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Japan tops wish list for remote workers

# Tokyo considers digital nomad visa for 2024

◆Focus

ANIKA OSAKI EXUM  
STAFF WRITER

Stefanos Antypas, 34, a social media business consultant from Greece, long held the dream of visiting Japan.

Having grown up watching films by Akira Kurosawa and Masaki Kobayashi and eventually being exposed to anime and Japanese food culture, it was always at the top of his list.

So when he came to Japan for the first time this October as part of a monthlong event inviting digital nomads to Fukuoka Prefecture, he quickly decided he'd be back — not just for a quick visit or holiday, but possibly for a few years.

“Since week two, it was so easy to make this decision,” Antypas said.

But now comes the hard part: the visa.

If Japan, like many other countries, had a visa for digital nomads — a term for people who work remotely while on short- to medium-term stays in a country of their choosing — he would have hopped on a plane home and easily returned for a longer stay.

Instead, Antypas is considering getting a student visa, which would allow him to do some work and study, or a startup visa, which would allow him to eventually set up a media company in Japan.

Japan, which boasts a low crime rate and world-famous tourist attractions, food and pop culture, is fast becoming a hot spot for digital nomads, who are also drawn to the country's lower cost of living compared to many Western countries as well as the weak yen.

In response to this trend, the government is working on a new visa for digital nomads with the hope that their influx will boost the tourism industry. An outline will likely be out by the end of December.

Nomadlist.com — a website tracking tens

of thousands of digital nomads — estimates there are around 35 million digital nomads around the world, with the majority of them coming from North America and Europe. The only Asian countries represented in the list of 30 nations are India, Japan and South Korea — in that order.

Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, the Philippines and Hungary are just some of the countries that offer visas specifically for digital nomads, while others, such as Japan, have alternatives that can be used by digital nomads — like the working holiday visa and tourist visa — but nothing specifically geared toward such workers.

More notably, Tokyo is the fastest-growing remote work hub according to Nomadlist.com, with the spike coinciding with Japan's reopening to foreign tourists in the past year.

Akina Shu, who has visited around 50 countries as a speaker and ambassador on the digital nomad lifestyle since 2020, has seen growing interest in Japan firsthand.

“Everywhere I go, when I tell (digital nomads) I'm from Japan, the country is always on their top-priority list to visit,” said Shu, who is ethnically Chinese but was born and raised in Japan.

Shu, who founded the Nomad University website and podcast, spoke from the engawa (wooden porch) of a historic, traditional Japanese home in rural Kyoto that was remodeled into a coworking space in 2019. There, she co-hosted a weeklong program called “Colive Kyoto.”

This program followed “Colive Fukuoka,” Japan's first public-private joint initiative involving organizations like Nomad University, the city of Fukuoka and the Fukuoka Convention & Visitors Bureau. Altogether, the program welcomed 49 digital nomads from 24 countries predominantly on tourist visas, said Shu.

While physical attendance for the two events was capped, roughly 350 people have already joined the “Colive Japan” online

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Israeli soldiers walk during a raid at the Balata camp for Palestinian refugees, east of Nablus in the occupied West Bank on Nov. 19. AFP-JIJI

## The West Bank is being reshaped

Hamas' attack has aggravated long-lasting conflict over land

◆Focus

SIMON MARKS  
BLOOMBERG

In the weeks since Oct. 7, Issa Amro has watched as Israeli settlers entered his community, shot at nearby families and damaged property. He's erected a fence and barricaded his windows with bricks after men in military uniform broke into his home earlier this month.

“I'm living in a cage now from all directions,” said Amro, a Palestinian activist who advocates the use of nonviolent resistance living in Hebron, a city located in occupied territory of the West Bank. “It's intimidation day and night.”

The events of Oct. 7, which saw more than 2,000 heavily armed fighters belonging to the

Islamist militant group Hamas storm into southern Israel from Gaza and kill 1,200 people, has aggravated a long-standing conflict over the West Bank. Jews living in the swathe of land between Israel and the Jordan River that forms the other Palestinian territory fear that something similar could happen there, and the extremists among them have lashed out.

Settlers — who have received hundreds of millions of dollars in state funding toward infrastructure and weapons in recent years — have carried out more than 220 assaults on Palestinian communities since Oct. 7, according to Yesh Din and B'Tselem, two human rights groups documenting attacks in the West Bank. They say that has included shooting live ammunition, setting homes and olive trees on fire and destroying water pipelines.

For decades, there have been clashes in the West Bank between Israelis — the military and settlers — and Palestinians, but last month's attacks have exacerbated tensions, sparking fears that a second front in Israel's war against Hamas could open up.

