

Fumi's Guide to Japan Railways

A practical companion for choosing trains, making transfers and learning on the ground.

The journey is more than the ride.

The useful exit, the correct operator, the extra ticket and the walk between platforms can matter as much as the train itself. This guide explains the decisions, then gives you exercises to practise them.



Original journey schematic; selected stops only, not to scale.

Use the chapter you need

- 02 Read the railway; use tickets and IC cards**
- 03 Kansai Airport and the first city transfer**
- 04 Osaka: stations, operators and short exercises**
- 05 Kyoto: two arrival routes and a bus connection**
- 06 Nara from Kyoto: choose the station and service**
- 07 Shinkansen: reservation, gate and baggage**
- 08 Tokyo: JR, Metro, Toei and the Keiyo transfer**
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Public reusable edition. No personal itinerary, booking records or hotel prices. Fumi assistance is a proposed companion experience; this manual works without a live Fumi service.

Read the railway.

Operator > line > direction > stopping pattern > platform > useful exit.

Before boarding, read the whole instruction

Operator and line. JR, a private railway and a subway can serve the same district through different stations and gates. Match the operator as well as the station name.

Direction and destination. Read the next stops. The final destination can be beyond the place you want; a familiar line colour is not enough.

Service type and stops. Local, rapid and limited express describe different services. Check your stop in the actual train listing, then confirm any reserved-seat or supplement requirement.

Platform, car and exit. Use the departure board for the platform. For a reservation, match the car and seat. Before leaving the paid area, find the exit that serves your street destination.

An IC card pays; it does not plan

ICOCA, Suica and other compatible cards are convenient on participating urban rail and bus networks. Acceptance is not universal, and crossing separate IC coverage areas may require a paper ticket. Check the whole journey.

Use the same card or device for entry and exit. Keep enough balance. A phone and a watch are separate travel credentials even if they belong to you. If a gate rejects entry or exit, step aside and show the journey to staff; do not try several unrelated cards.

Reserved trains are a separate decision

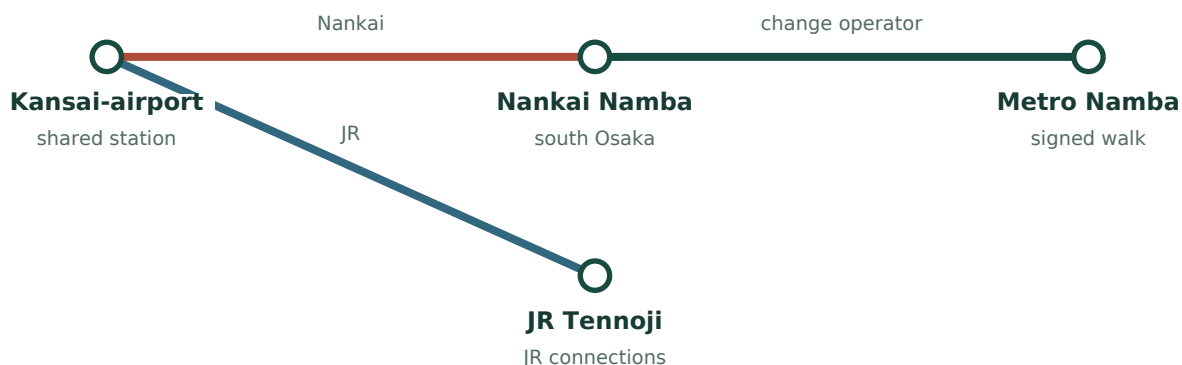
Stored value alone does not buy a Shinkansen reservation. Many limited-express services need an additional ticket. Follow the boarding instructions for the particular product you purchased.

Useful words: kaisatsu = ticket gate; norikae = transfer; deguchi = exit; noriba = boarding place; kaisoku = rapid; tokkyu = limited express; shiteiseki = reserved seat.

Official checks: [ICOCA: use and coverage](#) / [SmartEX: boarding methods](#)

Kansai Airport to the city.

One airport station, two railway operators. Choose by the final destination.



Original journey schematic; selected stops only, not to scale.

Choose the service before the gate

Nankai for Namba. Airport Express uses an ordinary fare. Limited Express Rapid requires an additional limited-express ticket. Compare the complete journey, seat and baggage comfort rather than speed alone.

