

Living in Japan

How did you overcome the language barrier?

Soomin: I went to a public elementary school in Japan, so I didn't really have any opportunities to learn basic Japanese and couldn't understand anything at first. But I wanted to join in on conversations with my classmates, and managed to learn Japanese by just letting myself get absorbed in watching TV shows and reading comic books. As a non-Japanese person, I found it easy to understand children's shows as they used simple Japanese.

Silvestre: They do say that Korean and Japanese grammar is similar. I speak Spanish and English, but since the grammar of those languages is totally different, it was hard for me to learn Japanese. While I learned some at a Japanese language school, it was making many Japanese friends and repeatedly making mistakes in the conversations I had with them that helped most.

Have you experienced any difficulties while living in Japan?

Thach: Since there was no subway in Vietnam when I first came to Japan, I got lost in a subway station in Osaka for over an hour, not knowing where to transfer or exit. I remember desperately explaining and using gestures to ask a station worker for help since I couldn't speak much Japanese back then.

Silvestre: I came to Japan in the winter, so the amount of snow surprised me. It rarely snowed in Bolivia and Spain, where I previously lived, so I was a bit worried about living in a snow-covered world. But now I'm used to the snow and cold and have become a pro at shoveling snow.

Dulani: I had a baby in July and found it hard to understand the explanations I was given at the hospital since there were so many difficult terms concerning childbirth and childcare. Dealing with all of the necessary procedures after having a baby was also a struggle. I somehow managed to complete them by asking friends and colleagues who had given birth in Japan about the things I didn't understand.

Key words and terms in this feature

Intercultural cohesion

This is the idea that people of different nationalities and cultures can live in harmony while respecting one another.

Yasashii Japanese

This refers to Japanese made easier for non-Japanese people to understand, such as by rephrasing difficult terms or adding hiragana next to kanji.

In Japanese, *yasashii* means both friendly and easy.

This feature was originally written horizontally in *yasashii* (simple and friendly) language for ease of reading by non-Japanese readers.



Location: Hoheikan (Historical Guest House) in Nakajima Park, Chuo Ward

We asked these four about what it's like to live in Sapporo



Silvestre

Originally from Bolivia
Foreign language teacher and event organizer



Soomin

Originally from South Korea
Coordinator for International Relations (CIR), introduces Korean culture to the people of Sapporo



Dulani

Originally from Sri Lanka
Sapporo International Communication Plaza worker (currently on childcare leave)



Thach

Originally from Vietnam
Exchange student attending a university in Sapporo

No. of non-Japanese residents in Sapporo



The number of non-Japanese residents has almost doubled in the last ten years. Approximately one out of every 117 residents in Sapporo is non-Japanese.

Largest groups of non-Japanese residents by nationality

1		China	4,930
2		South Korea	2,451
3		Vietnam	1,992
4		Myanmar	746
5		USA	710

(as of August 1, 2023)

The journey to becoming a city where people respect each other

– Living in the global city of Sapporo

People from countries around the world work and study in Sapporo. This feature considers what is crucial to ensuring all Sapporo residents can live here comfortably.

For further details, contact the International Relations Section, International Relations Department (011-211-2032)

Sapporo as seen by non-Japanese residents

Why did you come to Sapporo and what are your impressions of the city?

Silvestre: I first became interested in Japan because a university teacher I truly respected was Japanese. I chose Hokkaido because I realized that if I were to live in Japan, I would prefer a place abundant in nature like Bolivia. I think Sapporo is a wonderful city with hot springs nearby as well as delicious food and water.

Soomin: I lived in Japan for three years when I was in elementary school due to my father's work. Memories of summer festivals and fireworks hold a special place in my heart. When I took a trip to Sapporo, I liked its cool summer atmosphere and decided I'd like to work here, so I became CIR for the city. I especially like Nakajima Park and enjoy how its scenery changes with the seasons.

