



IS SOLAR RIGHT FOR YOU?

A JPS guide to doing solar right.

If you're thinking of going solar, you should do a thorough assessment of your energy needs, the space where you plan to install your solar panels, and the options available on the market.

Get Advice from the Experts

Make sure to get a qualified solar service provider to do a thorough assessment of your premises before you make that big investment in solar. This assessment will help you determine exactly what you need, the size of the photovoltaic system, the type of solar panels and inverters to be installed, where they will be located, etc.

Energy Production vs Time of Use

To get the most from your investment in solar, you need to fully utilise the power produced by the solar panels at the time this power is produced – during the day.

The peak period for production of electricity from solar panels is roughly between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm, dependent on the time of the year. If you run a business that operates mostly during regular work hours or you work from home, you are likely to get the most from your solar investment. However, if you are a residential customer, and most of your electricity usage is in the evenings, you may not see the reduction you expect in your energy bill.

What about batteries? Batteries store energy produced by your solar system, which you can use when the sun goes down. But they can be expensive – adding at least another 40% to the cost of your solar system. Note also, that the energy stored by your batteries will not necessarily take you through the night. Size matters, and a small battery system giving 2 – 3 hours of electricity may not be adequate for your evening activities. For more storage, a bigger investment will be needed in batteries – sometimes the equivalent of the cost of the panels themselves. So, if most of your activity is in the evening, you may want to take another look at your plans to go solar.



WORK WITH TRUSTED EXPERTS



Choose the Right Location for Your Panels

Where you place your solar system can determine whether it's a good investment or not. A qualified consultant will likely use an instrument called a solar pathfinder, which tells you how many hours of the day, and how many months of the year your roof is shaded. This will guide you in making the right decision about the placement of your panels.

Your assessment must also take into consideration the size and condition of your roof, as well as possible hazards and things that could prevent you from making the most of the sun. For example, solar panels are best placed on flat roofs, tilted about 18 degrees and facing south where you can get most sunlight. Does your roof qualify? Is it in good condition? Is the area shaded by trees or buildings? Is the roof very high, does it slope dramatically, and is it close to power lines? Carefully consider these questions and take any remedial action necessary before you proceed.

Get to Know Your Load Profile

An important part of the process is the load assessment. Your energy consultant will likely use a power data logger that measures the energy usage in your household or business place. It tells you how and when equipment and appliances are being used. This information is a useful guide for how you can make the most of your solar installation during the peak production hours.

PREPARE FOR LIFESTYLE CHANGES



Energy efficiency and conservation are as important as ever when you decide to go solar. You still need to cut out energy waste, or you may invest more than is necessary without getting the benefits.

As part of your preparation to invest in solar power, it's best to identify areas of inefficiency in your household or business. The experts advise that you should not try to match your investment

in solar with your current usage. Start by cutting out waste and reducing your energy demand. Then get a solar system that matches your reduced consumption. This way you save on your initial investment, and you can always expand your system later if necessary.

For most people, our usual lifestyle does not always lend itself to daytime use of electricity. So some adjustment may

be required for you to make the best of the daytime production of electricity once you become fully dependent on your solar installation. This will require discipline and consistency.

Grid-Tied or Not?

You may decide to have a grid-tied system that allows you to take power from the national grid when your system stops producing – like at nights, during the rainy season, or when there is cloud cover. Remember, without batteries to store the excess energy produced during the day, you will still import all the energy you use in the evenings and night from the grid, so you may not reduce your energy consumption as expected.

It's important to pay close attention to when you are using your solar power, as against when you are using power from the grid. This way, there will be no surprises when you get your electricity bill.

And, most importantly, for grid-tied systems, your solar installer should get your system licensed by the Ministry of Energy.

Choose the Right Solar Partners & Hold Them Accountable

Do your due diligence before selecting a solar partner. Your solar provider must be a reputable registered company. Assess the competence of the company before making a final decision – check out their track record, and get feedback from their customers. Get details of what is expected from your new photovoltaic system. Ask questions about warranties, maintenance and service contracts. Have them show you how to track your solar production.

Be an informed and empowered consumer. Going solar is a big investment – take care in deciding if it's the right option for you, and if now is a good time to go solar.