JR for a JR-connected destination. Compare the current airport rapid or limited-express options with the onward station. Read the full stopping pattern and required ticket type.

Rinku Town is a short first journey. Select an ordinary service that lists Rinku Town. The operator distinction is still important, even when the trip is only one stop.

Arrival to hotel, one decision at a time

Find the station signs after clearing arrival formalities. Confirm the route from your actual airport terminal. At the station, identify the JR and Nankai entrances, prepare the correct ticket, and check the display before entering.

The Namba name is not one platform

Nankai Namba, Osaka Metro Namba, Osaka-Namba and JR Namba are distinct. For Hommachi, find Osaka Metro and the Midosuji Line. Include the signed walking transfer in your travel allowance.

First exercise: photograph or sketch a public operator sign, record the arrival-to-gate walk, and explain why your chosen train stops at your destination. Keep private tickets out of photographs.

Official checks: [Nankai: airport train types](#) / [JR West: routes and station maps](#) / [Osaka Metro: official route map](#)

Learn Osaka by short journeys.

Use a simple subway spine; then add one deliberate change to JR.



Original Midosuji Line learning spine; intervening stops omitted, not to scale.

Start with stations you will use again

Short rides. From Hommachi, practise the Midosuji Line to Shinsaibashi, Namba and Umeda. Decide the street destination first, then choose a useful exit. Compare one short ride with the surface walk.

The Umeda area. Distinguish Metro Umeda from JR Osaka and Hankyu Osaka-umeda. Follow the named operator signs. Time the transfer walk rather than treating these names as the same gate.

One operator change. Ride the Chuo Line from Hommachi to Morinomiya, then connect to the JR Osaka Loop Line for Osaka. Verify the actual train destination and stopping pattern; not every Loop Line service keeps circling.

Two useful practice days

Day A: two or three familiar subway journeys, a station map, and a specific exit. Repeat the return without relying on a single coloured line.

Day B: the Morinomiya operator change, then JR Osaka to Metro Umeda. Record gates, level changes and where the next operator becomes clear.

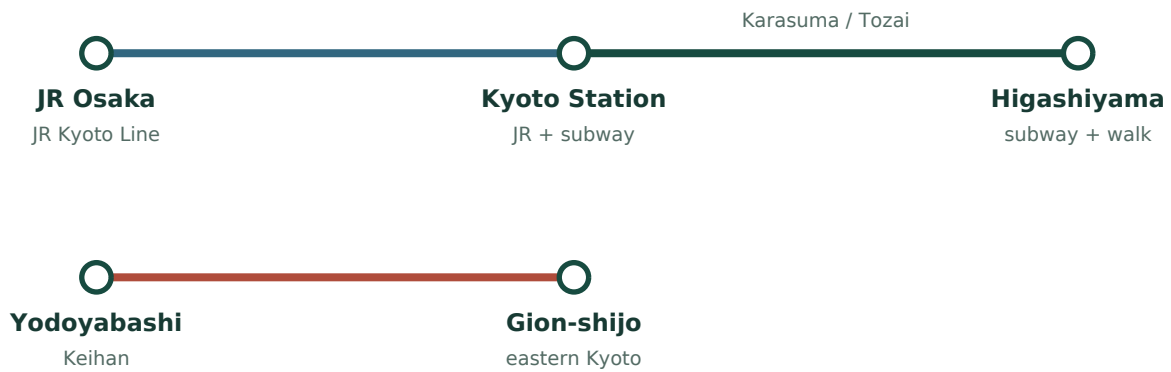
Success is an explanation you can reuse

Write a three-step transfer instruction with the operator, the line and the useful sign. Note the lift route if that is easier with luggage. Leave exact platform numbers to current displays.

Official checks: [Osaka Metro: official route map](#) / [JR West: routes and station maps](#)

Kyoto: arrive for the place.

A station is an access choice. Match it to the district you want to explore.



Original journey schematic; selected stops only, not to scale.

An adaptable two-day programme

First approach: JR and subway. Take a suitable JR Kyoto Line service from Osaka to Kyoto. Find the Karasuma subway line; for Higashiyama, change at Karasuma Oike to the Tozai Line. Compare arriving at Kyoto Station with reaching the district itself.

Return approach: Keihan. From eastern Kyoto, compare a suitable Gion-shijo service to Yodoyabashi, then Osaka Metro. Check the selected service and any change. This is a different station and operator from JR Kyoto.

