

Trains to the Hakuba Valley - Overview

You can reach Momiji in two main ways by train. The Bullet Train (Shinkansen) departs from Tokyo and Ueno stations for Nagano roughly every 20 minutes and takes between 80 and 110 minutes to reach Nagano Station depending on the service. From Nagano, it's a little over a 1-hour bus ride to the Hakuba Valley.

The alternative is a direct express train that departs Shinjuku at 8am and takes just under 4 hours to reach Minami-Otari. The drawcard of this train is it's a tourist train and takes a very scenic route from Tokyo and is convenient if you have already spent a few days in Tokyo prior to your journey. If 8am is just a little too early for you, the Express train has other departures from Shinjuku later in the morning but terminates at Matsumoto. From there you connect with a local train. That journey takes over 5 hours. It's a great journey if you wish to stop in Matsumoto and explore the castle before continuing on the last leg to Momiji.

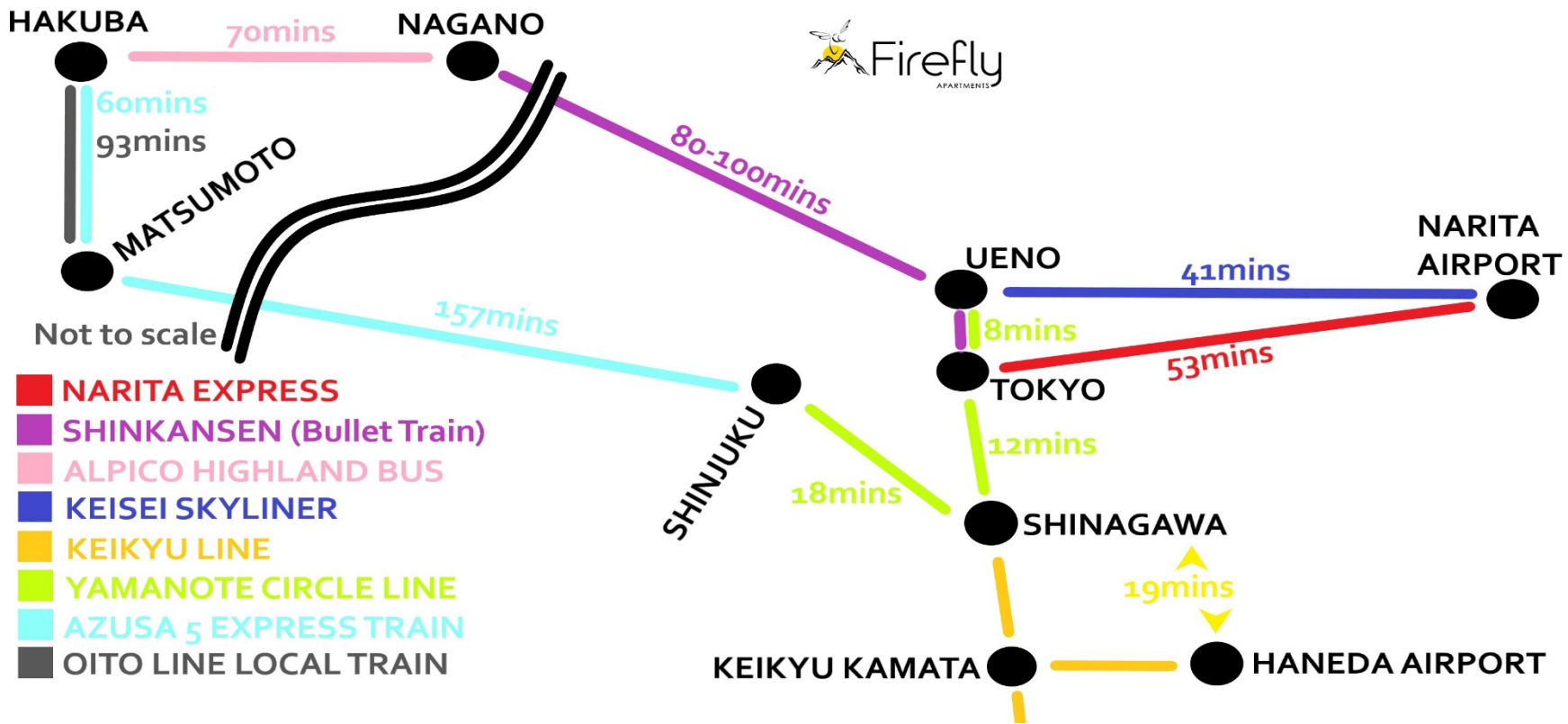
If you arrive into Japan mid evening or later, your best option would be by car or bus or stay overnight in Tokyo.

