

## Working in Japan By Joel Ward

Recent developments at Japan's largest *eikaiwa* language school have shown that even those with stable incomes from seemingly stable sources can suddenly find themselves out of work. This article hopes to briefly outline some of the bureaucratic pitfalls relating to finding, changing or leaving jobs. There is also a list of useful telephone numbers overleaf.

**Visas Status:** Each visa has different restrictions on what kind(s) of work the holder is eligible to do. A "Specialist in Humanities" visa (issued to most *eikaiwa* teachers) only permits the worker to do humanities related activities and does not, for example, permit the holder to work in a hotel or bar, even as a source of supplementary income to *eikaiwa* work. "Student" visas have restrictions on the types of work *and* on the number of working hours permitted. Non-Japanese can be prosecuted (and deported) if immigration officials discover violations.

**Visa Expiry:** The expiry date of a visa does not change, even if the employer does, but working visas are issued on the understanding that the holder is employed at that company. If immigration is not informed of employment changes in a timely manner, the visa is unlikely to be renewed next time. If the visa holder finds employment in a field not permitted by their visa status, they will need to apply for a new visa. (See above.)

**Leaving Japan:** A visa permits the holder to enter into Japan only once. If holidaying overseas (even your home country for even a short time) the visa is cancelled. This can be avoided by applying for a *Re-entry Permit* at the immigration office before leaving. Single permits allow the holder to leave and come back only once. Multiple re-entry permits cost more but allow the user to come and go at will *until the visa expires*. If a new visa is granted (extension or different "status of residence") a new re-entry permit is needed. Processing takes time and if urgent business requires you to leave Japan immediately, you may find yourself unable to return. A multiple re-entry permit provides peace of mind.

**Workers Compensation:** Non-Japanese workers are entitled to protection from unfair work practices and dangerous workplaces regardless of whether their visa is valid or not. If you are unfairly dismissed or are injured at work consult with the labor bureau. Staffs are available for free anonymous consultations, even in English or Portuguese. (See overleaf)

**Social Insurance:** Employers are required to enroll their permanent staff in an unemployment insurance scheme. If long term employees find themselves unemployed through no fault of their own, they are entitled to receive unemployment insurance for three months. Payments are calculated according to the former salary. Even if the employee quits the job on their own accord, they can still claim unemployment payments after a waiting period. Non-Japanese are not always enrolled in insurance schemes if they are considered "temporary." Check with your employer about whether you are covered for these three types of insurance.

**Pension Insurance:** Every person who works in Japan must make contributions to the national pension scheme. Non-Japanese are no exception, even if not intending to retire in Japan. Non-Japanese are entitled to a refund after leaving Japan, which is based on the contributions made. Unfortunately, this is paid in a lump sum and it is taxed as income. It is possible to lodge a tax refund application so that you can claim to have this tax refunded as well, but the application has to be lodged in Japan, meaning you will need to have a friend lodge the application on your behalf, or pay someone to do so.

**Health Insurance:** All residents of Japan are able to join the National Health Insurance program. Insurance premiums are calculated from the previous year's salary, so for non-Japanese they are very cheap in the first year (based on an income of zero) but skyrocket from the second. Some non-Japanese take out travel insurance instead of joining the Japanese welfare program. Please consult with your local health center for information about premiums and the types of cover available on the National Health Insurance program.

**Alien Registration:** Non-Japanese who live in Japan for more than 3 months are required to register at their local city hall. The identification card issued must be carried at all times. Any changes must be reported within 14 days. A change of employer or a change to visa status must be reported.

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