While the violence is caused by a minority, U.S. President Joe Biden has threatened sanctions against those extremists should it continue.

Israeli forces in the West Bank have killed in excess of 200 people in that time, more than a quarter of whom were children, according to the United Nations. Seventy of the dead were living in refugee camps with most killings occurring during Israeli search-and-arrest operations or in the context of demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza, the U.N. says.

A spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces said that it had recorded 770 “terrorism events” carried out by Palestinians in the West Bank since Oct. 7, including shootings and hurling stones and Molotov cocktails. Four Israelis have been killed in the West Bank.

The army confirmed that it had killed 216 Palestinians and documented 126 attacks by Jewish settlers. Counterterrorism operations are conducted nightly to apprehend suspects, many of whom are part of the

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## Nihon University VP sues chairperson

YUKANA INOUE  
STAFF WRITER

Nihon University Vice President Yasuhiro Sawada filed a lawsuit Monday against Chairperson Mariko Hayashi over alleged power harassment, in the latest twist in the fallout from the university's handling of a drug scandal surrounding its American football club.

On Nov. 22, the university's board advised Sawada and President Takeo Sakai to resign over the handling of the scandal. The two have expressed their intention to step down.

In the same board meeting, Hayashi agreed to take a 50% pay cut over the scandal.

Sawada filed the lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court, seeking ¥10 million (\$67,000) in damages from Hayashi, claiming her actions toward him constituted power harassment — a term referring to the abuse of authority to inflict physical or psychological pain or economic harm on an underling.

According to the lawsuit, Sawada was told to resign in September in order to take responsibility for the scandal. Hayashi also told him that the Metropolitan Police Department was investigating the case, which was not true.

The vice president was banned from attending almost all meetings at the university — including board meetings — between late August and early September without a legitimate explanation, the lawsuit said.

These actions by Hayashi, the lawsuit claims, were a form of harassment, with the chairperson using her superiority to paint Sawada as being solely responsible for the mishandling of the situation.

In the past few weeks, there have been reports of Hayashi blaming Sawada for the drug scandal and Sawada pushing back, with this turning into an ongoing power struggle between the two.

Although the university board's request that Sawada and Sakai resign was not binding, they reportedly agreed to step down in order to prevent further chaos. If Sawada and Sakai actually resign, it could signal an end to the internal power struggle, with the dispute now moving to court.

Information from Jiji added

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## Bedbugs spreading in Asia. Is Japan next?

KARIN KANEKO  
STAFF WRITER

As more people cross borders in the post-COVID era, it appears that another type of traveler is on the move: bedbugs.

Over the past few months, infestations have been afflicting mattresses and sofas worldwide, from Paris to Japan's neighbors such as South Korea and China.

No cases have so far been reported in Japan, but experts caution that it may only be a matter of time, given that the number of travelers going in and out of the country is quickly rising in the post-pandemic era.

Bedbugs are a type of blood-sucking insect that lives indoors. During daylight hours, they hide in the cracks of walls, underneath tatami mats or inside furniture, leaving behind brownish stains known as blood feces, as well as behind posters, books or clothing.

While bedbug bites cause itching that can make sleep difficult, they are not known to carry diseases. Symptoms may also vary from person to person, with some breaking out in a rash, while others exhibit no symptoms.

Masaru Natsuaki, a professor well-versed in



dermatitis from insect bites at Hyogo Medical University Hospital, said there had been a rise in reported cases abroad since around May due to the uptick in travel.

“The same thing is likely to happen in Japan in the future,” Natsuaki said, adding that infestations are already occurring in Japan, although they have not been reported yet.

It's only a matter of time before “it becomes clear that the number of bedbugs is increasing in many places.”

A worker uses a vacuum cleaner inside a bullet train at Suseo Station in Seoul on Nov. 13. BLOOMBERG

In fact, over the past decade, bedbugs have been garnering more attention around the globe — including in Japan.

According to the Japan Pest Control Association, consultations regarding bedbugs reached a peak in the fiscal year from April 2019, at 706. There were only 130 cases in fiscal 2009.

Consultations then declined to 534 cases during the pandemic, and gradually increased again to 683 in fiscal 2022.

Currently, there is not much the health ministry can do, so it has taken a wait-and-see approach. The Japan Tourism Agency, meanwhile, has said that it may alert the travel industry and related organizations, if such a request is made from the health ministry.

Natsuaki also believes that it is almost impossible for the country to comprehensively prevent bedbug infestations, as the insect is difficult to detect and people are constantly on the move.

“Each individual carries bedbugs in their suitcases, carry-on bags and clothes when traveling. They could stay at hotels with

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