Dulani: I was a fan of *Oshin*, a Japanese TV drama shown in Sri Lanka, so I came to Japan to see its scenic landscapes. Of the many places in Japan where I have lived, I like Sapporo the most. Although the winters are cold, I feel the people are warm.

Thach: My parents work in forestry, so I'd like to pursue a career in the trading of wood products. I came to Sapporo to study in Hokkaido, where the forestry industry prospers.

Making Sapporo a more comfortable place to live

What do you think is important for Sapporo to become a more livable city?

Silvestre: I really like Sapporo as it is now! But it would be nice to have more information in other languages around the city. Considering the influx of non-Japanese residents and tourists, there just aren't enough. It's not an issue for me as I've lived here for many years, but some friends have told me that the language barrier is still a big problem.

Dulani: As Sylvestre said, I think it's important to accommodate different languages. For example, non-Japanese residents who want to get a driver's license come to the Sapporo Help Desk for Foreign Residents at the International Communication Plaza where I work, but some of them give up because all of the lessons are in Japanese. If more people and places provided information and services in English or *yasashii* Japanese, it would help non-Japanese who are not fully fluent in Japanese. Still, it does seem like more people in Sapporo can speak English now, and I think the city will get better and better in the future.

Thach: There is one thing that comes to mind for me. When I was looking for a place to live, I was often rejected because I'm not Japanese. It was a little disappointing. I think everyone here can understand this...



(All give a big nod.)

Dulani: I've had the same experience. Even though I speak Japanese, I was rejected simply because I was not Japanese.

Soomin: It would be nice if people would look at non-Japanese residents as individuals without preconceptions or prejudice. Someone once asked me if I was strong-willed because I'm Korean. I wish people would communicate with us without judging us by our nationality.

Silvestre: That's another reason it would be great if Japanese and non-Japanese residents were more proactive about interacting with and understanding each other.



Dulani out with her newborn baby



Silvestre teaching about Latin culture at a lecture event for children



Thach deepening exchange with other international students



Soomin enjoying a boat ride in Nakajima Park

Emergency drill conducted by a Neighborhood Association Alliance and SAFE

Interview with Mr. Doi, the president of the Kosai Area Neighborhood Association Alliance that conducted the emergency drill

It is important to create a community where non-Japanese residents can live comfortably. That's why we must get to know each other in our everyday lives and understand each other's cultural and regional differences. I want non-Japanese residents to take part in this emergency drill and other neighborhood association events so that we can prepare for disasters together as members of this community.



Sapporo Assistance for Foreigners in Emergencies (SAFE) team

When a large disaster occurs in Sapporo, the team translates disaster information, patrols shelters, and engages in other activities together with the staff of the Multilingual Disaster Support Center established by the Sapporo International Communication Plaza. There are currently 40 members from 17 countries.



Disaster preparedness

Hokkaido was hit by a large earthquake with a magnitude of 6.7 and maximum seismic intensity of 7 in September 2018. Do you feel like you are suitably prepared for disasters?

Silvestre: I experienced the 2018 earthquake. The first impact felt like a truck had crashed into my house, and it left me feeling scared for about a week. After that, I prepared a bag with necessities and water that I keep in my house to take with me in case something happens.

Dulani: I was also in Sapporo at the time. When the power went out, I didn't know what to do and left my room. Other residents from the building came out, asking if I was OK and suggesting that we go to a shelter together. I could feel their warmth, which made me realize the importance of communicating with one another in an emergency.

Thach: Earthquakes are rare in Vietnam, and there haven't been any big ones since I came to Japan, so I don't feel prepared at all. We have disasters due to heavy rains and typhoons in Vietnam, but their predictability means people can prepare for them a week or so in advance. Since earthquakes are so unpredictable, I need to make sure I prepare before it's too late.

It must be hard to think about disasters as something that could happen to you without prior experience.