Second outing: a rail-led visit. Use Kyoto Station and the JR Nara Line for Inari, with Nara as an optional continuation. A full shrine-and-Nara day can be tiring; split it if the sightseeing deserves more time.

Learn one bus journey, not the entire city

Choose a short useful route from the current stop board. Check the correct side of the road, destination and stop name. For ordinary Kyoto City Bus routes, board at the rear and pay when leaving through the front. EX100 and EX101 use front boarding, payment on entry and rear exit.

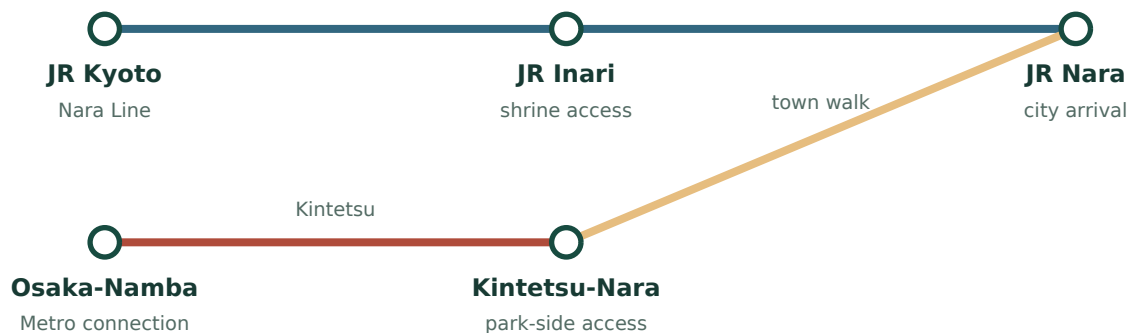
The walk is part of the route

Kyoto sightseeing often includes long approaches, stairs and busy streets. Rail plus a compact walking area can be more useful than chasing distant attractions by bus. Note crowding and the return stop before wandering.

Official checks: [Kyoto City: subway lines](#) / [Kyoto City: boarding a bus](#) / [Keihan: Osaka and Kyoto](#)

Inari and Nara, with intention.

Check the service, compare arrival stations, and keep the return simple.



Original journey schematic; selected stops only, not to scale.

Start with the correct Inari station

JR Inari and Keihan Fushimi-Inari are different stations. From JR Kyoto, use the JR Nara Line and verify Inari in the train listing. Kyoto City's current guide lists rapid as well as local services stopping there; do not rely on an old "locals only" rule.

Choose Nara by the visit you want

JR Nara and Kintetsu-Nara are separate arrivals. Kintetsu-Nara gives useful access to the park and temple district; JR Nara may suit a JR approach or a different city route. Compare the whole walk, including hills, weather and energy, rather than the rail time alone.

For a through JR outing from Inari towards Nara, confirm the selected train and any change. For a Kintetsu return to Osaka-Namba, check whether it is direct and whether your service requires an extra limited-express ticket. Find the Metro connection at Osaka-Namba before assuming you have reached the desired Namba platform.

A good circuit still needs room to enjoy it

Kyoto > Inari > Nara > Osaka is a full day. Choose a smaller walking area, or make Nara a separate excursion. Keep the last practical return and an alternative route available.

Field task: compare the JR and Kintetsu arrival-to-destination walks. Record the station name, useful exit and one thing the route planner did not explain. Avoid calling one station universally "better".

Official checks: [Kyoto City: Fushimi Inari access](#) / [Kintetsu: network and stop patterns](#) / [JR West: routes and station maps](#)

Reserve. Reach the gate. Board.

Treat local travel, the Shinkansen reservation and station walking as separate tasks.



Original journey schematic; selected stops only, not to scale.

Before the travel day

Confirm the actual station: Shin-Osaka is different from JR Osaka. Reserve the correct train, date, car and seat. SmartEX supports its own boarding methods, including an assigned IC card, a QR ticket or collected paper tickets. Follow the instructions for the method you selected.

With SmartEX linked-IC boarding, the Shinkansen charge is paid through the reservation payment card; it is not taken from IC stored value. Conventional-line fares remain separate. Use the correctly assigned card at the transfer gate and collect the seat-information slip where issued.

Choose a train that stops at the destination

For Atami, select a Kodama or a Hikari whose stop list includes Atami. Nozomi does not stop there. Book separate journeys for a multi-night Atami stay when the product requires it; a SmartEX journey is not an unrestricted stopover ticket.

