Getting to the ASLO conference venue – detailed information

ASLO-Biwako will take place at Otsu on the shores of Lake Biwa, a large (670 km\(^2\)) ancient (>3 million years) lake that is the source of drinking water for the city of Kyoto. Otsu is the capital of Shiga Prefecture, and lies 10 minutes by local train from Kyoto Station. Kyoto is usually accessed by flights to Kansai Airport (Osaka), Itami Airport (Osaka) or Narita Airport (Tokyo), followed by rail or bus connections. We hope the detailed travel information presented here will help your rapid transit from these airports to your hotel. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the ASLO-Japan office (aslo.biwako@gmail.com).

1. From Kansai Airport (KIX)

This is the probably the easiest of the three options, but not all airlines fly into or have easy connections to KIX.

- You will probably arrive on the ground floor after taking the monorail from your plane, passing immigration, picking up your bag and going through customs. It will depend on the day and other flights, but beautiful KIX airport (designed by European architect Renzo Piano) has one of the fastest services in the world from plane to terminal exit, making you forever wonder why airports in the rest of the world cannot be that efficient.

- On the ground floor just before the exit there is a series of ATMs, if you would like to pick up some cash in Japanese currency (Yen). Not all of the machines take non-Japanese cards, and not all have English options (some have a button you touch to convert the screen to English).

- Cross the road by taking the elevator to the second floor (marked 2F) of the terminal and then the pedestrian overpass across the street. Follow the signs to the Japan Rail train station (marked JR Line or JR Station).

- The JR station is on the same 2F floor level as the terminal building you have come across from (normally you will turn left after crossing the street via the overpass, then right a minute later, but look for the signs). Continue past the wall of ticket machines (on your left) unless you are ready for some stimulating mental exercise after your long flight, and go into the JR ticket office, on the far left, just beyond the machines.

- Ask for a ticket on the Haruka (fast express) to Kyoto and the train connection to Otsu. Reserved seats on the Haruka train are a little more expensive but worth it (there are no reserved seats on the local train). The Haruka trains leave about once an hour (option KT in the timetable: www.kansai-airport.or.jp/en/access/train/jr_time.html). This would be a good time to get your return ticket as well, and to ask for a receipt if necessary. Most credit cards are accepted. Most of the people there speak some English, but it is good to have your travel plans written out with dates and Kansai-Kyoto-Otsu – today (and your return Otsu-Kyoto-Kansai - date & time) clearly marked so there is no confusion.
• You will get a stack of little cards as tickets and it is important to hold on to these throughout the trip. The entrance to the trains is through the turnstiles opposite the JR ticket office. When you are starting to ‘learn Japan’ the best approach is to go to where the JR person in uniform at the gate is standing & show him/her your ticket. They are all extremely courteous and will love to help you. They will show you how to insert your tickets (2 or 3 for this trip) in the turnstile machine (remember to pick up and hold on to the 1 or more tickets that come out again – you will need it/them at the end of the trip).

• Descend the escalator to the trains. Find your car number marked on the platform & wait there. The train will arrive, be cleaned, and then leave just a few minutes after opening its doors to passengers. Sit back and enjoy this smooth ride to Kyoto, first crossing Osaka Bay by bridge, then winding through the vast urban and suburban environments of Osaka (whose residents also take their drinking water from Lake Biwa), interspersed with rice fields.

• The trip to Kyoto Station takes 75 mins. After disembarking the train take the escalator upstairs to Platform 2 (photo at left). Take any train on the Biwako line (platform 2, left hand side of the platform when descending the stairs). The first stop is Yamashina, the second is your stop, Otsu Station (about 10 mins total transit time).

• Exit Otsu station through its main (north or Biwako) gate – most people will be leaving in this direction, so follow the crowd. You will need to insert your remaining ticket in the turnstile to exit, or just show your ticket to the nice JR person at the gate.

• Your hotel may be in walking distance of the station, but if not (e.g., Prince Hotel, Biwako Hotel, Koyo Hotel, Piazza Biwako Hotel), the easiest will be to take a cab, which is worth doing at least once in Japan to discover the ultimate in service and cleanliness. The taxi stand is about 50 m to the left of the station exit. The driver will automatically open and close the door, so try to resist the temptation to do it yourself. A taxi ride to the hotel will take 8-15 mins, depending on traffic and the hotel.