Both airports, major stations, and Shinjuku station have JR ticket offices where you can buy tickets for your journey with English speaking staff. Just let them know your destination and they will arrange the most efficient method from A to B.

The best website for intercity train schedules is <https://www.hyperdia.com/>. It is not the most user-friendly software and you need to be very precise with your search criteria but it's the Japanese standard. If you show the train you want to catch from the search results at any ticket office in Japan, they will know exactly where it is and how to get there. In urban areas, Google Maps does a great job.

Prior to Covid, JR had the 'JR East Pass'. It allowed foreign tourists to use an unlimited number of journeys on any 5 days you selected in a 14-day period. You could get the train up, ski for a week, have a day trip to explore Matsumoto, get the train back and still have 2 days left over to explore Tokyo or Nagano on the pass. At the moment, JR is only offering 5 consecutive days on this pass to locals and tourists alike, which would only be slightly beneficial on a return trip from Narita/Tokyo and if you wanted a day trip to Matsumoto from Hakuba. https://www.jreast.co.jp/multi/en/pass/eastpass_n.html





By Bullet Train (Shinkansen)

The Shinkansen is the most 'Japanese' way of getting to the Hakuba Valley. The trains are super comfortable, punctual to the second and a great experience! What is better than whizzing through the countryside at 275Kph with a drink in hand, watching the world go by! Just as much as us big kids, the little ones totally love the experience too!

The Shinkansen departs from Tokyo Station and makes a brief stop at Ueno station before continuing on to Nagano. We will outline the easiest ways to get to Tokyo or Ueno Station from both airports later in this document.

Classes of Travel

The Shinkansen has three classes of travel, Ordinary, Green Car and GranClass.

Ordinary Class is laid out in a 2+3 layout with assigned seating. Each seat has a power plug (Japanese/US 2-prong), tray table, drink holder and a generous amount of legroom compared to an aircraft (40in, 101cm). The middle seat is also 2cm wider so you don't feel so sandwiched in. The Japanese think of everything! For the luggage, there is an overhead shelf for carry-on sized items and at the end of each car a rack for larger items. Free Wi-Fi is available (except when the train is in a tunnel - about 30% of the journey.)

Green Car is similar to a business class style service. The car is laid out in a 2+2 configuration with each seat being an electric recliner with footrest and 47in (119cm) of legroom. You will be greeted by an attendant once the train gets moving with a warm towel to welcome you on board. The Green Car is also available on the Narita Express and the Azusa train too.

GranClass is a first class service. In Tokyo station you get access to the sumptuous 'View Gold Lounge' for some pre-departure drinks and nibbles up to 90mins prior to departure. On the platform, you are shown to your seat by your personal attendant and from then it's full service all the way. The layout is in a 1+2 configuration with each seat being an automated leather recliner with massage functions. It was designed by Ken Okuyama, the famous Japanese designer for Ferrari. Also included are a Japanese-style light meal, beer, wine, sake, amenity kit and even slippers! The train car even has an active magnetic suspension so you get a smoother ride than the other carriages! Really is full service all the way!





Ordinary Class



Green Car



GranClass

From Narita Airport

On the basement level you need to proceed to the red JR ticket office. It's adjacent to the ticket gates. The English speaking agent there can help you arrange the most efficient means to get to the Nagano Shinkansen Station. Your first train will be the NEX (Narita Express) which takes about 53mins direct to Tokyo Station. It has reserved seating with luggage storage, free Wi-Fi, in-seat power and makes for a simple and comfortable direct journey to Tokyo Station. (If using a JR Railpass, use the larger 'Travel Services' counter).



Narita Ticket Office



NEX train exterior...



...And interior

In Tokyo Station, you can transfer in under 10mins to the Shinkansen but it's a good idea to leave yourself a bit of extra time as a buffer and to buy a few supplies for the journey. There is no shortage of stores to stock up on supplies! There is a small coffee shop inside the Shinkansen gates too. Tokyo station, although well signed, is a bit of a rabbit warren being the world's 8th busiest railway station. Follow the signs for the Green Shinkansen (not Blue) on platforms 20-23.



Follow the Green Shinkansen Signage

If you catch the Keisei Skyliner to Ueno it arrives at Keisei Ueno Station, which is separate to Ueno Station where the Shinkansen departs. It is just a little over 200m between the two stations. You should give yourself a minimum of 15mins to transfer here. Ueno Station is a major interchange so has plenty of stores to stock up for the next leg of the journey. Just follow the signs for the Green Shinkansen.

Please continue and click the 'At Nagano' for further transfer information.



