

Q1

A foreign national living in California (U.S.A.) is going to acquire an international driving permit in the United States before temporarily returning to Japan. Will they be permitted to renew their international driving permit in Japan, and can a California driver's license (or international driving permit) be changed to a Japanese driver's license?

Answer

- 1) An international driver's license is issued by each country in accordance with conventions, and an international driving permit of the United States cannot be renewed in Japan.
- 2) A person who holds a foreign driver's license may obtain a partial exemption from a license test for a Japanese driver's license for a motor vehicle or motorized bicycle that the person may drive with that license. If an application is received at a driver's license center or equivalent police facility in the prefecture where the applicant is domiciled (temporarily resides) in Japan, and the applicant is found to possess the necessary driving knowledge and skills and there is nothing to prevent them from driving, the applicant is exempt from taking part in the driver's license test (knowledge test and skills test). Nevertheless, the applicant must have stayed in a country or region for a period of 3 months or longer in total after he or she was granted a driver's license of the country or region (documents that can verify the length of their stay, such as passports with the seals of verification for departure and entry, are required).

The user of a license is not currently undergoing procedures to change from an international driving permit to a Japanese license (partial exemption from the driver's license test).

The documents required for the application may vary from prefecture to prefecture. For details, please contact the driver's license center of the prefectural police where the application is made.

Q2

At present, I am a student studying abroad in the United Kingdom. When I switched from a Japanese driver's license to a British driver's license, my Japanese driver's license was confiscated. When I return to Japan temporarily, can I drive on a United Kingdom driver's license in Japan? Also, can my Japanese driver's license be reissued while I possess the United Kingdom driver's license? My Japanese driver's license expired six months ago.

Answer

In Japan, you cannot drive on a driver's license from the United Kingdom. In the event that the period of validity of the Japanese driver's license expires and the license ceases to be valid, you would get a new driver's license and the old one will not be reissued.

The following methods are available for you to drive in Japan.

1) Acquire an International Driving Permit from the United Kingdom

Obtain an International Driving Permit under the Geneva Convention issued at a competent authority of the United Kingdom. (The period during which a person may drive with the driver's license is 1 year from the date of landing in Japan or 1 year from the issuance of the driver's license, whichever is shorter.)

2) Acquisition of a New License due to Unavoidable Lapse of the License

In cases where a driver's license ceases to be valid due to unavoidable reasons such as overseas travel, etc. (unavoidably lost), and three years have not elapsed from the expiration date, a new driver's license may be acquired based on a partial exemption from a driver's license test if it is within one month from the date on which said reasons cease to exist.

Applications are accepted at a driver's license center or equivalent police facility in the prefecture where the person is domiciled (temporarily resides) in Japan.

3) Acquisition of License by Partial Exemption from Examination Based on United Kingdom Driver's License

A Japanese driver's license for a motor vehicle or motorized bicycle that the driver is authorized to drive with a United Kingdom driver's license may be acquired when they are exempted from taking part of a test. Applications are accepted at a driver's license center or equivalent police facility in the prefecture where the person is domiciled (temporarily resides) in Japan. The applicant is exempt from part of the driver's license test (knowledge test and skill test) if they are confirmed to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to drive and nothing is found that presents an obstacle to driving. Nevertheless, the applicant must have stayed in a country or region for a period of 3 months or longer in total after he or she was granted a driver's license of the country or region (documents that can verify the length of their stay, such as passports with the seals of verification for departure and entry, are required).

In Japan, we do not confiscate foreign driver's licenses, so your United Kingdom driver's license is yours to keep.

For more details and the necessary documents, contact the driver's license center of the prefectural police where the application is being filed.

Q3

If you lose your driver's license, would you be able to get it reissued on the same day if you go to the nearest testing station? Also, do you need an identification card or something like that?

Answer

You may apply for the reissuance of a driver's license if the driver's license is lost at a prefectural public safety commission with jurisdiction over your domicile. In this case, documents certifying the lost facts are required.

■ Documents necessary for applying for reissuance

- 1) An application for reissue
- 2) Documents sufficiently evidencing the license, or the loss of license or the facts of the loss.

In addition to these, a prefecture may require a photograph (*) for application.

*A hatless, frontal, and background-free image taken within 6 months before the application is filed, with the upper part of the chest showing. 3.0 × 2.4 centimeters in size.

