**KNIFE LEGISLATION AND HANDLING AT AIRPORTS**

**IN**

**JAPAN**

# Weapons Act

*1.1 Which knives are considered weapons under your local law?*

Article 2 of the Arms Manufacturing Law defines "arms" and includes guns, explosives, but does not include knives and other knives. However, knives and other knives are regulated by the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act and the Minor Offenses Act as described below. The conditions under which scissors in a pocket tool would be classified as a knife or dangerous objects and thus restricted by these Acts are described in paragraphs 1.2, 1.3, and 1.5.

*1.2 Is there a legal requirement to have a legitimate/justifiable reason for carrying and/or transporting a knife in the public? If so, for what kind of knives (lock knife, folding knife [depending on a special blade length or not?], fixed knife or any knife)?*

1. Carrying a knife

(1) Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act

According to the regulations under the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act, Article 22 stipulates that "no person shall carry any cutlery exceeding 6 centimeters in length of blade that was measured pursuant to the provisions of a Cabinet Office Ordinance, except for such cases where the person carries it for business and any other justifiable reason; provided, that this shall not apply to scissors and folding knives with a blade length of 8 centimeters or less, as measured pursuant to a Cabinet Office Ordinance, and to other bladed objects, if these scissors, folding knives and the other bladed objects are of the types or shapes specified by Cabinet Order."

The bladed objects specified by the Cabinet Order as exceptions under the proviso of Article 22 of the Act shall be as follows:

1. Scissors other than those with an extremely sharp tip and sharp blade.
2. Folding knives that do not exceed 1.5 centimeters in blade width and 0.25 centimeters in blade thickness, and do not have a mechanism to lock the opened blade in the sheath.
3. Fruit knives with a blade length of 8 centimeters or less, that do not exceed 0.15 centimeters in blade thickness, and have a rounded tip.
4. *Kiridashi* (craft knives) with a blade length of 7 centimeters or less, that do not exceed 2 centimeters in blade width and 0.2 centimeters in blade thickness.

This exception is explained on the website of the Metropolitan Police Department and interpreted as "business" which means that "repeatedly and continuously using a knife based on one's social status and it is one's job to use a knife (for example, a cook carrying a kitchen knife in a bag to go to the workplace)."

In addition, "justifiable reason" is interpreted to mean "cases deemed appropriate in light of the necessity for work or daily life, and whether or not they fall under this category should be judged by comprehensively considering objective factors such as the purpose, shape and performance of the device, the relationship between the person who carried the device and his/her occupation and daily life, the date, place, manner, and circumstances of the device, and subjective factors such as the motive, purpose, and awareness of the device." For example, this refers to a case where a knife is purchased from a shop and taken home. On the other hand, it is not a justifiable reason to carry a knife around for "personal protection" in downtown areas for reasons such as "being prepared for an unexpected street quarrel or fight."

(2) Minor Offenses Act

Even if cutleries or other instruments have a blade length of 6cm or less, carrying them without justified reason may constitute a violation of the Minor Offenses Act. Article 1, Item 2 of the Minor Offenses Act stipulates that "Any person who has, without justifiable reason, carried under cover, cutleries, iron rods, or other instruments which might be used for endangering the life of others, or for giving serious injury to the human body" shall be punished by misdemeanor imprisonment without work or a petty fine. However, the abovementioned Article 1, Item 2 of the Minor Offenses Act carries an exception if there is a "justifiable reason". The "justifiable grounds" are the same as the justifiable grounds under the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act (stationery, such as scissors and cutter knives, may be subject to crackdowns if carried around without a justifiable reason and in a readily usable state). Therefore, someone may be allowed a “justifiable reason” due to health maintenance or for hobbies in some cases, but it will depend on the individual circumstances. (For example, the Supreme Court ruled on March 26, 2009 that a person in possession of tear spray was not intending to use it as a weapon of attack. The Okayama Branch of the Hiroshima High Court on March 8, 2017 ruled that the accused had carried a Nunchaku, which is a pair of karate sticks, for their hobby and thus found a "justifiable reason.") On February 28, 2023, the Niigata Summary Court ruled there was a “justifiable reason” in a case where a multi-tool knife was stored in a car’s console box for over 5 years without ever being used. On the other hand, on August 1, 2023, the Osaka High Court ruled there was no “justifiable reason” in a case where a multi-tool knife was carried in an outer pocked of a bag. It appears that an appeal has been filed against the Osaka High Court’s decision, and based on available case law databases, it appears the Supreme Court has not yet rendered its decision.

As shown by these cases, the determination of what constitutes a “justifiable reason” is highly case-dependent, and at present, it remains unclear under what circumstances a “justifiable reason” will be recognized.