Nagano Shinkansen

From Haneda Airport

As you exit into the arrival hall, if you walk past the bus counters towards the monorail station, there is a JR ticket office that can create a booking for you from start to finish. They will advise the best way to connect through to Tokyo. Usually allow about 30mins to get to Tokyo taking into account connection time. We will describe the Keikyu Line to Shinagawa, then the Yamanote Line to Tokyo Station because it is generally the fastest, with more frequent departures and also less walking to connect in Shinagawa. The monorail is also an option. You will need to change to the Yamanote Line at Hamamatsucho if you take the monorail.

Using the Keikyu Line, you will be catching a suburban train to Shinagawa then changing trains. The trains depart every 5-15 minutes but half the trains departing the airport are bound for destinations south of Tokyo like Yokohama. You should always check which direction it will be going before jumping on. There is a TV screen on the platform with a map indicating which direction the train will be destined for beyond the fork at the station Keikyu Kamata. Common destinations that will be on the signage that you want to take: Shinagawa, Aoto, Takasago, Imba-Nihon-Idai.



Avoid Trains for Yokohama. Get on northbound trains to Shinagawa (The sign will alternate between Japanese and English)

When you arrive at Shinagawa, you need to exit the train and proceed towards the front of the train. There will be an elevator next to the stairs to take you down under the tracks and back up to platform level on the other side of the station. Don't exit through the ticket gates on the street/basement level. Follow the signs for 'JR Line Transfer'. Back at platform level on the other side of the tracks, there is a large set of ticket gates. These you can pass through and you are now in the JR Station. The Yamanote Line (green) is the first platform you come to. It is well signposted and you want to take it towards Tokyo. The trains run every 2mins so you will never be waiting long if you miss one!



Follow Signage for 'Transfer to JR Line'



Don't exit. Follow 'Transfer to JR Line'



Then Use the Gates Transfer to JR Line at platform level. Yamanote Line for Tokyo Station

It will take you about 12mins on the Yamanote line to reach Tokyo Station.

When you arrive at Tokyo Station, follow the signs for the Green Shinkansen Transfer. The Shinkansen departs on platforms 20-23 for Nagano.



At Nagano

You will arrive at the Nagano Shinkansen Station after 80-100mins, depending on the speed of your train and how many stops it makes.

Proceed up the escalators, and exit through the exit ticket gates almost straight ahead. After you pass through the gates there will be a large lighted information sign in front of you. Turn left here. Proceed straight and on your left side there will be an elevator. Take it to street level. Pass the taxi rank and look for bus bay 26, Alpico Highland Bus - Hakuba.



Close to departure time, a ticket agent will appear and ask your destination. Catch the coach to 'Happo' or 'Tsugaike' or 'Hakuba Norikura'. Preference is: 'Hakuba Norikura', then 'Tsugaike' or as a last resort 'Happo'. The coach tickets are bought onboard. Starting season 2022/23 they accept cash and VISA credit cards ONLY via a tap. Always a good idea to have the cash just in case. Non-Japanese cards can be hit and miss.

Most departures line up with Shinkansen arrivals and run every 30 to 90mins depending on the time of day. If you have a layover, there are plenty of coffee shops and restaurants inside the station complex.

If you need picking-up from Norikura or Tsugaike you MUST pre-arrange this with us.

If you have a long wait, you can buy your tickets in advance from the Alpico ticket office across the road from the Zenkoji Station exit (north) Blue shop next to the post office. Google Map link; <https://goo.gl/maps/Zw76bqkxdie4HNme8>

The Alpico Bus timetable: <https://www.alpico.co.jp/en/timetable/hakuba/r-nagano-hakuba/>

Azusa Express Train

The Azusa No. 5 express train departs Shinjuku in central Tokyo every morning at 8am and arrives at the last stop, Minami-Otari, at 11:56. No transfers. This train is super handy if you are spending a few days in Tokyo prior to your stay with us. We can store your gear and have you on the mountain just after lunchtime! Sometimes the early mornings are worth it! Please contact us to arrange a complimentary pickup from Minami-Otari Station. Do not get off at Hakuba!

The train is a well-known train made famous for the views you experience along the way. On a clear day, you can expect to have some great views of Mt Fuji. The train is even specifically designed for the views with extra-large windows.

If 8am is too early for you, the Azusa has several departures later in the day but the train terminates at Matsumoto. From there you transfer to the waiting Oito Local Line train for the last hour and a half of your journey. A lot of guests break up the journey with a quick stop in Matsumoto to check out the castle, have lunch, and then continue on. Makes a relaxing day trip.

The castle is a brief 15min walk through some medieval streets and also has some interesting temples along the way too. During the winter, on many days the castle also has full battle dressed Samurais, drummers and market stalls. Sometimes even a Samurai battle takes place! Makes a really fun bonus on battle days! There are luggage storage lockers in the station of varying sizes. They are coin only and tend to fill up by late morning in peak periods.

