



Chasing sakura

# Self-drive Japan, Tried and Tested!

Inspiring and fulfilling adventure for couples, friends and even individuals.



Droston (Singaporean, 35) first time to Japan



Right-hand Drive

## 1. Shizuoka Prefecture Road Trip (5-7 September 2015)

My wife, Mei and I had a couple of places we wanted to visit in Central Tokyo and Shizuoka but for Shizuoka, rails are not getting us any nearer, so we decided that a 2-day road trip would be more convenient yet economical!



We picked up our car at Ofuna Station, Kanagawa which is the tail end of our Narita Express (nearest to Shizuoka). Rail rides are comfortable but mind you, there are no escalators and lifts in some of these stations!

We didn't want to drive more than two hours on the road, especially at night, on our first road trip in Japan - so we booked an Airbnb accommodation at a nearby town: Yugawara.

Shizuoka is renowned for its hot springs and we enjoyed a relaxing, authentic onsen experience at Atami. We also visited the Atami Castle, perched high on a hill with a great unblocked view of neighbouring towns.

Our favourite activity was participating in an hour long tofu making session (conducted 100% in Japanese) at a traditional tofu factory. We pre-arranged with Izu City Tourism Information Centre in Singapore.

Other places of interests includes Numazu Port



(fresh seafood) and Izu Fruits Park (fruits picking).

Although we missed out on locating the Daibutsu Buddha, we found a lively Odawara station and was fascinated with our first Japanese beautifully hand-crafted coffee and snacks at a local café.

Do take note that weather can be pretty wet and chilly at this time of the year (September), near the coastal areas in Shizuoka.

## 2. Osaka Multi-Prefecture Road Trip (14-20 April 2016)

April is spring time in Japan. We were hopeful to catch the famed cherry blossoms. We even stopped randomly by a few roads just to be up and close with them!

We utilized the highway extensively and chalked up impressive toll charges (JPY 18,910). It saved us lots of time. In some districts, we had to tread cautiously through narrow and two-way, one-lane streets.

We conquered several landmarks: Kuwana's Mitsui Outlet Park (shopping), Kyoto's Fushimi Inari

(sightseeing/hiking), Nagoya's Toyota Techno Museum (education), Shiga's Blumen Hugel Farm (sightseeing/flora) including Wakayama's Isonoura beach (chill out at the face of the vast Pacific Ocean).

To make amends from missing out on Daibutsu, this time, we made it a point to spend a night at Nara to visit the majestic Todai-shi. A UNESCO World Heritage site. Here, you have deers roam free and you feel a sense of peace and tranquility.

As a traveller, the experience had been breath-taking and dramatically enriched, especially in such a culturally rich country like Japan. There are many hidden gems.

### Tips for driving in Japan

- You can truly immerse in the Japanese culture as your car navigates around small streets, snacking a bit, crossing long stretches of highways and stopping at a convenient few, across the prefectures. Each highway stops showcase unique snacks and gift; and parking is convenient.
- Cater more time for expected slower traffic in city centre (try to avoid morning and evening peak hours) and around touristy spots. Watch out for really narrow, single-lane meant for two-way traffic.
- Do advance reservation for your preferred car groups
- GPS is important (you can request for English version) and always double check the telephone number of your intended destination. You can also assistance from the rental car counter staff.
- Data-enabled smart phone or mobile routers are great secondary companion but data roaming may fade out in the mountainous regions and thick forestry.
- If you are frequenting the highways, remember to request for ETC (paying toll charges automatically instead of cash).

