

Japanese Emigrants and Their Descendants, the “Nikkei,” Bridge Japan with the World



There are five Nikkei employees at Iwata Shinkin Bank, and according to bank staff “it’s natural” to have the Japanese descendants working here. Iwata Shinkin Bank focuses its CSR (corporate social responsibility) activities to assist members of the Japanese-Brazilian community by offering them perks such as free legal consulting and Japanese language classes.

Japan is an island nation. In addition to this geographic limitation, there were various other factors that made overseas travel difficult in past eras. Since modern times, as interchange with overseas countries flourished, the number of Japanese nationals migrating abroad increased dramatically. Today approximately 3.8 million Japanese emigrants and their descendants, known as “Nikkei,” live and work all over the world.

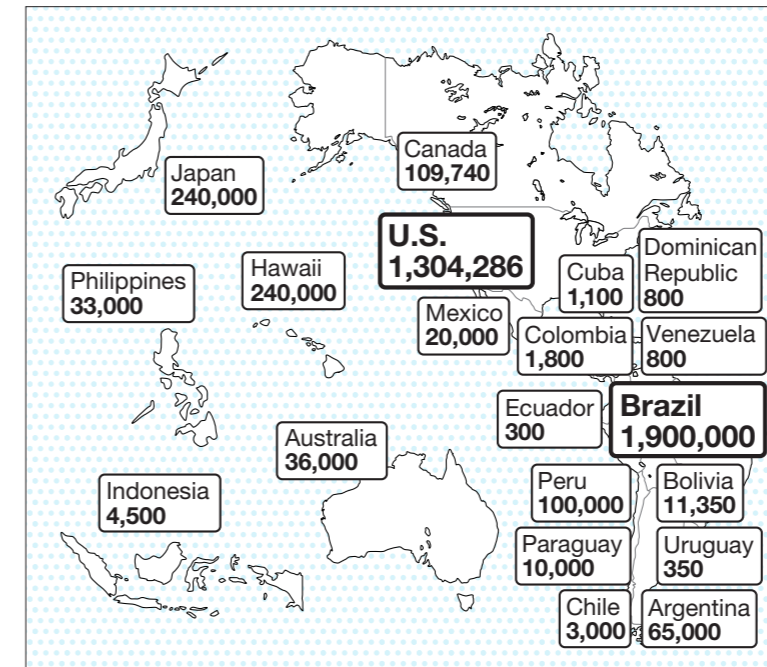
Nikkei in Japan

After generations have passed since their Japanese ancestors first moved abroad, now many Nikkei come to live in Japan. All over Japan, some 240,000 Nikkei currently live and work alongside Japanese nationals. In Shizuoka Prefecture’s Hamamatsu City, which is home to



Third-generation Japanese-Brazilian Luiza Sasai says the advantages of living in Japan include a comfortable lifestyle, public safety, and punctuality. “I’ve now lived longer in Japan than I did in Brazil, so my emotional attachment is stronger to Japan,” she says with a laugh.

Nikkei population by country/region



The majority of Japanese emigrants are settled in North and South America, especially Brazil and the United States. Source: The Association of Nikkei & Japanese Abroad



To ensure the safety of foreign residents in case of emergency, HICE provides multi-language interpreters in disasters, and carries out disaster preparedness training for foreign residents of Japan.

renowned manufacturing companies such as Honda, Suzuki, Yamaha and Kawai, foreign nationals (including Nikkei) account for about 22,000 of the 807,000 total population, the highest ratio of foreign residents in any city of Japan.

One of them is third-generation Japanese-Brazilian Luiza Sasai. After graduating from architecture school in Brazil, she moved to Japan with her parents. Currently she works in overseas trading at the Iwata Shinkin Bank in Iwata City, adjacent to Hamamatsu City.

“Especially in the cities of Hamamatsu and Iwata, in the west part of Shizuoka Prefecture where many foreign nationals reside, there are lots of Japanese language classes and multicultural exchange events to help people better understand Japanese culture. It’s great that in Japan if you work decently hard you can make a living and, as long as you’re not too extravagant, can get pretty much whatever you want. I’m a Japanese-Brazilian, but at my current workplace I get treated the same as any Japanese national. At work and in my daily life, as a Nikkei fluent in both Japanese and Portuguese, I’m happy to be able to assist people who don’t speak Japanese,” she says.

Being familiar with both Japanese culture and the culture of their homelands, the Nikkei are a boon to the workforce in Japanese companies that hire foreign nationals living in Japan. Indeed, in this modern age of globalization, the Nikkei have become a highly sought-



HICE Coordinator Lissa Kikuyama: “We’re working toward establishing a total support system that covers citizens who are foreign nationals in Japan from their birth until they can get jobs and become contributing members of society.”

after human resource.

At the regional level, comprehensive support is available for Nikkei. HICE (The Hamamatsu Foundation for International Communication and Exchange) was established in 1992 to offer information and advice, and provide various classes and events to help the Nikkei and other foreign residents assimilate into the local community.