There are no restrictions based on the length of the objects, such as the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act. In addition to any weapon that was originally designed to kill and injure people, objects also include equipment (e.g. scissors, tool knives) that can kill and injure people depending on the method of use. In some cases, even small tool knives and so-called army knives are subject to crackdowns.

2. Import and sale of knives

"Cutlery" can be possessed and imported. Provided, however, that if the imported goods are judged to be "Swords" as defined in Article 93.07 of the Customs Tariff Table of Custom law and Article 2, Item 2 of the Firearms and Swords Law, certain procedures are required.

The term "Swords" in this context shall mean a sword, a spear and a halberd with a blade of 15cm or more in length, as well as a dagger with a blade of 5.5cm or more in length, an *aikuchi*, and a knife having a mechanism to automatically open a blade at 45 or more degrees (excluding a flick-knife with a blade of 5.5cm or less and without having a mechanism to fix the opened blade in a straight line with its sheath, and whose blade tip is straight the spine tip is rounded, and where a line connecting a point on the spine that is 1 centimeter away from the tip with the tip itself intersects at an angle of 60 or more degrees against the line of the edge of a blade).

If it items are judged to come under "Swords," imports are not allowed unless the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry under the Import Trade Control Order approves them. In order to obtain this approval, it is necessary to obtain a "license to possess a sword" issued by the Prefectural Public Safety Commission based on the "Firearms and Swords Possession Control Act" or a "certificate of registration of firearms and swords" issued by the Prefectural Board of Education. The Public Safety Division, Public Safety Commissions, and Prefectural Boards of Education are in charge of the procedures for issuing licenses. After obtaining this permission, importation will be allowed after obtaining the approval of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and confirmation by customs.

As described above, the regulations are complicated and detailed, and we would very much appreciate it if you could consult with us separately in the case of individual items.

*1.3 How must these concerned knives of point 1.2 be carried or transported in the public (e.g. in a closed or locked container)?*

1. Sidewalks and streets

According to the Minor Offenses Act as set forth above, it is prohibited in Japan in principle to carry a knife, which is subject to "carrying it hidden." The Metropolitan Police Department website describes the definition of "carrying". This is interpreted as "putting a knife in a position other than one's home or room in one's hand or hanging it on one's body in a condition where it can be used immediately, and keeping it in that condition for a while." For example, leaving it in a trunk of a car can be regarded as "carrying it hidden."

Thus, it is necessary to take such measures such as storing in a backpack, etc. in order to avoid danger to others.

2. Public transportation such as buses, trains, and subways

After the terrifying knife incident on the Tokaido Shinkansen's Nozomi super express train on June 9, 2018, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism amended the Regulations for the Transport of Passenger Motor Carriers (Ministry of Transport Ordinance No. 44 of 1956) and added knives as items that must not be brought onto public transportation. Many of the knives, as represented by stationery, are carried due to the necessities of daily or social life. However, in view of the inconvenience to other passengers, it has been clarified that knives are prohibited from being brought onto public transportation, except for those packed in such a way so as not to cause harm to other users.

Packaging method examples are as follows.

(1) Knife exceeding 6 cm

If a knife with a blade exceeding 6 cm is used maliciously or accidentally penetrates another, there is a particularly high risk of serious consequences such as death or injury. Therefore, if it is necessary to for a person to carry a knife with a blade, then it should be stored in an appropriate manner so that it cannot be easily accessed or removed whilst travelling on public transportation.

For example,

* The blade should be sheathed and covered or protected (by plastic or leather etc.). The entire blade should be packaged with newspaper, etc. and placed in a durable bag, box, or bag so that it does not protrude when being transported.
* Keep the original packaging that came with the blade when first purchased.

(2) Knife with a blade length of 6 cm or less

These knives are not as dangerous as those listed in (1) above and are highly likely to be carried on a daily basis in general. However, in view of the fact that the interior of public transportation is often a closed space used by many and unspecified passengers, it is necessary not to use them whilst travelling but to store them in a bag, etc. so that other passengers can travel in safety and with peace of mind.

For example,

* The cutting edge of a cutting knife should be folded and stored in a pen case, etc.

*1.4 Are there any public places which may be restricted by an authority (on certain days or at certain times) for carrying any knives or other dangerous tools (e.g. railway station, airport, market places, football stadium, event halls etc.)?*

1. Train stations

In response to the knife incident on the Tokaido Shinkansen train on June 9, 2018 as mentioned above, the Railway Transport Regulations were amended.

According to the guidelines (December 2018, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism) for packing methods for bringing blades into railway cars, the packing methods described for Q1.3 above are the same.

