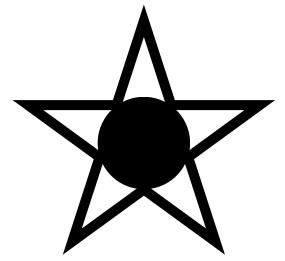


# ASAHIKAWA INFO



June 2024, Volume 331

## Hokkaido News Top 5

April & June 2024, compiled by the AIC

### **117 Municipalities Are Potentially at Risk of Disappearing by 2050 (4/25)**

On April 24, the Population Strategy Convention (人口戦略会議) announced that 40% of municipalities nationwide are at risk of disappearing due to population decline. In the case of Hokkaido, 65%, or 117, of its towns and villages are at risk due to the declining number of women aged 20-39. Many are calling for reform in the workplace, industry structures, and policies to incentivize families to have children.

### **The Number of Akiya (Empty Homes) in Japan Reaches Record Highs at 13.8% (5/1)**

According to a recent survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (総務省), 13.8% (9,000,000) of homes in Japan are empty. In Hokkaido, 15.6% (about 450,000) of homes are empty. Many attribute this to the declining birthrates and aging population that is currently plaguing Japan. Several local municipalities in Hokkaido are working towards decreasing this number through demolition to improve the area's scenery and make way for future construction.

### **18 Types of Hokkaido Produce Yield Largest Output Domestically (5/15)**

According to a 2022 study conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, Hokkaido ranks first in the nation for produce yield, with 18 different types of produce having the highest output nationwide. This increase in produce yield could be attributed to global warming, making the northern region more optimal for cultivation and farming.

### **Asahikawa City Actively Implements Bullying Prevention Measures(5/16)**

This fiscal year marks the second year of the "Asahikawa Model," a bullying prevention measure targeted towards young children from 5th grade elementary to 3rd year junior high. This measure involves creating a 24-hour support system chat where children can use either a smartphone or a tablet provided by their school to seek consultation or advice on a wide range of issues, including bullying, dropouts, and studies.

### **Asahikawa City Working to Develop an App to Protect Elderly With Dementia (5/21)**

Elderly residents with dementia have the tendency to disappear and loiter causing stress to families. In order to tackle this issue, the city has been collaborating with organizations from Sapporo to help develop an app that would help locate the missing elderly and share information with relevant parties such as local police and support organizations. This app is to help prevent missing residents suffering from dementia and is currently scheduled to be tested this summer.

#### **Inside this issue...**

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For more information,  
please scan the QR code to  
access our website



#### **For further information or to register**

##### **for events, contact:**

Asahikawa International Committee (AIC)(ISHIBE Satoko) or  
Coordinator for International Relations (MABILANGAN John)

##### **Location:**

International/City Affairs Division, Tourism, Sports and  
International/City Affairs Dept.

##### **Address:**

Asahikawa International Center Feeeal  
Asahikawa 7F, 1-jo-dori 8-chome,

Asahikawa 070-0031

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Email: cir\_kokusai@city.asahikawa.lg.jp



# Upcoming Events

Upcoming events and activities in Asahikawa and around Hokkaido



## The Great Hokkaido Music March 北海道音楽大行進

*Experience one of the nation's largest music parades, an ongoing Hokkaido tradition since 1929!*

**Date:** 6/8 (Saturday)

**Time:** 12:20 (Start of the young children's march),  
13:00 (Start of the general march)

**Location:** From 8-Jo-dori 7-chome to 1-Jo-dori 10-chome

## Asahikawa Music Week 2024 旭川ミュージックウィーク2024

*Throughout Music Week, locals and visitors can experience live music performances across the city.*

**Date:** 6/9 (Sunday) - 6/16 (Sunday)

**Time:** Varying times

**Location:** Asahikawa Station Northern Plaza, Heiwa-dori Shopping Street, Asahikawa Harete, Asahikawa Station, Asahikawa Civic Culture Hall

**Admission:** Depends on the event

**For Details:** [https://musicweek.asahikawa.info/?utm\\_source=transfer&utm\\_medium=site](https://musicweek.asahikawa.info/?utm_source=transfer&utm_medium=site)



## Jan Widlarz Piano Recital: All Chopin Program ヤン・ヴィドラシュ ピアノリサイトル

*Listen to the sounds of Jan Widlarz as he performs his piano recital during his Hokkaido tour!*

