

Name: NEPPEL ELIAN

Duration: 2021.4 ~ 2023.9

Hello there, let me share with your advice and experiences being a French student here in Japan, Sendai, Tohoku University. I have been here for several years and I am pursuing a PhD here after a master's degree.



Do you think the program and the educational environment helped promote your research?

Absolutely yes. France barely invests in research and is more focused on financing private industries. Those will do (and keep) the research themselves. I never imagined doing research before coming here, nor knew how to do it. But I learned quite quickly, found a really interesting subject to study and most of all had plenty of time and support from the school to do the research. In the end I received a scholarship to continue my work here, indeed I have rent and food to pay, and could not have continued my research in PhD without it.

Suggestions and/or criticisms for space of improvement

About this, I would like to talk about transportation and mobility.

The shuttle bus linking Tohoku University's campuses is an incredibly good thing. But a simple website with the map of the bus stops and operating hours would help a lot, especially for newcomers. The Tohoku University Campus map for example is very helpful, and adding the bus stops on there would be incredible.

The main improvement I would love to see is a better road to go to Aobayama Campus. A surprising amount of students walk/cycle it daily (it's healthy and the subway is expensive).

Despite the number of students using it, the road to Aobayama is very hostile if not in a car. The sidewalk is so small I cannot walk beside my friend and have a conversation. The sidewalk often becomes a pool of mud, the fence forcing me to walk in it. However, the road for cars is huge and clean, 2 meters could easily be given to pedestrians and bikes. Furthermore, because this road is huge, cars drive fast, but the visibility is very bad with lots of turns and branches from the forest. It is very dangerous for bicycle climbing at low speed.

I would in priority widen and improve the sidewalk. Then add a bike lane protected with plastic poles, at least on the climbing side.



Living in Sendai : Experience and Advice

Tips for new arrivals. (e.g., food and traffic can be more expensive than the cost in France)



Tips for new arrivals. (e.g., food and traffic can be more expensive than the cost in France)

To my fellow bicyclist commuters from Europe, road rules in Japan are almost non-existent compared to your home country. Yes, laws exist but are sometimes dangerous, inconsistent and rarely respected. So, place your (and pedestrian's) safety above any rule that you might think exists.

After you get used to the country, you can focus on riding better, but not before. Riding on the sidewalk is allowed most of the time, on the contrary if you ride on the road you will face angry drivers all the time (especially taxis). So please stay safe and relax on the sidewalk.

The most important and respected rule is that you should not park your bike outside of a bicycle parking (those are not free but very cheap, and often underground in Sendai).



School Activities

I would also highly encourage anyone to join a circle / club in order to make friends and learn Japanese much MUCH faster. A small and laid back circle (=sa-kuru=サークル) would be better. You will only need to follow one message conversation with less than 10 people in Japanese, and you'll know everyone. I tried the orchestra, but it was way too big, with 5 emails every day, 5 conversations to follow and 200 members. Someone had to babysit me every time which is not fun.

In a small laid back group you'll easily understand what concerns you and you can easily ask what's up without bothering the others.

Also, Japanese students will be quite scared or not know how to interact with you in broken Japanese/English. So you will need to actively interact with them. Especially at the start, they will not come to you if you don't specifically ask for something.

Career Paths

I am currently continuing my PhD. I would advise anyone to look for scholarships, and consult with their professors about what is interesting research. Do not lose time making stuff useless for a paper, a scholarship or your future.

Because you decide what you do during your research, this is perfect to build up new skills that will be useful for your future job. Your research should be used to improve yourself.

