



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Japanese Railway Tests a System to Help Visitors

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Japanese railway operator, Seibu, is testing a special **help desk** for foreigners at one of the company's busiest train stations.

Visitors who need help at the Seibu-Shinjuku station in Tokyo can go to an information window and ask questions. About 135,000 people per day pass through the Seibu-Shinjuku station.

To get help, a person just speaks into a microphone. A system called VoiceBiz listens to their words and displays them on the window in Japanese. The railway worker can see the question and reply in Japanese. Then VoiceBiz translates the answer into a language the person who needs help can understand. The system works with Japanese and 11 other languages.

Rail stations throughout Japan are very busy this summer. More than 2 million people visited Japan in June, the most since before 2020. COVID-19 restrictions barred most foreign travelers for a long time.

Kevin Khani was visiting Japan from Germany. He tried out the VoiceBiz system recently after getting **confused** in Seibu's Shinjuku station.

He said the translations were "spot on," which means they were exactly right. He also said it is nice to see that there is a human working at the window.

"So, you take your time to explain what you need, and you will know that they will understand what you need," he said.

The Seibu railway has been testing the VoiceBiz system for three months. After that time, the company will consider using it in additional stations.

Ayano Yajima is a sales and marketing official for Seibu. Yajima said looking at each other adds to the “smoothness of communication.”

Toppan is the company that makes VoiceBiz. It tested the window at Kansai International Airport near Osaka earlier this year. It hopes to sell the windows to businesses and government offices in Japan so they can communicate with travelers and immigrants.

The company believes the Shinjuku area is a good testing place. The busiest railway station in the world is nearby – 3.6 million people use the Japan Railway station in Shinjuku. Many people use the Seibu train to get to other trains and subways and go to other places in Tokyo or the rest of Japan. As a result, there is a high chance that someone gets lost or needs help.

French visitors Isabelle and Marc Rigaud used the help window to find their way from the Seibu station to the Japan Railway station. They had just gotten off an airplane at 1 in the morning, local time.

“It’s very Japan,” Isabelle said of the technology.

I’m Dan Friedell.

Dan Friedell adapted this story for Learning English based on a report by Reuters.

Words in This Story

help desk –n. an area in a transportation center or similar public building where people can go to ask for directions and help

confused –adj. lost or unsure of something

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