日を除く)

13:00～13:30

## 5. その他

日本語が理解できない方は、通訳人をお連れ下さい。

★ If you can't speak Japanese. Please come to our office taking interpreter.


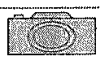
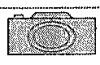
審査の結果受付できない場合もあります。

## 6. 所在地

<http://www.police.pref.fukuoka.jp/>

福岡市南区花畑4-7-1 福岡試験場 2階 ⑦窓口 学科試験係



13:00~13:30	<b>Receipt ⑦</b> 受付時間 窓口 Checking documents 書類(文献)審査 Aptitude test 適性試験 Traffic rule test 学科試験 (筆試)	Please wait for a while in the lobby of the second floor until your name is called. 
13:30~14:30		
14:30~15:00		
技能免除 14:45~15:15 Taking pictures for licenses 15:15~16:00 Grant a license 免許交付	写真撮影 	
15:00~17:30	<b>Driving skills test</b> 運転技能の確認 実技(路考)	写真撮影 
We do the driving test to judge whether you can drive based on the Japanese traffic rules. So we can't deliver the license to you if you can't do driving based on the Japanese traffic rules.		
If you have taken this examination before, please come to our office in 13:00~14:00 on weekdays. Every time, a re-examine needs the examination commission and the rent for a car until passing the examination. (Motor vehicles license = ②2200yen + ⑤1550yen + ⑥2050yen = 5800yen)		
15:30~18:00	Photography for licenses	写真撮影
15:30~18:30	Grant a license	免許交付

① 大型・中型免許 ② 普通免許 ③ 2輪免許 ④ 原付免許 ⑤ 貸車料金 ⑥ 交付手数料 ⑦ 併記免許交付手数料	Large or medium-size 大型・中型免許	⇒ 4600 円(¥)
	Motor-car 普通免許	⇒ 2200 円(¥)
	Moter-cycle 2輪免許	⇒ 3050 円(¥)
	Motor bicycle (50cc) 原付免許	⇒ 1500 円(¥)
	The fees for car rental 貸車料金	⇒ 1550 円(¥)
	Grant fee 交付手数料	⇒ 2050 円(¥)
	The fees for Additional licenses 併記免許交付手数料	⇒ 200 円(¥)

No. 11  
 W i n d o w