Measure luggage before buying the seat

On the Tokaido, Sanyo, Kyushu and Nishi Kyushu Shinkansen, ordinary luggage over 160 cm and up to 250 cm in combined length, width and height needs the relevant oversized-baggage reservation. Larger luggage is not accepted as ordinary carry-on. Confirm special-item exceptions and storage rules with the operator. Keep aisles and doors clear.

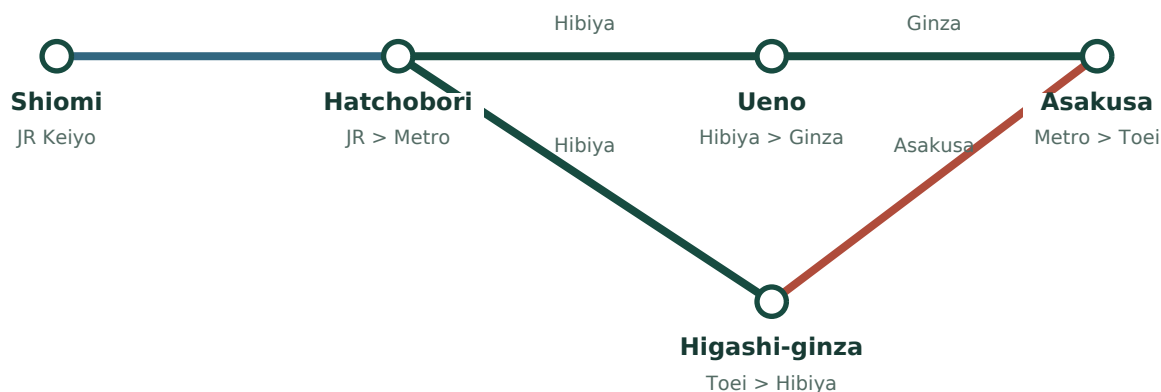
If you miss the train or the gate refuses entry

Do not assume the next train has the same ticket rights or baggage space. Ask staff or the booking provider and show the actual reservation. Discount and reserved-seat conditions differ; change the booking before departure where permitted.

Official checks: [SmartEX: boarding methods](#) / [SmartEX: linked IC-card boarding](#) / [JR Central: oversized baggage](#) / [JR Central: Shinkansen stops](#)

Tokyo is several networks.

Use JR, Metro and Toei deliberately; a district name is not a ticketing system.



Original journey schematic; selected stops only, not to scale.

A useful practice circuit

Ride JR Keiyo from Shiomi to Hatchobori, change to Metro Hibiya for Ueno, then Metro Ginza for Asakusa. Return via the Toei Asakusa Line to Higashi-ginza, Metro Hibiya to Hatchobori and JR to Shiomi. Verify directions and transfer instructions on the day. Break the circuit into outings if that suits you.

Tokyo Station and the Keiyo walk

The Keiyo platforms are not beside every Shinkansen or JR arrival platform. Follow Keiyo signs and include the concourse walk, level changes and waiting time. Choose a Keiyo service that stops at Shiomi if that is your destination; the line name alone does not guarantee the stop.

A subway ticket does not cover every Tokyo train

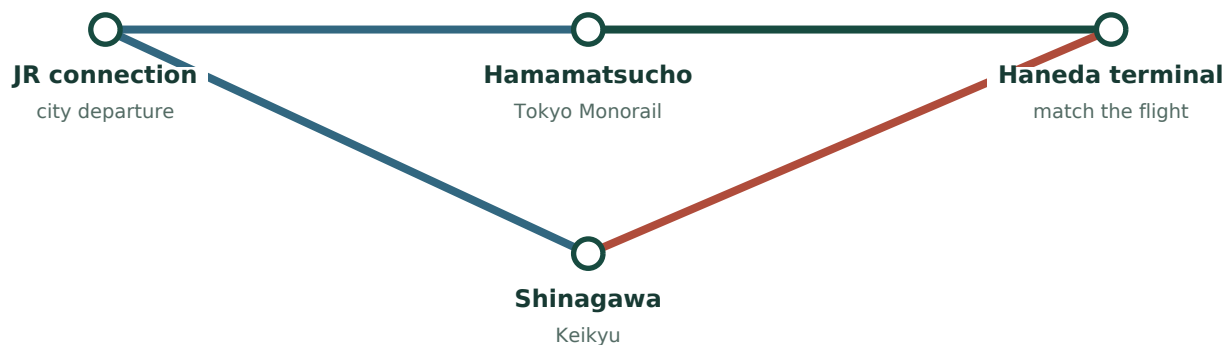
The Tokyo Subway Ticket covers Tokyo Metro and Toei subway lines. JR Keiyo, JR Yamanote and other JR journeys are separate. Compare a pass with the rides you will actually make, then check its current eligibility and validity.