### Event Details

**Date:** 6/14 (Friday)

**Time:** 18:00 (Entry) - 18:30 (Performance Begins)

**Location:** Asahikawa Taisetsu Crystal Hall (Kagura 3-jo 7-chome, Asahikawa)

**Admission:** ¥3,000

## Asaichi (First Thing in The Morning) あさいち

*Spend a refreshing morning with an estimated 40 food stalls in operation for 2 days.*

### Event Details

**Date:** 6/15 (Saturday) - 6/16 (Sunday)

**Time:** 7:00 - 12:00

**Location:** Kitasaito Garden (Miyamae 2-jo 1-chome, Asahikawa)

**Admission:** FREE

**For Queries:** 0166-74-3355



# Upcoming Events

Upcoming events and activities in Asahikawa and around Hokkaido



## Asahiyama Zoo Indian Ink Performance 動物園墨画パフォーマンス

To commemorate the upcoming summer season, Asahiyama Zoo is showcasing live calligraphy and painting performances by local high school students.

### Event Details

**Date:** 6/15 (Saturday) - 6/16 (Sunday)

**Time:** 13:00 - 14:30 (Saturday), 13:00 - 15:00 (Sunday)

**Location:** Asahiyama Zoo (Kuranuma, Higashi Asahikawa)

**Admission:** ¥1,000 (General Admission), ¥700 (Local Resident)

## Asahikawa Design Week 2024

### 旭川デザインウィーク2024

To promote Asahikawa Design, there will be several design-related events hosted throughout the city for residents and visitors to enjoy.

### Event Details

**Date:** 6/15(Saturday) - 6/23 (Sunday)

**Time:** Varies based on time

**Location:** Varies based on location

**For Details:** <https://adwhokkaido.com/>



## Kaimono Kouen Matsuri 2024

### 買物公園まつり2024

For 2 days, Kaimono Kouen Matsuri will host free markets, street performances, and food stalls for everyone to enjoy.

### Event Details

**Date:** 6/29 (Saturday) - 6/30 (Sunday)

**Time:** 10:00 - 18:00; ends at 17:00 on 6/30

**Location:** Heiwa Dori Shopping Street

**For Details:** <https://www.kaimonokouen.com/>



## Wakuwaku Science in Sci-Pal (Asahikawa Science Center)

### わくわくサイエンスin科学館~アサヒカワノカガク

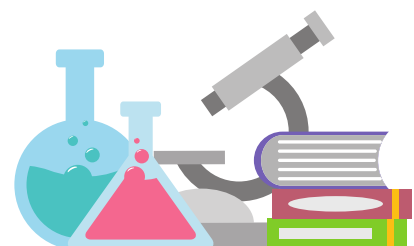
Learn about the natural sciences from specialists, scientists, and Asahikawa's students!

### Event Details

**Date:** 6/30 (Sunday)

**Time:** 10:00 - 16:00

**Location:** Asahikawa Science Center Sci-Pal (Miyamae 1-jo 3-chome, Asahikawa)



# A Baby Boomer Learns English

## Episode 3: My First Germany and Europe (1984)

Written by Noriaki Gentsu



(Left) At Linderhof Palace; (Right) At Goethe Statue (1984)

(Continued from Episode 2)

### Introduction

For an English learner who had only known Japan and America, my first trip to Germany in 1984 became a pivotal point in my long cross-cultural journey. Here, I will reflect on my findings from specific events and places during the trip.

### Frankfurt, Germany

One Sunday morning in June 1984, I made my first contact with European soil at Frankfurt Airport. I checked into Hotel Arabella in downtown Frankfurt, which was going to be the venue for the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) Meeting I would be attending. This meeting was scheduled from Monday through Friday, marking the beginning of my ten-day trip in the country.

I had high expectations for the trip because I had been interested in the country since my high school days. I had learned the German language, read Hermann Hesse's novels in translation, and even had a pen pal from there since my teenage years.

The meeting was about international electrotechnical standards for audio and video recordings. I was a member of the Japanese delegation assigned to participate in two working groups related to consumer-use VCRs.

Aside from the meetings themselves, here are some takeaways I experienced in the city:

First, during my first Sunday afternoon in the city, I joined the other members from Japan at the hotel lobby. We explored the main streets for places to taste German beer; however, many of the shops and restaurants were closed. One of us, who was familiar with Germany, added, "Germany has a law limiting business activities on weekends." What a difference!