• If you are going to the Prince Hotel, you may be in time for the free shuttle. Cross the road from Otsu Station for this: www.princehotels.com/en/otsu/access/shuttlebus.html
2. From Itami Airport (ITM)

Many of us will arrive at this airport after a connection via Narita in Tokyo (or perhaps from Tokyo’s second airport, Haneda). If you need Yen, there are cash machines (ATMs) in the South Terminal, including 7 Bank which has an English option when you insert your card. If you have time between connections at Narita, it would be a good idea to use the ATM machines there (e.g., Citibank). **Note:** For your return trip, the first bus from Kyoto Station to Itami is at 5h50: [http://www.okkbus.co.jp/en/timetable/itm/f_kyt.html](http://www.okkbus.co.jp/en/timetable/itm/f_kyt.html). The bus could be delayed by traffic, so it would be best to stay overnight in Osaka if you have an early morning flight.

- After picking up your bags on the ground floor (you probably already cleared customs in Narita), exit the terminal and look for the bus ticket machines, immediately outside (photo to left). The sign above the machines being pointed to shows the destinations in English, including the bus stop number for Kyoto.

- Insert Yen bills and touch Kyoto Station – it was 1280 yen in April 2012 – then the symbol of 1 person to get one ticket. Pick up your ticket and change. The bottom left hand corner of the machine has a square to touch to convert the screen to English (photo left). Go to the bus stop number that the Kyoto bus leaves from.

- The limousine bus ride to Kyoto should take about 1 hour. The bus will stop opposite the southern side of Kyoto JR Station. Stay on the same side of the road as the bus stop and walk in the same direction as the traffic flow on that side. At the second crosswalk (the photo to the left shows the first one to cross; the long building on the right is the train station), cross the street into the main southern entrance to Kyoto Station.
• Take the elevator, stairs/escalator upstairs and look for JR West Gate (photo at left).

• At the West Gate, buy a ticket for Otsu (this was 190 yen in April 2012) by putting coins or paper bills into the machine. The buttons will light up – push the one for 190 yen, pick up your ticket and wait for change. Pass the turnstile to the train platforms by inserting your ticket. Remember to pick it up again when it comes out the other side because you will need it to exit.

• Go to Platform 2 (photo at left). Take any train on the Biwako line (platform 2, left hand side of the platform when descending the stairs). The first stop is Yamashina, the second is your stop, Otsu Station (about 10 mins total transit time).

• Exit Otsu station through its main (north or Biwako) gate – most people will be leaving in this direction, so follow the crowd. You will need to insert your remaining ticket in the turnstile to exit, or just show your ticket to the nice JR person at the gate.

• Your hotel may be in walking distance of the station, but if not (e.g., Prince Hotel, Biwako Hotel, Koyo Hotel, Piazza Biwako Hotel), the easiest will be to take a cab, which is worth doing at least once in Japan to discover the ultimate in service and cleanliness. The taxi stand is about 50 m to the left of the station exit. The driver will automatically open and close the door, so try to resist the temptation to do it yourself. A taxi ride to the hotel will take 8-15 mins, depending on traffic and the hotel.

• If you are going to the Prince Hotel, you may be in time for the free shuttle. Cross the road from Otsu Station for this:
  www.princehotels.com/en/otsu/access/shuttlebus.htm
3. From Narita Airport (NRT)

Most international airlines serve Narita airport, which is about 60 km east of Tokyo. A good way to break up your trip would be to stay overnight in Tokyo, for example near Shinagawa Station where the bullet train (the shinkansen) stops en route for Kyoto, but it is also possible (albeit very tiring) to get all the way through from Tokyo to Kyoto and Otsu that day, depending on when your flight arrives.

Some flight connections require transfers from Narita airport to the other Tokyo airport, Haneda. This connection is also sometimes used by airlines if your flight is delayed and there are no Narita-Itami or Narita KIX flights available when you arrive. The Narita-Haneda transfer is by limousine bus, and the Information Desk near the terminal door will extremely be pleased to help you: http://www.limousinebus.co.jp/en/.

If travelling by train from Narita to Kyoto, the Narita-Express to Tokyo Station takes about an hour, and Tokyo Station to Kyoto Station is 2 h 35 mins.

