

Buying from Japan

How to buy a Kei car from Japan

There are a few ways to buy cars from Japan for USA import, car aggregators, and direct auctions. Before naming all the available options, there are some key points to cover

Cost of a Kei car

Typically, the cost of a Kei car will be displayed with the total shipping cost to the chosen port. However, this is just the first cost of the process. For my first van, the cost of the truck and shipping was \$6,850. However, customs fees, port fees, and other fees will add up.

Suzuki Cost	\$ 4,555.00
Shipping to Freeport, TX	\$ 2,263.00
Paypal fee	\$ 300.00
Port Fee	\$ 186.30
Duties	\$ 152.28
DUTY DISBURSEMENT	\$ 2.29
Broker Fee	\$ 300.00
CUSTOMS CLEARANCE	\$ 150.00
IMPORT SECURITY FILING FEE	\$ 85.00
SINGLE ENTRY BOND	\$ 95.00
OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCY FEE / OGA	\$ 55.00
POA SETUP	\$ 85.00

COLLECT SERVICE FEE	\$ 21.86
Total	\$ 8,250.73

See [Paying for a Kei car](#) on the different methods of paying.

Choosing a Kei car

Auction grade

When buying a Kei car, you will typically see the auction sheet with the auction grade. The grades are listed below:

- S or 6 – Brand New
- 5 – As new but used
- 4.5 – As above, with the most minor of blemishes
- 4 – Excellent Condition
- 3.5 – Minor Marks and Blemishes
- 3 – Noticeable/Heavy marks and Blemishes
- 2 – Poor condition
- 1/0/-1 – Very Poor condition OR modified (and quite possibly in excellent condition)
- R/RA – Accident Damaged/Repaired Vehicle

Trusting the grades

Most people advise purchasing Grade 3.5 or above vehicles, but grades do not hold as much weight as they seem. Some bidders have seen grade 4s with a heavy amount of rust, a bad smell, or other degraded features.

Example of 3.5 grade in bad condition

R grade

The R grade is also misleading because it may seem like R is the lowest grade. In reality, some good cars will have an R grade for any type of accident. R grades can become good deals, but it's recommended to have someone in person check the car.

The advice is to stick to grades 3 and above, but to still thoroughly inspect any car you purchase.

Auction sheets

See Japan Car Direct's [How To Read Auction Sheets](#) on how to read an auction sheet.

Example auction sheet

軽バントラコーナ									
3217	車種 (自家用以外は記入)		排気量		型式		評価点		
	H12/月		660		GD-TT2		3		
初年度登録年月		車名	グレード	駆動方式	エンジン	内装			
H12/月		サンバートラック	2D	TC	4WD	C			
車検	年	月	日	シフト	F5	標準品	SR	純AW	PS
走行	136,631	km	冷房	AC	カウ	TV	ナビ	エア	
外色	元色	色番	カラー	955	セールスポイント				
燃料	ガソリン	内装色	★ ユーザー買取車						
輸入車	輸入区分	ハンドル	★ 4WD						
リサイクル	0円	車庫定員	2人	積重量	0.35t	登録No			
預託金		車台No	TT2-067391						
○注意事項 (修復・不具合箇所および状態等)				シリアルNo					
○検査員報告 左Fビラー下部ヒズミ 荷台、アオリキズ凹 D/Sブーツ破れ 左右Fウィンカーレンズフレ ルーム内汚れキズ シート破れ 下廻りサビ腐食 各キズ凹ツヤなし									
[荷台内寸] 約 × × (cm) 長さ cm 幅 cm 高さ cm									

Interior grade

Similar to the auction grade is the interior grade; cars will receive an interior grade depending on the condition. The grade will take into consideration the age of the car.

- A: New
- B: Clean and in good condition
- C: Typical for its age
- D: Damaged interior and signs of wear and tear
- E: Terrible

Kilometers

Since street-legal Kei cars are 25 years old, expect the car to have a modest number of kilometers. A car in the 30,000 to 90,000 kilometer range is normal. With proper maintenance and good care, a Kei car can last well beyond 200,000 kilometers, but with all used cars, it's variable.

Car features

Kei cars have a wide range of features that can affect the pricing. The more features present in the car, the more expensive it will be. Typically, cars with 4WD and A/C will go for a higher price.

- 4WD vs 2WD
- Manual vs automatic

- [A/C vs no A/C](#)

Signs of a lower trim model:

- No keyhole in rear passenger door
- Bench seats
- No A/C

Engine placement is a factor when choosing a car. Some cars will have the engine under the seat, which can produce heat and noise, or in the back of the car.

See [Picking a Kei car](#) for more information on car features and how to pick a car.

Where to buy for import

Below are the common ways people in the USA buy Kei cars for import.

For importing a Kei car, I would recommend a **direct auction importer** for most people's first Kei car. There are many aspects of kei cars that someone in the USA might not know that they are more familiar with. They can help answer questions, find any issues, and help you learn information.

Car aggregator

Car aggregators list various cars on their websites for customers to choose from and order. It's similar to buying a car from CarMax or Carvana. Be extra cautious and thorough with these cars since the aggregators may not send any extra information beyond the photos of the car. **Be sure to negotiate for a lower price;** most of these websites will bid down the car price.

- [Car from Japan](#)
- [BeForward](#)
- [Car Deal Page](#)
- [TC-V](#)
- [Goo-net](#)

Direct auction

For a direct auction, you will work with a person in Japan who goes to the car auctions. This can be a great option since they are able to see the cars in person, take videos/photos, address any concerns you have, and ensure that the car you get is in great shape. The cost might be slightly higher than a car aggregator since it's more personal work, but you can ensure the car you get is in good shape and the one you want.

- [Japan Car Direct](#)
- [T-S export](#)

- [Way Before the Fame](#)
 - Reach out to see if Nick is in Japan
- [JDM Auction Watch](#)
- [Minitrucks](#)

Paying for a Kei car

After agreeing on the car price, you will be given a proforma invoice. After official payment, you will be sent the official invoice. Ensure that the invoice breaks apart the cost of the vehicle and the cost of shipping. This will be needed to calculate the duties owed because you do not pay duties on the cost of the vehicle + shipping, only the cost of the vehicle.

Paypal

Some websites allow for paying through PayPal. However, PayPal adds a fee (CarFromJapan adds \$300). There is also a limit on PayPal transactions in Japan, ¥1,000,000 JPY, so the payment may need to be broken up into multiple transactions by the seller.

PayPal does let you use a credit card or a payment plan. You can get a [PayPal credit card](#) to get 3% cash back on PayPal transactions, so that could help mitigate the extra PayPal fee.

Wiring money

Wiring the money can help reduce the fees, but requires having the cash immediately available in your bank account.

To wire the money, you will need the seller's SWIFT code and account number, which is provided in the official invoice.

You can wire money through your bank or use a service like [XE exchange](#) or [Wise](#). Most recommend using XE or Wise since the fees are lower.

Ensure that the invoice number is included in the memo field.

Steps after purchase

Once the car is purchased, see [How to import a Kei car](#) to start the import process