In addition, we investigated some websites that stated the items, which are prohibited from being brought onto station premises. However, as of the day of this memorandum, no regulations have been found yet.

2. Educational institutions

It is likely for each school in Japan to have its own regulations regarding certain harmful items, which cannot be brought onto the school premises. For example, please find the case of Seijo High School as a public high school found and operated by the Osaka Prefectural Government.

The following rules and instructions are provided for regulating hazardous materials that should not be brought onto the school premises.

1. Do not bring a hazardous substance into the school.
2. Hazardous materials that are prohibited from being brought into schools (hereinafter referred to as "prohibited hazardous materials") refer to those that are highly likely to injure people depending on how they are used and are not required for school life. For example, "knives (including cutting knives)", "air guns", "nightsticks" etc. In some cases, these are the subject of instruction by teachers. On the other hand, tools that are permitted to be possessed under the instructions or supervision of the personnel in charge for the purpose of use in classes, club activities, or cultural festivals are not considered as prohibited hazardous materials.
3. When prohibited hazardous substances are brought into school, the following items i) to iii) shall be examined depending on the items brought in and the situation in which they are used:
4. Whether a case is reported to the police as misconduct violating the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act, etc.;
5. Whether or not special support is required for dealing with such and guidance; and/or a
6. Concrete instruction plan.”

In addition, some driving schools prohibit the carrying and possession of blades.

3. Sports stadiums and event halls

1. On the Tokyo Dome website, artillery and swords, fireworks, firecrackers, deleterious substances, and other dangerous substances are specified as items that are prohibited from being brought into the Tokyo Dome (prohibited items). Tokyo Dome is a multi-purpose major sports stadium, which is used for not only baseball games but also for other sporting events like American Football, etc. It is sometimes used for music concerts and performances.
2. The City Ordinance for Operation of the Narashino Cultural Hall, Narashino City, prohibits bringing any objects, animals, explosives, cutlery, or other dangerous objects annoying others, to the Hall in accordance with its Article 7. Under Article 8 of the City Ordinance, the Board of Education may refuse entry to a person, who falls under any of the following items, and enforce him/her to leave the Hall.
3. Universal Studios Japan regulates carrying prohibited items, such as knives (multi-tool knife, scissors, cutters, etc.), explosives, weapons and weapons (including guns, swords, rifles, handcuffs, water cannons, sprayers, etc./products, counterfeits, toys, handmade goods, etc.), and those generally called dangerous goods, as well as those that may harm other customers.
4. The Rakuten Mobile Park Miyagi Stadium Rule prohibits some articles from being brought in. The Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act regulates those items violating the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act (guns, knives), fireworks, firecrackers, dangerous drugs, and the like. Miyagi Stadium is a multi-purpose stadium but is mainly used for baseball games.

4.Airports

Please see our answers in Q2 for 2 Airports.

*1.5 How is the blade length measured (only the cutting blade or including the blade shank)?*



As described in Q1.2, the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act prohibits the carrying of knives exceeding 6 centimeters in length.

Article 101 of the Administrative Ordinance for Enforcement of the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act stipulates the measurement method for the length of the blade as follows. I think the metal parts with letters such as Victorinox on the following sites are similar. If this part is connected with the same material as the cutting edge, the cut-out of the "knife story" is considered to be included in the "cutter".

Method for Measuring the Length of a Blade:

1. The method of measuring the length of a knife specified by the Cabinet Office Ordinance as set forth in Article 22 of the Act in Article 101 shall be to measure the length of a line connecting the tip of the knife (in the case of a blade without a tip or a knife with an unknown tip, the edge of the blade; hereinafter the same shall apply in this Article) and the point closest to the cutting edge in the handle section.
2. Notwithstanding the provisions of the preceding paragraph, knives falling under any of the following items shall be measured by the method prescribed respectively in those items:
3. For a *kiridashi* (traditional Japanese craft knives), a Japanese razor, and a grip scissor, and other similar knives where the distinction between the blade and handle section is not clear, measure the length of the straight line connecting both ends of a knife blade and subtract 8 cm from the length of the line.
4. For scissors with screws, measure the length of the line connecting the tip to the center of the screw.
5. Notwithstanding the provisions of the preceding two paragraphs, in the case of a knife having a handle on both ends of the blade or similar cases where measurement by the methods prescribed in the preceding two paragraphs is difficult, the length of a straight line connecting both ends of the cutting edge shall be measured.
6. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 or paragraph 2, for a knife where the length of a straight line connecting both ends of the cutting edge is longer than the length of the blade measured by method prescribed in paragraph 1 or paragraph 2, the length of the straight line connecting both ends of the cutting edge shall be measured.