Soomin: I think non-Japanese residents tend not to worry as many haven't experienced major disasters. Those who are new to Japan may not understand just how concerning it is for Japanese to not know when a disaster will occur. I'm also worried that non-Japanese residents who don't have families or many friends in Japan may become very vulnerable in a disaster.

Silvestre: Dulani and I work to help non-Japanese residents in Sapporo during times of disaster as members of the Sapporo Assistance for Foreigners in Emergencies (SAFE) team. It's likely that more non-Japanese will come to Sapporo in the future, and I want to use my experience to help those who are not fluent in Japanese, as well as tourists.

Initiatives being undertaken by the City of Sapporo

Various forms of support are provided to non-Japanese residents

The City of Sapporo is promoting city development focused on intercultural cohesion. You can find answers to your problems or questions by calling the numbers or visiting the websites below.

●Sapporo International Communication Plaza

The Sapporo International Communication Plaza is home to the Sapporo Help Desk for Foreign Residents, where you can seek advice about problems encountered in your everyday life. It also dispatches volunteer interpreters to ward offices and schools as well as occasionally holds Japanese-language classes.

Sapporo Help Desk for Foreign Residents

Hours: 9:30 – 17:00 on weekdays (except on public holidays and from Dec. 29 to Jan. 3)

Address: MN Bldg., Kita 1-jo Nishi 3-chome, Chuo-ku

☎011-211-3678

✉soudan@plaza-sapporo.or.jp



website

Sapporo International Communication Plaza

☎011-211-3670

●Sapporo City Call Center

You can ask questions about systems, procedures, etc. in the city of Sapporo. Calls are accepted daily between 8:00 and 21:00.

Languages: English, Chinese, Korean ☎011-222-4894

●A Guide to Living in Sapporo

This website provides information necessary for living in Sapporo.

Languages: *yasashii* Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese

website



●Sapporo Medical Communication Hotline

When you want to go to a medical clinic or hospital, you can make reservations or inquiries by calling this number. Calls are accepted 24 hours a day. Medical clinic and hospital reservations can be made between 9:00 and 17:00 on weekdays. There is no charge for this service.

*Telephone charges apply.

Service available in 21 languages, including English, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese.

☎011-211-2121

website



What each of us can do

Getting to know others

There are many differences between yourself and others besides nationality and culture. It is important to be willing to learn about such differences.



Speaking to non-Japanese residents in *yasashii* Japanese

If you speak slowly in *yasashii* Japanese, it will be easier for those who are not yet fluent in Japanese to understand.

Key points for rephrasing and using *yasashii* Japanese

Make each sentence short.

Example: Put burnable garbage in a yellow bag and take it out by 8:30.

➔ Put burnable garbage in a yellow bag.

Take garbage out by 8:30.

Do not use difficult words.

Example: Please fill out this form.

➔ Please write on this paper.

Don't talk in a roundabout way.

Example: It's OK not to write here.

➔ Don't write here.



Our Basic Policy for Promoting Intercultural Cohesion

The City of Sapporo is preparing the City of Sapporo Basic Policy for Intercultural Cohesion and International Exchange, which summarizes its efforts to ensure that all residents can live here comfortably, regardless of national or cultural differences.

One of the focuses of the Basic Policy is support for Japanese language learning. The Policy will be completed by incorporating public opinions.

Ms. Sase, International Relations Section, International Relations Department



Striving to be a city that embraces all cultures

Both Japanese and non-Japanese residents are precious members of the Sapporo community. Let's care for and accept one another to make Sapporo a city that is friendly to everyone.

Learning with videos

Videos created by technical school students

Five videos based on the theme of intercultural cohesion can be viewed on the website.

website



Intercultural cohesion may still be an unfamiliar term to many. These videos show that the number of non-Japanese residents is increasing in Sapporo and present examples of *yasashii* Japanese. I hope watching the videos will promote understanding.

Mr. Yamamoto from the Hokkaido College of Art & Design