What to learn: which gate ends one operator's journey, which sign begins the next, and whether the transfer is inside the paid area or involves a street walk. For every outing, save a useful exit and an easy return.

Official checks: [JR East: route and station maps](#) / [Tokyo Metro: subway map](#) / [Tokyo Subway Ticket: coverage](#)

Finish the journey at the terminal.

A correct airport train is only part of a successful departure.



Original journey schematic; selected stops only, not to scale.

Haneda: compare two rail approaches

Tokyo Monorail connects the airport with Hamamatsucho and an onward JR connection. Keikyū offers an alternative via Shinagawa and through services. Choose from your actual city starting point, with the number of changes, walking and baggage in mind. Verify the selected train's destination.

Use the terminal on the current airline ticket and airport departure information. Do not assume all international flights use Terminal 3: Haneda can use Terminals 2 and 3 for international flights. Include the station-to-check-in walk and the airline's check-in deadline, not merely the airport-station arrival time.

Major stations need a street destination

At Tokyo, Shinjuku or Shibuya, identify the useful exit before leaving the paid area. Construction, lifts and crowding can alter a familiar walk. A direction such as "get off at Shinjuku" is incomplete without the operator, line and exit or nearby destination.

Do experiments before the airport day

Practise a major-station transfer when you have time. For a flight, use the route you can explain, add a generous disruption margin and finish the field exercise before the time-critical journey begins.

Accessibility check: select a step-free route when useful, locate lifts from the station map, and allow for queues. If assistance is important, contact the operator in advance; do not treat a planner's lift symbol as a guarantee of an effortless transfer.

Official checks: [Tokyo Monorail: Haneda access](#) / [Keikyū: terminal to station](#) / [Haneda Airport: international departure](#) / [JR East: route and station maps](#)

Use a flight to link two rail stays.

Good regional combinations start with the airport-to-town journey.

Hokkaido: New Chitose, Sapporo and Otaru

JR Hokkaido's airport trains link New Chitose with Sapporo; some run through to Otaru. Read the destination: a Sapporo or Teine-bound train is not automatically an Otaru service. Ordinary non-reserved travel can use a compatible IC card; reserved seating requires the appropriate additional purchase.

Hokkaido IC limits matter

JR Hokkaido notes that IC travel cannot continue beyond Otaru towards Yoichi, Kutchan or Niseko. Plan the whole trip and buy the required ticket before setting off rather than discovering the boundary at a small station.

Hokuriku: Kanazawa and Toyama

Pair a Kanazawa stay with Toyama by the Hokuriku Shinkansen. Book through the appropriate JR reservation channel; SmartEX is for the Tokaido, Sanyo and Kyushu corridor, not this northern route. Distinguish Komatsu Airport from Komatsu railway station and Toyama Airport from Toyama railway station. The airport transfer is a separate leg to plan.

Southern Japan: hubs, then short connections

Hakata is a useful Fukuoka rail hub; Kagoshima-Chuo is the Shinkansen arrival in Kagoshima. Kansai can link to southern domestic airports by flight. For each option, compare the airport transfer, city station, hotel access and onward journey before assuming a cheap flight produces a cheap or easy day.

Compare door to door, not air to rail

Add local transfer, check-in or boarding time, connection margin, baggage rules and a final walk. Price the actual reserved rail journeys before choosing a pass. An airline itinerary with inexpensive domestic hops is an individual fare search, not a permanent offer or a guarantee of free sectors.

Check seasonal rail disruption and flight changes with the actual operators. Avoid a tightly timed connection between separately booked rail and flights when missing it would be costly.

Official checks: [JR Hokkaido: airport, Sapporo, Otaru](#) / [JR West: routes and station maps](#) / [JR Kyushu: travel information](#) / [SmartEX: boarding methods](#)

Travel. Check. Notice. Improve.