The following images are excerpts from images illustrations demonstrating the aforementioned measurements methods for a *kiridashi*, a gripped scissor, and a scissor with screws provided in item (2), which appear on pages 504 of “Commentary on the Firearms and Swords Control Act (3rd Edition)” by Takashi Otsuka et al[[1]](#footnote-2).

The solid lines in the images below indicate the length of the blade, and the dotted lines indicate the length to be subtracted.

ダイアグラム

自動的に生成された説明

*1.6 Are there any further dangerous objects which also fall under the Weapons Act?*

In summary of the aforementioned:

1. Arms Manufacturing Law:

Article 2 of the Arms Manufacturing Law defines "arms" and does not include knives.

1. Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act:

A sword (a sword, etc., with a blade length of 15 cm or more) shall be registered, and a person carrying or transporting a sword, etc., shall carry a registration certificate, etc., at all times.

1. Minor Offenses Act:

As mentioned earlier, the Victorinox knives can be subject to these laws and acts. Even Victorinox scissors may be regulated as a violation of the Minor Offenses Act in some cases. However, since the Minor Offenses Act does not specifically mention the length of bladed objects, it is not clear in which cases such regulation would be applied. For more details, please refer to the information provided in paragraph 1(2) of the response to Questionnaire 1.2.

*1.7 Are there any exceptions?*

As we already mentioned briefly above, the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act permits exceptions to foldable knives and scissors that meet certain conditions.

The proviso to Article 22 of the Act states that "this shall not apply to scissors and folding knives with a blade length of 8 centimeters or less measured pursuant to a Cabinet Office Ordinance, and fruit knives and *kiridashi*, under the condition that these bladed objects are of the types or shapes prescribed by Cabinet Order." and "the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act Enforcement Order," which is an Ordinance of the Cabinet Office, provides that "knives of the type or shape specified by a Cabinet Order set forth in the proviso to Article 22 of the Act, shall be those listed in the following items" in Article 43:

1. Scissors other than those with an extremely sharp tip and sharp blade.
2. Folding knives that do not exceed 1.5 centimeters in blade width and 0.25 centimeters in blade thickness, and do not have a mechanism to lock the opened blade in the sheath.
3. Fruit knives with a blade length of 8 centimeters or less, that do not exceed 0.15 centimeters in blade thickness, and have a rounded tip.
4. *Kiridashi* (traditional Japanese craft knives) with a blade length of 7 centimeters or less, that do not exceed 2 centimeters in blade width and 0.2 centimeters in blade thickness.

Based on the above, these regulations can be interpreted as follows:

* Scissors with a blade length of 8 centimeters or less are exempt from the carrying prohibition regulations under Article 22 of the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act only if either the tip of the blade is not extremely sharp or the blade itself is not sharp.
* Folding knives with a blade length of 8 centimeters or less are exempt from the carrying prohibition regulations under Article 22 of the Firearms and Swords Control Act only if they meet all three conditions - the blade width does not exceed 1.5 centimeters, the blade thickness does not exceed 0.25 centimeters, and the knife does not have a mechanism to lock the opened blade in sheath.
* Item 3 exemption above only applies to fruit knives and not to fixed-blade knives in general.
* Item 4 exemption above only applies to *kiridashi* and not to cutting tools in general.

*1.8 What are the consequences for a legal offense?*

Penalties are stipulated as follows:

1. Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act:

Article 31-18 Paragraph 2, Item (ii) provides that a person shall be punished by imprisonment with work for or less than two years or a fine of less than 300,000 JPY.

1. Minor Offenses Act:

Article 1, (ii) provides that a person shall be punished by misdemeanor imprisonment without work or a petty fine. Provided, however, that it can be waived if the situation of the crime or a petty fine may be cumulatively imposed depending on the circumstances.

*1.9 Are there any legislative developments? If so what do they concern?*

The Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Act was amended and became effective as of January 5, 2009, and possession of Daga-type knives and diver-knives are prohibited.

# Airports

* 1. *According to the Official Journal of the European Union laying down detailed measures for the implementation of the common basic standards in aviation security, any pointed or sharp objects which may cause serious injury, including a knife with a blade more than 6cm are not allowed to be taken into the security restricted areas or on board of an aircraft.* 
     1. *Are there any further national regulations to be considered in this respect?*

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs website lists the conventions prepared by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), but no regulations on knives have been found yet as of the day of this memorandum.

* + 1. *If your country is outside the EU, what are the corresponding local regulations?*

In JAPAN, Article 86 of the Civil Aeronautics Act and Article 194, Paragraph 1, Item (x) of the Ordinance for Enforcement of the Civil Aeronautics Act regulate the carry-on of blades on board aircraft.

