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Japan Railways, Inc.

The Japanese are very proud of their railway system and, as it probably offers the most comfortable and efficient rail service in the world, they have every right to be! The system that is in place consists of several companies that operate trains and railways. The most prominent of these is the nationally run organization called Japan Railways, or JR for short. JR has a vast network of trains that cover nearly every population center in the country. In addition to JR, there are a handful of other private railway companies that have extensive systems in all the major cities that cater to commuters and tourists.

Within the JR system there are seven distinct rail services designed to meet the needs of most any commuter or tourist. These are divided up according to the two different types of tracks used. One kind of track is a normal track similar in construction



to those used in the United States, and by most other industrialized nations. These tracks have a physical speed limitation on them, and as such, are used by the slower inter-city services, the moderately fast intra-city services, and everything in between. These services are named (in order from fastest to slowest): Limited Express or Tokkyuu, Express or Kyuukoo, Rapid train or Kaisoku, and Local train or Futsuu. The Shinkansen Line is made of parallel runs of welded (vice bolted) stainless steel track that in essence is one continuous rail. This enables the rail to be able to handle trains with much higher speeds than otherwise and this is where the other three trains run. The Shinkansen, or “Bullet Train”, can run at speeds in excess of 270 km/hr, and are used mainly for island-scale travel and going

between cities. The three services offered are (in order from fastest to slowest): the new Tadama, Hikari, and Kodama. The Shinkansen tracks run practically the whole length of Honshu along the pacific seaboard, and include limited service on Kyushu Island to the city of Fukuoka.

The railways in Japan are extremely efficient and comfortable. Sitting in a Shinkansen train is akin to sitting in a first class seat in an airliner. A uniformed JR snack vendor even comes by nearly every five minutes. All JR stations have timetables, which indicate when trains are due in at the station. And unlike most public transportation timetables in the United States, the trains actually follow these tables and are uncannily punctual! Overall, the Japanese railway infrastructure is simply amazing.