For details such as contact points where an applicant may apply for reissue of license, other documents necessary to apply and whether licenses can be issued in one day, applicants may directly contact the driver's license center of the prefectural public safety commission with jurisdiction over their domicile.

Q4

When I was renewing, this time I was certain that I would have a 5-year validity period on the driver's license, but the renewal letter stated it would have a validity period of three years. I only had 1 violation nearly five years ago. Are people with violations from about five years ago unable to qualify as drivers with an exemplary record?

Answer

Exemplary (gold) driver's licenses are issued to drivers with exemplary records.

A driver with an exemplary record status is prescribed in the Road Traffic Act, etc. as a status that cannot be attained when a driver incurs a violation during the five-year period from the date 40 days prior to their birthday immediately before the date on which the validity of a license expires prior to renewal.

Pursuant to the 2001 amendment of the Road Traffic Act, the period of validity of a license that a driver with a satisfactory record (a person other than a driver with an exemplary record or a driver with a violation or short record) is extended from the conventional 3 years to 5 years, in principle. A driver with a satisfactory record refers to a person who has had a history of a minor violation (of 3 points or less) only once in the past five years (and limited to a person who has not caused an accident causing injury or death). Drivers with a satisfactory record are issued a blue driver's license with a valid period of 5 years. (Blue with a valid period of 3 years for drivers with violations)

Q5

My current driver's license is gold and is valid for five years. I would like to renew based on special rules, but if I do so, will the valid period be 3 years or 5 years? Of course, I continue to drive without ever having an accident or incurring a violation.

Answer

Gold driver's licenses are issued to drivers with exemplary records.

According to the provisions of the Road Traffic Act, etc., drivers with exemplary records are regarded as those who have not incurred a violation for 5 years from the date 40 days prior to their birthday immediately before the date on which the validity period of the license expires before renewal.

In the case of a renewal based on special rules, a condition of being a driver with an exemplary record (issued a gold driver's license) is that they have not committed any violation within 5 years from 40 days prior to the date on which they received the fitness test required for renewal, and whether or not they received a renewal based on special rules is not related to the issue of a gold driver's license.

Q6

Am I allowed to extend the validity of an international driving permit to the same

period as my Japanese driver's license?

Answer

Understand that the period of validity (1 year) of an international driving permit is based on the provisions of the Convention on Road Traffic (called the "Geneva Convention") to which Japan is a signee.

Q7

Why does the valid period of a license go from 3 to 5 years? Can I extend it further? I heard that there are some foreign countries that have valid periods of 10 years or do not have expiration dates.

Answer

The license renewal system must be understood as a system to ensure traffic safety and to protect the lives of the people.

Q8

I have studied for over 1 year in Japan, have become accustomed to Japan's traffic conditions and would like to drive a vehicle. If I obtain an international driving permit in my mother country, can I drive a vehicle?

Answer

In order to drive a vehicle in Japan, it is necessary to have an international driving permit in the format stipulated by the Treaty concluded by Member States of the Geneva Convention, a driver's license with a Japanese translation attached (hereinafter Foreign Driver's License) from countries or regions ; the Swiss Confederation, Federal Republic of Germany, French Republic, Kingdom of Belgium, Kingdom of Monaco and Taiwan, designated by a government ordinance as having a licensing system of a level equivalent to that of Japan, or a Japanese driver's license.

A person may be driven with an International Driving Permit or foreign driver's license for a period of one year from the date on which the person lands in Japan or the period of validity of the license, whichever is shorter. (Provided, however, that in cases when a person recorded on the Basic Resident's Registry leaves Japan with confirmation of departure or re-entry

permissions and returns to Japan within 3 months, the date of return to Japan (landing) is not on the start date for the period during which the person is permitted to drive with an international driving permit or foreign driver's license.)

Specifically, when a person landed in Japan 1 year or longer and recorded in the Basic Resident Registry leaves Japan for 3 months or longer and re-enters Japan holding an international driving permit, the date of re-entry is the start of the period during which the person can drive; but if the period from departure to re-entry is less than 3 months, the date of re-entry is no longer the start of the period during which the person can drive and the person may not drive even though they hold a valid international driving permit. Driving in this case is sanctioned as driving without a license.