

Living in Japan as a Malaysian

With all the cancelled flights and travel bans, it is unknown precisely when the Malaysia borders will be reopened again. Well... it does not look soon. It's such a hard time for those who have family members over in Japan, and for the long distance relationship couples. If you have been to Japan before, we are sure you miss it as much as we do.

This November, What's Up Japan decided to feature something special for you. Instead of introducing travel attractions as usual, we interviewed four Malaysians who have the experience of studying and working in Japan. Have you ever wondered about the local lifestyle in Japan? Through their personal insights, you can see how they live as a foreigner in Japan.

Turn the page and let the insiders tell you.



Hyogo

BIODATA

Name: Amber Cher
Age: 24
Japan City: Kobe City, Hyogo prefecture
Hometown: Kuantan, Pahang
Duration: March 2020~ now
Occupation: Employee
SNS: amber_j.d._



Niigata

BIODATA

Name: Ruheine Naidu Chandren
Age: 24
Japan City: Nagaoka, niigata
Duration: March 2019~ now
Hometown: Kuantan, Pahang
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SNS: ruheinenaidu



Shizuoka

BIODATA

Name: Jackalyn Yeo Deng Ying
Age: 24
Kikugawa city, Shizuoka prefecture
Duration: September 2019~ February 2020
Hometown: Kuching, Sarawak
Occupation: Internship as an English teacher
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Kanagawa

BIODATA

Name: Maisarah Sajidah binti Mohd Rosley
Age: 23
Japan City: Matsuda town, Kanagawa prefecture
Duration: September 2019~ September 2020
Hometown: Shah Alam, Selangor
Occupation: Internship as an assistant language teacher (ALT)
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Ruheine Naidu Chandren



Q: How's it like in Niigata prefecture?

A: Niigata is surrounded by mountains, the air is very humid. It snows so much in winter that people name it a "snow country". If you ever come here in winter, remember to snowboard and ski at the ski resorts!

Q: Tell me some good spots in Nagaoka!

If you like alcohol, go and try out sake at *Ponshukan inside the Nagaoka train station. An hour drive away from Nagaoka is the Sasagawa Nagare coastline, where you can enjoy hiking, snorkelling, and camping all at once. This is my favourite spot!

Q: Recommend me some good local food!

A: Definitely come try Hegi soba! It's one of Niigata's specialties. In Autumn, you can find a lot of sweet potatoes, chestnuts and *momiji flavoured desserts. My personal favourites throughout the year are *Famichiki, mazesoba, and ice cream, haha.



Q: How much do you spend on monthly expenses?

A: Since I don't use gas, I spend a lot on electricity, about 6,000yen (≈RM 235) including AC and heater. Water bill 1,600yen (≈RM 63). Rental fee 35,000yen (≈RM 1374). I own a car... so 4,000yen (≈RM 157) for gasoline. Everything including grocery shopping costs me anywhere between 80,000~90,000yen (≈RM 3141~3534) per month.



Q: Which type of house and neighbourhood are you living in?

A: I live alone in an 1LDK apartment, it's something like a studio room. Around my house, there are a lot of paddy fields. Retired people grow plants in their yards too. I love taking a walk in my neighbourhood.

Q: What do you like to do during weekends and on holidays?

A: On weekends I love to go to Tenryo-no-sato by the sea. It's a perfect spot for sunset-watching! I sometimes go hiking at Mt. Yahiko, and after the hike, soak in the natural hot springs. In spring holidays, I do domestic travel. Meanwhile in summer, I usually go back to Malaysia and stay there for 2 and a half weeks.

*Ponshukan: sake-tasting corner *Momiji: literally red leaves
*Famichiki: fried chicken sold in convenience stores

Amber Cher



Q: Is there any specific reason why you chose to work in Japan?

A: Yes, there are a few reasons. I joined a student exchange program to Kyushu prefecture, and it left a very good impression on me, especially the people, culture, cleanliness and architecture. It has always been my dream to live there. Right after graduating from my home university, Universiti Putra Malaysia, I flew to Japan immediately for my first job.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about your living area?

A: I am living in a single room inside a sharehouse. The location is very strategic, only 3 minutes walk away from the Motomachi train station. This area is where Sannomiya and Motomachi Center Gai (センター街 Sentā-gai) located at. You can find a huge variety of popular cosmetic shops, boutiques, aesthetic bookstores and also a famous Chinatown called Nankinmachi. It's convenient to get everything in Kobe without having to go to other big cities.