- To go all the way through in the same day (only advised for marathoners), follow the signs to JR Narita Express. At the JR ticket office, buy a ticket that goes from Narita to Tokyo Station to Kyoto to Otsu. Reserved seats are a little more expensive but worth it. Most credit cards are accepted for this transaction. The JR Offices will have people who speak some English and you can ask for a receipt if necessary. You could also buy this ticket in your home country, or consider a 1-week rail pass allowing access to all JR trains. This must be purchased out of Japan, and is worth considering, especially if you intend to do quite a bit of travelling: www.jrpass.com. It is not valid for all JR trains; for example it cannot be used for the fastest Shinkansen service called the Nozomi, but it can be used for reserved seats on standard Shinkansen services.

- You will get a stack of little cards as tickets and it is important to hold on to these throughout the trip. When you are starting to ‘learn Japan’ the best approach is to go to the part of the turnstiles (ticket gates) where the JR person in uniform at the gate is standing & show him/her your ticket. They are all extremely courteous and will love to help you. They will show you how to insert your tickets in the turnstile machine. Remember to pick up and hold on to any tickets that come out again – you will need them at the end of the trip, and to show during the Shinkansen section of the trip. Your carriage number will be marked on the platform, and this is important to find and wait at because the trains do not stop for very long (2 mins max).

- At Tokyo Station (a very busy place) you should follow the signs to the Tokaido Shinkansen (bullet train) for Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka and Hakata. It will take at least 15 mins to walk from the Narita Express arrival point to the Shinkansen departure area, and you will use your Shinkansen tickets to enter through the turnstile (ticket gate) there.
- Your carriage number will be marked on the platform, and this is important to find and wait at because the trains stop only for 60 seconds. Similarly, when Kyoto is announced (this will be in English), you should collect your bags and move to the door to be ready to disembark. Kyoto is about 35 mins from the preceding station stop, Nagoya. If you end up in Osaka you have gone too far.

- On a fine day you will be able to see beautiful Mount Fuji, from the right hand side of the train, about 40 mins from Tokyo Station. This is Japan’s highest mountain (3776 m) and is of great cultural significance.

- If you are staying overnight in Tokyo (highly recommended to break up your trip, as well as one of the world’s great cities to enjoy) there are many transport options. You could take the very fast, new and reasonably priced Skyliner (well marked at Narita Airport) to Nippori (36 mins) then buy a ticket at that station (from the ticket machine) to take the JR Yamanote Line (the circle line around the city) to the station closest to your hotel.

- There is also a limousine bus service from Narita Airport; this is slow in bad traffic (1 h but allow at least 90mins), but is door-to-door, and it stops at many hotels: www.limousinebus.co.jp/en/bus_services/narita/index. For example the Shinagawa Prince Hotel, which is only a 5 min walk from the western gate of Shinagawa Station is serviced by this bus. The Information desk ladies at Narita Airport will love to talk to you and help you with bus ticket information.

- Many of the Tokaido Shinkansens stop at Shinagawa Station in Tokyo, and this is a less busy station to stay near and to buy your onward tickets from. The JR Ticket Office is near the western gate: www.jreast.co.jp/e/stations/e788.html. The ticket should be purchased for Shinagawa-Kyoto-Otsu, and it would be good to buy the return ticket at the same time. See also the preceding points for tips on Shinkansen travel.

- Once you arrive in Kyoto station, take the elevator, stairs/escalator upstairs and look for JR West Gate (photo at left).

Here is a map showing bathrooms etc in the train station; the Osaka Air port (ITM) bus stop on the south side of the station is also marked.

http://www.kyoto-station-building.co.jp/map_en/kyoto_station_building_kyoto_station.pdf
• Pass through the West Gate with your Otsu ticket and go to Platform 2 (photo at left). If you happen to arrive from an underground gate, you'll see Platform 2 on the right. Take any train on the Biwako line (Platform 2, left hand side of the platform when descending the stairs). The first stop is Yamashina, the second is your stop, Otsu Station (10 mins from Kyoto).

• Exit Otsu station through its main (north or Biwako) gate – most people will be leaving in this direction, so follow the crowd. You will need to insert your remaining ticket in the turnstile to exit, or just show your ticket to the nice JR person at the gate.

• Your hotel may be in walking distance of the station, but if not (e.g., Prince Hotel, Biwako Hotel, Koyo Hotel, Piazza Biwako Hotel), the easiest will be to take a cab, which is worth doing at least once in Japan to discover the ultimate in service and cleanliness. The taxi stand is about 50 m to the left of the station exit. The driver will automatically open and close the door, so try to resist the temptation to do it yourself. A taxi ride to the hotel will take 8-15 mins, depending on traffic and the hotel.

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