

A significant number of foreigners experience housing discrimination in Japan

July 5 06:09 am JST 12 Comments



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It's not uncommon for Japan to be described as some kind of utopia. The temptation is certainly understandable. Violent crime is exceptionally rare here, the majority of citizens are hard-working and polite, trains run on time, and by and large, Japanese society is tidy and efficient.

However, Japan's harmonious facade does belie underlying issues. In the wake of [Hana Kimura's](#) suicide, [online harassment](#) is increasingly

considered unregulated and out-of-control. [Hate speech](#) is another issue that many feel needs to be reigned in, and [women's position](#) in the country is sadly subjugate. In short, there remains work to be done.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, Japan was experiencing a record influx of foreign residents and tourists. [Expat employees](#) were also growing in number in several industries. Nevertheless, several find it difficult to assimilate as they face housing discrimination and outright racism in certain situations.

40% of Foreign Residents Have Experienced Housing Discrimination

In response to a [2016 survey commissioned by the Ministry of Justice](#), 40 percent of foreign respondents reported they had experienced housing discrimination. In addition to this figure, 27 percent admitted giving up on a residence after learning of "no foreigners allowed" policies. In some cases, individuals born in the country to foreign parents also experience the same problem.

One Filipino woman related her experience to the [Nikkei Asian Review](#). "The landlord told [me and my husband] that the house is not for foreigners." She continued, "We visited a different real estate agent, but they said a Japanese guarantor was required. We explained that we were both permanent residents, only to be declined because we did not meet the conditions."

Japanese real estate companies often operate under a guarantor system. A guarantor is a person or entity that essentially insures the rental contract. They cover unpaid rent or damages in the case that the renter is unable to or has fled the country. Nevertheless, numerous foreign residents have trouble finding a Japanese guarantor and thereby difficulty renting.

Why Landlords Reject Foreigners

Although such results are problematic, they point to a situation more complicated than mere racism. Landlords likely feel anxious about needing to provide English services in order to explain sometimes particularly complex housing policies.

While 40 percent of foreign residents experience the ramification, property managers are likely more anxious than the figure lets on. In [a survey](#) of Japan Property Management Association members, 60 percent reported they were reluctant to accept foreigners. Unsurprisingly, most cite concerns over communication.

According to Toshiyuki Nagai, a spokesman for a real estate company, "Communication issues between tenants and landlords or with neighbors often lead to deeper problems." Landlords typically assume foreign nationals are unable to understand Japanese.

Others have different concerns. Although perhaps misguided, they may entertain ideas that a foreigner's attitude will cause problems. There is concern that foreign renters will disobey local garbage rules or household rules like taking off shoes or not pouring oil down the sink.

Contractual and financial concerns are also a problem. According to [an article](#) in The Japan Times, many landlords complain of foreign tenants violating contracts, suddenly vacating the property, or late rent payments. Ironically, foreign residents are no more likely than their Japanese counterparts to pay rent late, according to Japanese immigration lawyer Shoichi Ibuski.

Although these perceptions are discouraging, and there are some efforts underway to help foreign tenants and Japanese landlords understand each other better, the situation is unlikely to change anytime soon. Property owners in Japan are allowed free rein to reject applicants, even based on discriminatory criteria such as an applicant's nationality. As such, openly denying foreign residents in property advertisements is also permitted by

the law. Additional documentation and fees are even a possibility.

Nevertheless, housing discrimination is unaligned with the ideals of Japan's constitution. Should the influx of foreign nationals seeking employment return in a post-corona world, the issue will likely need to be addressed.

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