Second, I have found some new perspectives on learning English: One, I heard a variety of English conversation spoken by delegates from 17 nations on the bus when we made a courtesy visit to the City Hall (Römer). It felt like a small world connected by a common

language: English. Two, an interpreter spoke on behalf of the Lord Mayor of Frankfurt in the Emperor's Hall (Kaisersaal). Her German speech sounded like beautiful music. Then, she translated it into English. Catching similar words in her pronunciation, I thought I might be able to speak German by improving my English ability. Three, during the meetings on the following days, I noticed people from different countries spoke their own unique versions of English: the French spoke English with a French intonation and Germans spoke with a unique German accent. This experience made me realize that I ought to focus on improving my ability to properly convey my thoughts in English rather than native fluency.

Third, I was able to take a short glance at European history. When we were in the Emperor's Hall (Kaisersaal) at the Römer, we were surrounded by walls adorned with about 50 portraits of all the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire. Decades later, I would learn it was different from either the Western Roman Empire or Germany. The visit sparked my subsequent interest in European history.

Lastly, the working style was different from Japanese society. For instance, the whole meeting appeared to be document-oriented. I saw only a few staff working at the reception to see arriving participants. There was nobody standing by the pigeon box designed to distribute all the documents addressed to each individual participant.

The difference was obvious when compared to the same meeting held in Tokyo the previous year: I saw more staff sitting at the reception area and moving busily around the pigeon box where they orally repeated the announcement that was already written in the documents. Such a difference would become even clearer to me later in my business practice when my Japanese and European colleagues worked together.

### **Goethe-Haus, Frankfurt**

During a meeting break, I took a ride on a streetcar to Götheplatz (Goethe Square). Inside, I savored the announcement going in German slowly, simply, and clearly: "The next stop is Götheplatz, Götheplatz next."

simplicity of the way they convey information! It is much different from those announcements on Japanese trains, which feel too much sometimes. It may stem from a unique mindset deeply rooted in Japanese culture.

I entered the Goethe House. It was the birthplace and childhood home of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and where he wrote "The Sorrows of Young Werther" and some other notable works. I was quite impressed by the beauty of his handwritten scripts and his desk where he might have written his works. Inspired by the museum, I also hoped to visit Hermann Hesse's Museum some other time, which I would eventually realize a decade later.

### **King Ludwig II of Bavaria**

After the meeting, I traveled to Munich and joined an excursion trip offered by Dr. Herbermann, one of the German delegates. Prof. Dr. Remley from the US, and Dr. Sugaya from Japan joined as well. After a short visit to the English Garden and the IRF (the Institute for Radio and Television), Dr. Herbermann drove us to three landmarks King Ludwig II of Bavaria made: Linderhof Palace; Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein Castles. They are so special because I revisited them much later with my family a few more times and have studied King Ludwig II's mysterious life.

On the winding road to Neuschwanstein Castle, we crossed the border control and entered Austria. I never knew then that would be the first and last time I crossed the border control in Europe. The European Union (EU), established in 1993, ensured the open borders among the member countries.

### **Hotel Aschenhütte, Osterode am Harz**

The next day, I planned to visit our VCR factory in Osterode am Harz (Osterode by the Mount Harz), a small town near the border to formerly East Germany. It was established in 1982 jointly by Panasonic and Bosch (Germany). The European Union (EU) (back then known as the European Community (EC)) required Japan to reduce VCRs export and instead produce them in European countries

as a remedy for the trade imbalance between Japan and EU countries.

After a quick market research in Hamburg, I boarded a southbound express train at Hamburg Central Station. It was my first train ride in Europe. When I got off the train at Nordheim, a small stop south of Hannover, I was greeted by Mr. Yoshida. He was a long-time colleague that I had worked with in Osaka who was then stationed in Osterode, was waiting for me. He drove me to his home in Osterode where the factory was. After a week of complete immersion in English, I savored a relaxing time speaking my native tongue with my Japanese colleague and his family consisting of his wife and his newborn daughter. They told me stories about the distinct lifestyle in Germany: for example, their neighbors would strictly tell them when to mow the lawn or clear fallen apples in their own garden. How different from Japan!

Later, he dropped me off at Hotel Aschenhütte and left. It was a typical German style hotel with its ground floor serving as a local restaurant and its upstairs as hotel rooms. By the narrow reception desk at the counter, the locals were loudly chatting over beers. The owner handed me a room key and ushered me to the steep and narrow stairway. The room was wider than expected and looked fancy with its vintage furniture.

