

Double degree program report

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1. Student life

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

I definitely think it did.

Firstly, based on the fact that it is a long-standing program that therefore has a wealth of alumni on whom to rely for experience and advice. For instance, I got into contact with a couple of students who had already finished before I signed up, in order to acquire information on the program. While I took part in the program, there were a dozen or so other students alongside me, which fostered a supportive environment where useful information circulates quickly and otherwise troublesome problems (such as administrative worries, schedules, transport, etc) can be solved significantly faster than when alone.

Secondly, it helped with studies and research, not just on the matter of everyday life; depending on whether other students are in the same department, it can be easier to confront educational milestones together as a group and help lift the pressure of exams, important presentations, seminars, and so on. However, it is important to do the same with your Japanese friends, colleagues and co-students, as they will also provide precious advice and can be also interested in any support you can bring too.

Suggestions and criticisms for space of improvement

It could be interesting for a collection of alumni reports (maybe two or three, ideally from similar departments) to be distributed with arrival documents in order to provide even more complete information and assuage any worries that new arrivals will inevitably have.

2. Living in Sendai: Experience and Advice

Tips for new arrivals

For food, I would recommend shopping at Aeon for fresh fruit and vegetables, and Gyômu Super for the vast array of frozen goods (fruit, vegetables, meats), foreign imported foods such as pasta, and canned goods. The price, quality and selection are all considerably better than convenience stores or smaller supermarkets.

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

I used to spend around 30,000-40,000 yen a month on food (about 7500-8000 yen per week), without eating out. I was also a vegetarian, so I do not know whether buying meat would make this more expensive. As I had to live on the 80,000 yen of the JASSO scholarship, there wasn't much space for things other than food, rent and utilities (generally 28,000-35,000 for rent and utilities at my Katahira dormitory depending on season and other residents). I used to walk a lot rather than take public transport, so you may need to add extra fees on top.

Preparation for essential items for maintenance before arrival: living accessories, manuals of various kinds, etc.

For transport, it is of course advisable to get a Suica card to avoid having to buy tickets all the time, if you choose to use public transport frequently.

I also recommend getting some shoe spikes for the winter, especially January and February. It snows frequently, which already makes walking difficult, but when it thaws and refreezes it becomes even more dangerous. On the other hand, prepare airy clothes for the summer, which is hotter and more humid than in France.

For disaster prevention, it is a good idea to keep a stash of water bottles and calorie-dense foods such as CalorieMate bars in an accessible space such as under the desk or more generally in a space where you are likely to shelter during an earthquake.

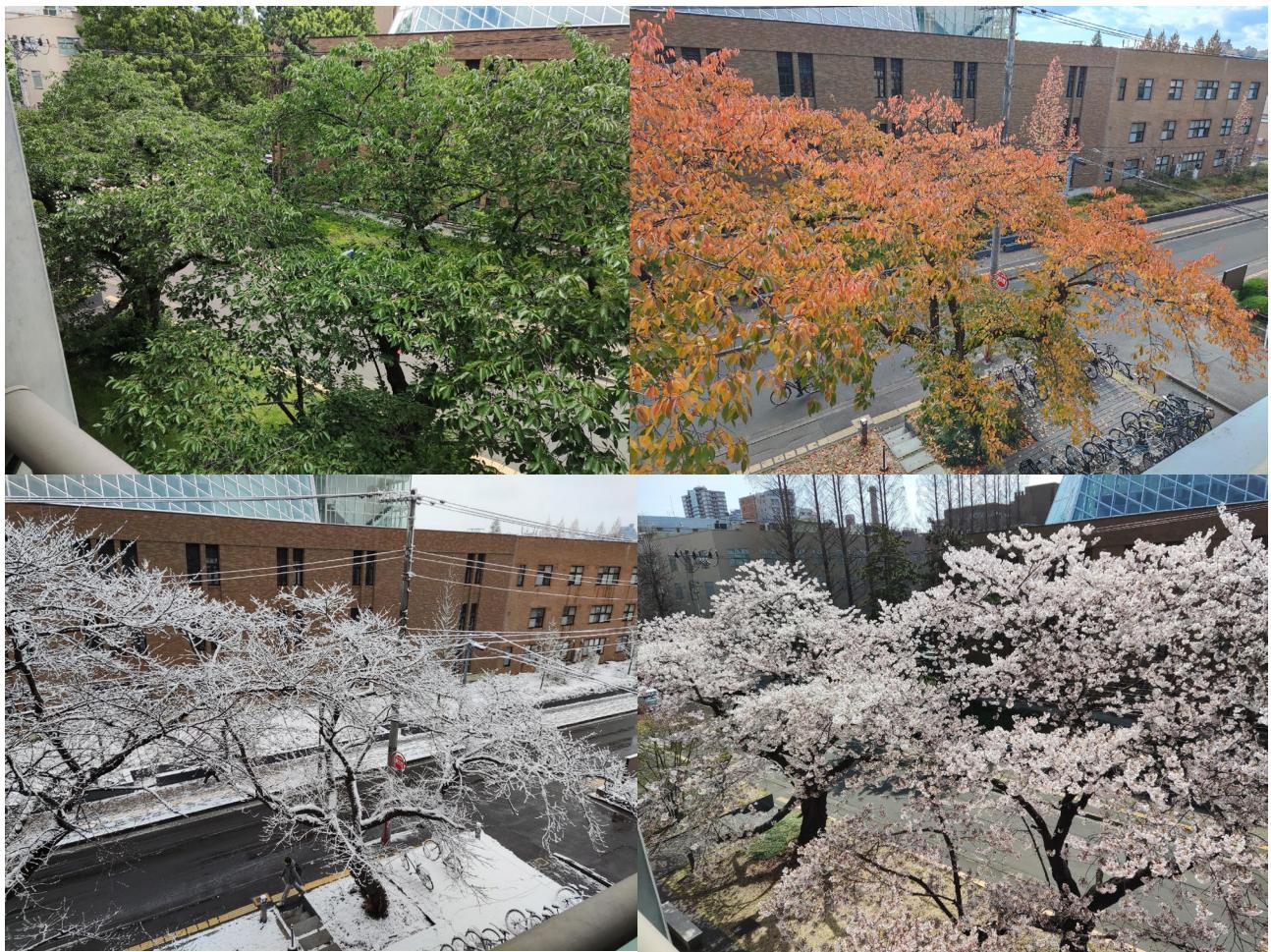
Difficulties you may encounter after arriving in Japan. (e.g., shopping, hospitality)