A working exercise is successful when it produces a clearer instruction.

Three programmes you can repeat

Osaka: two flexible days. Read an airport/operator sign, practise the Midosuji spine, then make one subway-to-JR change. Explain the difference between Osaka, Umeda and Shin-Osaka.

Kyoto and Nara: two outings. Compare the JR approach with a Keihan return. Try one useful bus ride; on another day, verify Inari and compare the two Nara arrivals.

Tokyo: three days plus an airport module. Measure the Keiyo walk, cross JR/Metro/Toei boundaries, choose a major-station exit and rehearse the airport route without a flight deadline.

What a human notices that a planner may miss

A sign visible only after a turn; an exhausting stairway; a lift queue; a noisy announcement; nowhere to sit; awkward luggage; an exit that leaves you across a difficult road. Record conditions and consequences, not only whether the train arrived.

Recovery: stop, locate, confirm

Step aside from the passenger flow. Identify your station, gate or street. Check the operator display or ask staff using the destination and line name. If you lost an item, record the train, direction, approximate time and car if known, then contact that operator's lost-property service. Never enter the track area.

One journey record

Start station / gate / street and destination / useful exit

Operator / line / service / ticket / walking, waiting and riding times

Advice tested / correct, incorrect or unverified / supporting evidence

Human observation / help required / correction worth keeping

Photograph public infrastructure only where permitted. Avoid identifiable bystanders, private tickets and staff working areas. An observation may inform future Fumi guidance; this is not a live AI test system.

[Open the full Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo field exercises at FumiTours.com](#)

Keep the official sources close.

Reviewed for this edition on 5 October 2026. Current displays and staff instructions take priority.

These links open operator guidance rather than copied commercial maps. Diagrams in this manual are original simplified learning routes: not geographic maps, full stop lists or platform plans.

ICOCA: use and coverage

www.westjr.co.jp/global/en/howto/icoca/

Nankai: airport train types

www.nankai.co.jp/en_railway/access-timetable

JR West: routes and station maps

www.westjr.co.jp/travel-information/en/plan-your-trip/routes-schedule/

Osaka Metro: official route map

subway.osakametro.co.jp/en/guide/routemap.php

Keihan: Osaka and Kyoto

www.keihan.co.jp/travel/en/

Kyoto City: subway lines

www2.city.kyoto.lg.jp/kotsu/webguide/en/tika/tika_route_info.html

Kyoto City: boarding a bus

www2.city.kyoto.lg.jp/kotsu/webguide/en/bus/howtoride_bus.html

Kyoto City: Fushimi Inari access

kyoto.travel/en/getting-around/comfortable-access-to-fushimi-fushimi-inari-taisha-shrine/

Kintetsu: network and stop patterns

www.kintetsu.co.jp/foreign/english/about/station/route_map/

SmartEX: boarding methods

smart-ex.jp/en/entraining/

SmartEX: linked IC-card boarding

smart-ex.jp/en/entraining/iccard/

JR Central: oversized baggage

global.jr-central.co.jp/en/info/oversized-baggage/

JR Central: Shinkansen stops

travel.jr-central.co.jp/plan/tokushu/shinkansen/station/

JR East: route and station maps

www.jreast.co.jp/e/routemaps/

Tokyo Metro: subway map

www.tokyometro.jp/en/subwaymap/index.html

Tokyo Subway Ticket: coverage

www.tokyometro.jp/en/ticket/travel/index.html

Tokyo Monorail: Haneda access

www.tokyo-monorail.co.jp/english/

Keikyu: terminal to station

www.haneda-tokyo-access.com/en/haneda-airport/to-station.html

Haneda Airport: international departure

tokyo-haneda.com/en/flight/int/index.html

JR Hokkaido: airport, Sapporo, Otaru

www.jrhokkaido.co.jp/global/english/travel/airport.html

JR Kyushu: travel information

www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/

Before an important departure

Station and terminal: actual starting point, destination, operator and useful exit.

Train and ticket: service stops, reservation and boarding method.

Margin: walking, waiting, luggage and possible disruption.

Backup: charged device, saved route, correct ticket and a way to ask staff.

Edition 1.0 is practical selected guidance, not a nationwide timetable. No fares, fixed platforms or guaranteed transfer times are promised. Keep your private itinerary and emergency information in a separate personal document.