The next day, I visited the factory. The VCR production lines are almost the same as those in Osaka, except for the German workers and the instructions in German hanging before them. Management told me about some key issues on what should be done for the original product design in Osaka: easy-to-produce and European market-oriented design. At that time, I never knew I would later work there to solve those issues myself.

Back at the hotel that day, I wanted to call my long-time penpal, Irmtraud, from Bochum, a city near Düsseldorf. We had not written for more than ten years. I had already found her number the day before when I looked up telephone books at the Hamburg Central Station. I checked my dictionary and prepared

essential German phrases needed for the call. I made an English sentence first and converted each word into the equivalent German. That seemed to work for basic communication.

Hesitantly, I dialed the number and an elderly woman answered. I said in German, "Hello, Gentsu from Japan speaking. I'm a letter friend with Irmtraud. Can I speak to her?" The woman, seemingly her mother, said something in German I couldn't catch well. I repeated the same question, and she gave almost the same answer. I could partly hear her saying, "nicht da (not here)." Half puzzled, I thanked her and hung up.

I wrote Irmtraud a card the next day and left the country. Six months later she wrote me, telling: she had been married to Friedhelm for about 10 years and had a son (Hendrik) in 1982 and a daughter (Sonja) in 1983; and that she was moving to a new flat when I called her mother from the hotel in Osterode.



Irmtraud Hansen (Circa 1967)

### **On The Flight Back Home**

On the homeward bound flight, I found myself somewhat wishing to come back to Germany sometime in the future. As for my "long cross-cultural journey", I thought I still have a long way to go to truly understand "Know the difference" as far as Europe and its deeper culture concerned. When would I reach the following milestone of "Understand the difference" and "Enjoy the difference" as taught in my language class in Osaka?



**To Be Continued**

# Travel Album



Hotel Aschenhütte (1984)

The Emperor's Hall  
(Kaisersaal) (1984)



Practicing for a summer  
festival (1984)

A horse and cart near  
Pilgrimage Church of  
Wies, Bavaria (1984)



Letter from Irmtraud  
(1984)

# AIC BULLETIN BOARD



## Need Assistance?

If you ever find yourself in need of assistance, know that the Hokkaido Foreign Resident Support Center is there for you! They are able to provide you with consultation services in various languages (Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Russian, Indonesian, Thai, Nepalese, Burmese) on residence procedures, employment, medical care, welfare, childbirth, childcare, education, and more for FREE! Call them at **011-200-9595** or go to: [www.hiecc.or.jp/soudan](http://www.hiecc.or.jp/soudan)



Interesting activities such as quizzes, discussions, songs, games, handicrafts and much more, all in English! Come meet new people, relax and relate on Fun Fridays!

**Dates:** July 12th & 26th, August 9th & 23rd, September 13th & 27th

**Times:** 13:00pm-14:00pm ~Afternoon~ 2nd and 4th Friday of the month  
18:30-20:30pm ~Night~ 2nd Friday of the month

**Location:** Asahikawa International Center, Common Meeting Room (1)  
(Feeeal Asahikawa 7F 1-jo-dori 8-chome)

**Charge:** ¥1,500 for 3 months (Free for volunteer leaders)

The AIC offers many services to make your life in Asahikawa more enjoyable. Here are just a few:

**Volunteer Guide:** Volunteers are registered to help translate and interpret.

**Event Volunteer:** The AIC plans many exciting events throughout the year, such as Friendship Parties.

**Homestay:** Families are registered to welcome you into their homes for an overnight stay or just an afternoon visit.

**Why not become a volunteer and help plan these events?**



The Asahikawa International Center (Feeeal Asahikawa 7F 1-jo-dori 8-chome) has free Wi-Fi available for public use. If you reside in Asahikawa, registration for a user card is required. Please feel free to come by anytime, as well as check out some of the other services and activities available at the Asahikawa International Center!

## Spread the Word!

Contribute to the AIC newsletter and share any interesting information you may have with other readers. You may write on any topic including: items to buy/shell, offers for culture/language exchange, or write an essay about your life in Asahikawa or your hometown. The article should not be profit-related! Please send your submissions to us at the AIC.



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**\*\*The opinions expressed in the essays are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the AIC or the City of Asahikawa.\*\***