As a student and if you are not working, you will be eligible for exemption from the National Pension payments. However, you need to apply for this exemption at the beginning of April every year you are in Sendai. You need to do this by going to the City Hall.

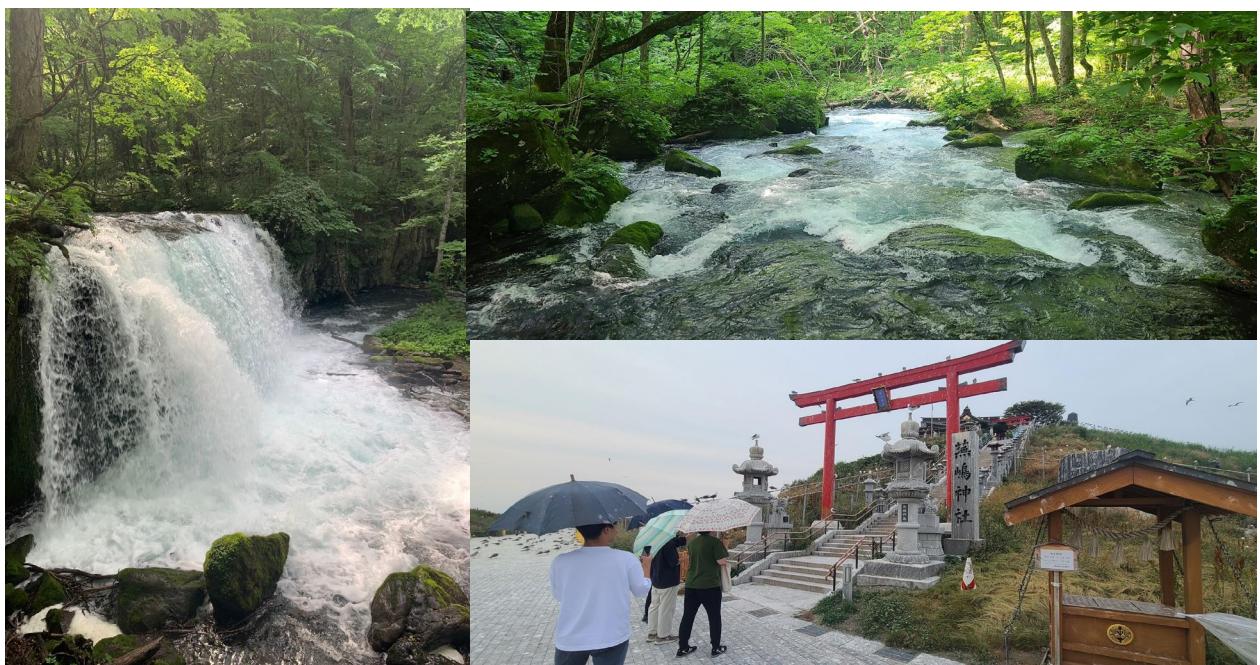
Similarly, if you are not working then you will have no taxes to pay, but you will still need to turn in your tax report that will come through in the mail sometime near the end of fiscal year (generally January to March). Under the previous assumptions, your financial situation will be extremely simple and only requires a couple of zeros in the total lines, but if the Japanese tax form is still too overwhelming to understand, you can go to the tax office (the building opposite the City Hall) and they will help you in the thirty seconds it takes to fill the form.

Leisure

I did a lot less travel than would otherwise have been enjoyable due to finances being somewhat tight. Nevertheless, I did tour the various shrines in Sendai such as Ômiya-hachimangû (a designated national cultural artefact), the ruins of Sendai castle and the recently-restored statue of Date Masamune, and enjoy the cherry blossoms in Spring. The cherry blossoms outside the Katahira dormitory provided four wonderful seasons' worth of views.



In the summer of my second year of the Master's program, I went on a Tōhoku round trip with my co-students. We visited Hachinohe, the Towada lakes, Lake Tazawako, a series of onsen in Akita prefecture and generally enjoyed the nature of north-east Japan and its landscapes.



3. Career paths

Pursuing graduate school degree (including PhD) at home university or Tohoku University

I chose not to pursue a PhD, be it at my home university or at Tohoku University.

Professional career outside of academia

This may be something included in many other reports, but it bears repeating anyway: if you are intent on finding a job or pursuing a career in Japan, you will need to start job hunting very early, between 1-2 years before graduation. You can ask other Japanese students for advice as they will be in the same situation and can offer insights into the Japanese system. Your main asset as a foreign person will be your hopefully high proficiency in multiple languages: on top of a level of Japanese that is between N2-N1, you will need to provide ability in English and your mother tongue. This also means that although you will have less success with traditional Japanese companies, who are obviously interested in fluent Japanese speakers, you will have more success than native Japanese people with companies from abroad who have offices or branch companies in Japan. Furthermore, it is a good idea to search for work agreements that may exist between your country and Japan, such as the V.I.E. for French people.