On May 1, 2002, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism promulgated a ministerial ordinance to partially amend the Ordinance for Enforcement of the Civil Aeronautics Act (Ministry of Transport Ordinance No. 56 of 1952) to have a broader scope of objects that are prohibited to be carried in aircraft, and the ordinance came into effect on May 31.

As an outline of the revision, the scope of items that are prohibited to be carried on board aircraft (such as firearms and swords that are prohibited under the Firearms and Swords Controlling Possession Control Act; for example, knives with blades greater than 6 centimeter in length) was expanded and small knives and other items that are sufficient to kill and injure people are now prohibited.

The term " sufficient to kill or injure" shall mean, for example, the following:

* Small knives
* Hammers
* Butts
* Golf clubs
* Ice picks, etc.

As an exception, aircraft can transport goods that are prohibited from being carried on board if they are properly packaged and checked in as consigned baggage to the airline.

Penalties for violations are amended and came into effect on March 10, 2022. Article 149-3 provides that a person who violates Article 86 Paragraph 2 of the Civil Aeronautics Act and brought prohibited objects into the aircraft shall be punished by imprisonment with work for or less than two years or a fine of less than 1,000,000 JPY.

The "knives" include tool knives (multi-function folding knives), and even if components that do not include items that fall under the category of restricted in-flight items, knives are prohibited from being brought in because they are shaped at first glance to pose a threat.

* 1. *May the airports/airlines in your country issue any further (stricter) regulations for forbidden items?*

As a specific example, the Narita Airport website contains the following descriptions.

1. Prohibited articles

The website of Narita Airport, which is known as the New Tokyo International Airport, states that "Firearms and swords, dangerous combustible materials (including fireworks, bamboo, etc.) are prohibited from being brought into the airport." The Narita International Airport Management Regulations also stipulate that knives shall not be brought into the airport. Article 6 of the Narita International Airport Management Regulations stipulates that Narita Airport shall not engage in any of the following acts.1

*“(1) Damage or defacement of buildings, structures, signs, other facilities or apparatuses at Narita Airport, or vehicles;*

*(2) Without justifiable grounds, to bring in knives, rods and other objects that may cause injury to persons, unmanned aerial vehicles (aircraft prescribed in Article 2, paragraph 22 of the Civil Aeronautics Act), model aircraft (aircraft of less than 200g, which is excluded from the definition of unmanned aerial vehicles, etc.) and other objects that may cause confusion to persons.*

*A person who violates Article 6 may be restrained or ordered to be removed or removed under Article 25 of the Regulations.”*

In addition, Kansai International Airport for the Osaka area and Tokyo International Air Terminal Corporation, which manages Haneda Airport’s International Terminal has the same rules as Narita Airport.

2.Possibility of other carry-on goods

Although the above-mentioned Narita Airport lists the typical rules for airlines that land at Narita Airport, it should be noted that some airlines may have their own restrictions.

* 1. *May a pair of scissors or a saw be included in a pocket knife with a blade of max. 6cm? If so, is the size of the pair of scissors or the length of the saw of relevance?*

Each blade component, including scissors or saw, needs to be examined individually according to the regulations regarding the length, width, and thickness of the blade. The details of the regulations and measurement method are described in Q1.2, Q1.5, and Q1.7.

As mentioned in paragraph 2.1.2 above, multi-function folding knives are prohibited from being carried onto aircraft. This restriction applies even if none of their components fall under the category of restricted carry-on items, because their appearance could be perceived as threatening to others (<https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001425421.pdf>).

* 1. *What is considered as a sharp object besides knives?*

Please refer to Q2.1.2 above.

* 1. *Are there any further aviation security regulations with respect to the Victorinox (pocket) knives to be observed?*

We have not yet found any further airline regulations which may apply to the Victorinox product.

On the other hand, although the main feature of the "Victorinox jetsetter" is that as "a tool without a blade that can be carried in," it is possible that the product will be suspected by the safety inspection of the aforementioned standards by following the above-mentioned laws and regulations.

* 1. *Are there any changes intended in the near future? If so what do they concern?*

As of the day of this memorandum, no information of such changes to the laws and regulations have been found especially relating to airports or airplanes. Nonetheless, there is a possibility that security inspections are going to be strengthened in Japan, as there have been a number of news reports on security inspection errors at airports in Japan.

Ibach, Switzerland, 14 February 2025

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1. The Japanese tittle of the commentary and its author’s name are as follows:  
   大塚尚ほか著　『注釈　銃砲等刀剣類所持等取締法（第3版）』504頁 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)