Q: Do you feel homesick? Since there are travel restrictions now, how did you cope with it?

A: Hmm... not really. The only thing is, I missed Bak Kut Teh a lot recently! I'm glad that there's a Malaysian restaurant near my home. The owner has been living in Japan for around 40 years, so the Malaysian food there tastes pretty good!

Q: Is there a huge difference between living in Japan and living in Malaysia?

A: Yes, of course! The biggest difference is the amount of walking I do. After moving to Japan, I walk more than 10,000 steps per day. Back in Malaysia, I seldom walked this much. Also, the public transportation here is very convenient, so I frequently commute by train.

Q: What do you do during your free time and on the weekends?

A: Painting, dancing, photography and also modeling. You can check the pictures out on my SNS! Other than that, I often go try out new restaurants and do café-hopping with my friends. Recently, I tried out sweet potato and yam flavored cornets, they are autumn-limited, and tasted so good!



Jackalyn Yeo Deng Ying



Q: If I were to visit Shizuoka, where would you recommend me to go?

A: There's a very famous sightseeing spot called Kunozan Toshogu shrine in Nihondaira, located up on Mt. Kuno. From what I know, this shrine is dedicated to Shogun Ieyasu. Oh yeah! If you're a seafood lover, you must visit Shimizu Port for their sushi!

Q: What was your daily routine?

A: On weekdays, I would be at school from 8am~ 4:45pm. I got home around 6:30pm and ate dinner together with my host family. On Saturdays, I cycled to a café in Fujieda city. Sundays were reserved for the church service. Once in a while, my host family and I would travel to another prefecture.

Q: How did you travel to work every morning?

A: By train, bus, and bicycle for about an hour, it's quite a long way. My host family's house is in Kikugawa, but I worked at Meisei Middle and High School located in another city called Fujieda.

Q: Are you a foodie? (chuckle)

A: Yes! After I came back to Malaysia, I really missed the maguro sashimi in Shimizu. It was super fresh and good. As for eatery, I often went to Saizeriya for some western food. Oh, Strawberry Daifuku! I used to buy them in front of the train station during winter.

Q: Six months in Japan is rather short. What are the most memorable moments for you?

A: Wow, I have quite a few. Last year in autumn, my host grandma brought me to Kyoto for a one-day trip. That was my first time seeing maple leaves! They were really stunning. Other than that, I went to Mt. Fuji in winter. Unfortunately it didn't snow on that day, but I still saw remnants of snow from the day before!

Q: How much did you spend on the living expenses per month?

A: On average I spent about 140,000yen (≈RM 5,523), including rental fee, transportation fare, etc. I realised that a huge part of my money went to the transportation fees, since the school is far from my house.

Maisarah Sajidah binti Mohd Rosley



Q: Could you briefly explain your internship? How did you find it and what was your job scope?

A: Via an agency. The staff from a recruitment agency came to my university and looked for students who were interested in doing their internship in Japan. I was lucky enough to pass the interview and that's how I ended up in Japan as an Assistant Language Teacher! ALT's job scope is to support the Japanese homeroom teacher or designated English teacher during classes.

Q: Tell me what are some of the best things to do in Matsuda town!

A: In Matsuda, a few big events are held throughout the year, such as the Matsuda Kankou Festival in August, and the Matsuda Cherry Blossom Festival in spring. At the cherry blossom festival, vendors will be selling food such as sakura dango and sakura flavored tea. At night, there is also a light up festival for people to watch the sakura trees.

Q: And where are your favourite eateries?

A: I really loved the Honobono Italian restaurant. They serve authentic pizza and there's a lot of vegetarian friendly items on their menu. After work, I sometimes ate the 1,000yen kaisendon value meal at a restaurant nearby the train station.



Q: Is the cost of living high or low in Kanagawa?

A: To me it costs a little high. For example, my 1LDK apartment rental fee was 73,000yen (≈RM 2872), but it covered all the utility bills.

Q: How did you spend your weekends?

A: I usually stayed in and watched anime. If I went out, it was usually to Odawara city, where I could shop at Don Quijote. There's a thrift shop that I liked, called "MODE OFF". Found a lot of good and cheap clothes there, for example the winter jacket that I'm wearing right now.

Q: Overall, did Japan meet your expectations?

A: Yes! I watched anime a lot, so I kinda had a rough idea of Japan before I actually lived there. I felt familiar with my residential area even though I had never been there before, haha. Somehow, the train station and school felt a bit different from anime.

