

# Life at Tohoku University

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## **1 Students Life**

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

Tohoku University was for me the first time I really did any research, so answering this question can be somewhat difficult because I don't have any point of reference. What I can say is that in Japan, or at least at Tohoku University, you are often left autonomous. That can be a good or a bad thing depending on the context. It allows you to make progress and learn how to do things by yourself, which is an essential skill in my opinion. But I would have still really appreciated if I was a bit more guided, especially in the beginning. It felt like I lost (unnecessarily) a significant amount of time because I was still trying to find my footing and to figure out what I needed to do. Nonetheless, after some time, I managed to find a good workflow and to arrive at a result I'm satisfied with. This is my experience, but I know that it can really depend on the lab you end up with. I encourage you to try to find a lab with other foreign students so you can ask questions about how things are done there.

The amount of time spent on the classes depends on your department, you will need to take around 20 credits, one class awards you with 1 or 2 credits depending on if they last the full semester or only half. Most people will get the 20 credits in the first year of the master and entirely focus on research for the second year. From my experience, the classes in most department only require you to assist to the class and submit reports, which should not take much time. But, if you end up (like me) in the department of metallurgy, be prepared to have mandatory exams every half semester. Unfortunately for me, most of my classes were with professors speaking Japanese and the slides in English, that meant that I needed to take a lot of time to learn the subject by myself as the slides were often not well done or simply not enough to learn the material at a sufficient level for the exam. This meant that for the first year I did almost no research, but it's remains manageable to do get good results within one year, so don't worry too much.

Having said that, you don't need to worry too much about the workload, it's more than manageable, and you will have plenty of time to enjoy Sendai and the rest of Japan.

### **1.2 Suggestions and criticisms for space of improvement**

I don't have many suggestions if not to try to accompany the new students a bit more. Because the double degree students are considered like a normal master student, almost every email is sent in Japanese and a lot of the resources are only available in Japanese. Trying to make sure that more of those resources are available in English would be a big improvement. For anyone coming to Japan, I would suggest to not hesitate to go see older DD students or anyone else to get additional information on what you need to do/be careful of.

## **2 Living in Sendai: Experience and Advice**

### **2.1 Tips for new arrivals.**

- When arriving in Japan I advise you to get a Suica (IC card for transportation) so you don't need to worry about buying tickets every time you take the train/metro/bus.
- You can download the "d POINT CLUB" app on your phone, it will indicate the position and allow you to log in a lot of free Wi-Fi spots.
- Once you get to your dormitory, if you need any more daily items, you can go to Daiso or any other 100 yens shops where you can probably find anything you need.
- If you are too lazy to cook and live near a supermarket (IH Sanjo 2 represent), it is also useful to know that around one hour before closing, bentos (pre-made meals) are on sale up to -50%.
- Google Maps works wonders here so you should look at it every time you want to go somewhere.
- I would also advise to get an eSIM before coming so you can have access to the internet while you do all the procedures to get a real SIM and Wi-Fi. I think it took me a couple of weeks to get the bank account and SIM.

### **2.2 What is the monthly cost of maintenance in Sendai beyond the dormitory?**

I don't have exact figures, but in my experience the JASSO scholarship is just a little bit too low to sustain my life in Sendai, but I admit I do go out pretty often and don't really watch my spendings too closely. So, if you have to survive on just JASSO it is clearly doable, but I would still recommend having a little more money on the side if possible for comfort.

### **2.3 Preparation for essential items for maintenance before arrival.**

I just arrived with clothes and almost nothing else. I went straight to a 100 yens shop and got everything I needed and more, so you don't really need to worry too much about bringing things.

### **2.4 Difficulties you may encounter after arriving in Japan.**

I didn't encounter many difficulties, I would just advise to arrive in Japan with the best Japanese level you can achieve for a smoother experience. You can perfectly go around speaking no Japanese, but the basics are still a nice thing to have. Other than that, I recommend bringing a Japanese-speaking friend to accompany you when registering for a bank account, getting a phone plan etc. if you are not confident in your Japanese level. Everything is doable on your own without Japanese but it's going to be way more difficult than necessary.

### **2.5 Leisure**

Sendai is an excellent city to live in. Cheaper and quieter than Tokyo while still having everything you need. If you like sightseeing, there are not many things to see in Sendai itself, but there is a lot of interesting stuff around, so go explore! Sendai also has its own airport and has multiple Shinkansen lines going through, so it's really easy to go visit the rest of Japan. Just make friends or enjoy Sendai and the rest of Japan.

If you're interested in making Japanese friends outside of your lab, you can join circles or club for a multitude of different activities. This is an ideal way to meet different people while doing something you like.

### 3 Final thoughts & Carrier paths

My two and a half years in Japan were an unforgettable experience where I discovered an amazing country and met even more amazing people. I would recommend for anyone to come if you want to, don't hesitate! Two years might seem like a long time and there will probably be times where you feel a bit down, but the ups are so high that I can say for sure that my time in Japan was one of the best times in my life and I will never forget it. Having said that, I do not intend to do a PhD and will peacefully go back to France to find a job.

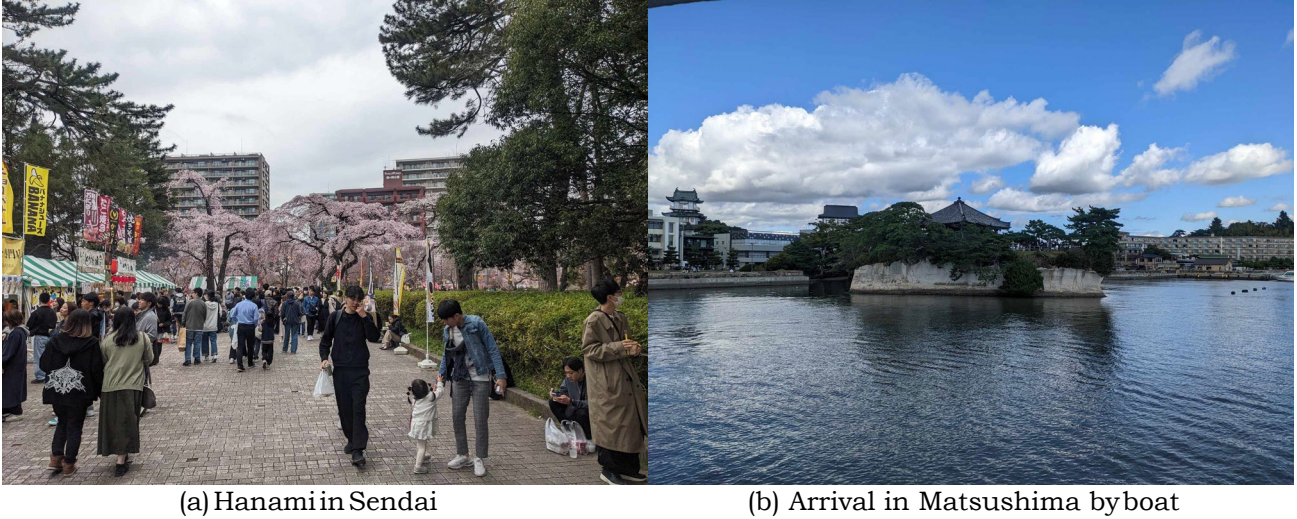


Figure 1



Figure 2



(a) Hiking in Naruko



(b) Onsen near Naruko

Figure 3



(a) Ramen



(b) Yakiniku

Figure 4