

If you think of train rides as Amtrak's tiresome, smoky, jerky, never-on-time ordeals, put a trip to Japan on your itinerary and experience the bullet train. They sail along at 160 miles an hour, and better than flights that dump you in far-from-city airports, the Shinkansen takes you from downtown Tokyo to downtown of every major Japanese city. And also unlike Amtrak and all airlines, they depart and arrive exactly on the minute their schedules promise.



For non-Japanese -speaking visitors, all station and on-train instructions are printed in several languages, including English. Also, at ticket offices all the employees speak English, with some who can communicate in several languages.

For a seven-day Japan Rail (JR) pass that covers all destinations throughout Japan, the price for a tourist seat is \$292, and for first class, it is \$390. Unlike Amtrak and some airline passenger areas, the bullet trains are super-clean, with seats padded comfortably and views out of the enormous windows give a wonderful panorama. Passengers can see all the city sights, as well as the neatly-patterned countrysides and, of course, Mount Fujiama in all of its glory. Food served on the train is on the expensive side, but at every stop, vendors offer inexpensive, ready-made Japanese-style meals.

For schedules, destinations and more information, go to www.hyperdia.com or www.japanrailtravel.com