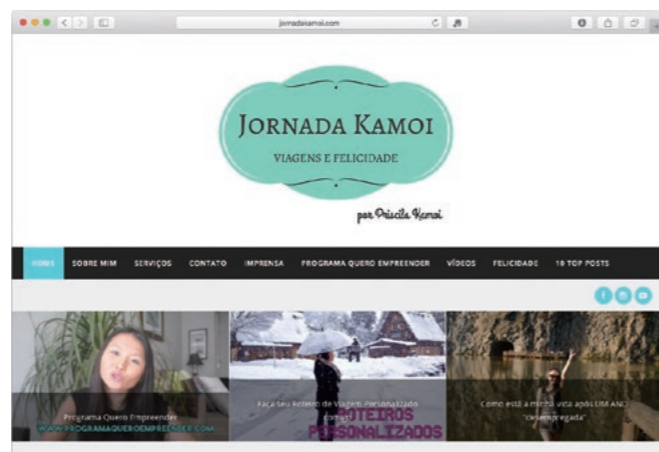
“Japanese-Brazilians account for the majority of the Nikkei in Hamamatsu. As their native language is Portuguese, public institutions such as City Hall and

local schools hire interpreters to facilitate life for Nikkei who have moved to Japan with their families. We work to strengthen connections between the local community and the Nikkei by cooperating with local organizations to conduct disaster preparedness trainings, open language schools, and so on,” explains HICE Coordinator Lissa Kikuyama.

Nikkei in their home countries

Many Nikkei serve as bridges between Japan and their home countries. The Japanese government is implementing many programs to deepen ties with Nikkei outside Japan, including an annual program inviting Nikkei from Central and South America to visit Japan.

Priscila Megumi Kamoi is a third-generation Japanese-Brazilian living in Brazil. In 2016 she visited Japan, the native land of her grandparents, by participating in the Latin American Nikkei Invitation to Japan Program. Kamoi is a professional blogger who makes her living writing a travel blog called *Jornada Kamoi~Viagens e Felicidade* (“Kamoi’s Journey—Travels and Happiness”). Kamoi says the invitation program provided opportunities to deepen understanding of Japanese culture and life in Japan. “When I actually visited Japan, I noticed that people strictly followed traffic rules. They didn’t throw trash on the side of the road or make a lot of noise on the train. Respect for elders has not been



Kamoi runs a blog called *Jornada Kamoi—Viagens e Felicidade*. After participating in the invitational program, she partnered with the Consulate General of Japan in Curitiba to run series of lectures on Japanese culture and traditions and provide other information about Japan.

forgotten, and manners are notably good. I think there’s a lot that Brazilians could learn from these attitudes. When living in Brazil I kind of forget that I’m Nikkei, but by participating in this program I was able to renew my awareness that my ancestors were Japanese. I felt compelled to convey Japanese culture and traditions to Brazil,” she said.

After returning to Brazil, Kamoi partnered with the Consulate General of Japan in Curitiba to help with the Japanese national government’s public relations

activities by spreading information about Japan. “A large number of Brazilians have an interest in Japan and want to travel there,” she noted. “Through the program I was able to visit Japanese companies and experience Japanese traditional culture, and it made me want to share what I learned and experienced with people like these who are interested.”

Alexandre Shodi Nomura is a third-generation Nikkei Brazilian who runs his own business in Brazil. “The first- and second-generation Japanese immigrants in Brazil have contributed a lot to their communities and are held in high esteem, so much so that ‘the reliable Japanese’ has become an everyday phrase,” he says.

“During the 2016 Rio Olympics, Brazilian Nikkei, despite accounting for less than 1% of the total population, were recognized and honored for their contribution to the development of Brazil. As a third-generation Nikkei, I feel both pride in my forefathers and a responsibility to strengthen friendly ties between Japan and Brazil.”

Nomura works on the board of directors of the Brazilian Society of Japanese Culture and Social Assistance (Bunkyo) and was a chairman of the Junior Chamber International Brazil-Japan in 2016. He helps Japanese people in Brazil adapt to Brazilian culture, conducts various Japanese cultural programs for Brazilians, and acts as a mediator, working to connect everyone involved. In recognition of these efforts he was invited to the 2016 Latin American Next-generation Nikkei Leaders Conference organized by the Japanese government.

“At the conference I exchanged ideas with young Nikkei leaders who are active in various countries, and I reconfirmed the importance of Nikkei forming their own communities in each region. I also renewed my resolve to ensure that the high regard with which Nikkei are currently held in each country is carried on by future generations, through building deeper connections among our own Nikkei communities, home countries, and Japan. I believe these relationships can heighten the recognition and trust toward Nikkei, and bring wider opportunities for each individual to actively and powerfully contribute to their own countries.”

Both in and out of Japan, the Nikkei, who inherit the Japanese values passed down from Japanese emigrants to the second and third generations, are important links for strengthening the ties between Japan and their countries.



Since the invitational program, Nomura says he’s “even more motivated to contribute to the strengthening of the Nikkei community as an essential channel for spreading the values of the Japanese people.”



Nomura is also involved in the Awa-Odori Represa group, which brings the Awa-Odori, a traditional Japanese dance originating from Tokushima Prefecture, to Brazil. With a history of over 39 years, Awa-Odori Represa has performed countless times throughout Brazil. The photo is of a performance in Tokushima during a visit to Japan in 1995.



Third-generation Japanese-Brazilian Priscila Megumi Kamoi participated in the “2016 Latin American Nikkei Invitation Program for Strengthening International Communication” after being introduced to the program by a friend.



During the week-long invitational program, discussions among participants as well as lectures by experts, visits to companies, and cultural activities were conducted.



Alexandre Shodi Nomura, a third-generation Nikkei. Nomura has taken charge of running Bunkyo’s main event taking place in 2018, the “Bunka Matsuri Coordination Campaign” which lets Brazilians experience Japanese culture, and he is working enthusiastically to ensure it will be a success.