

1. About National Pension Plan Payments

All the people living in Japan, who are from 20 to 60 years old, are under obligation to be enrolled in the national pension program. Office workers have joined the corporate employee pension plan other than the national pension. So they don't have to complete formal procedures of the national pension plan by themselves. However, self-employed persons, students, and unemployed persons have to complete enrollment procedures and pay insurance premium for the national pension.

The insurance premium of the national pension is revised every fiscal year or tax year. The monthly premium of the national pension in the fiscal year of 2022 is 16,590 yen. The payment slips are sent to the people who pay in cash from the Japan Pension Service. The insurance premium should be paid before the end of the following month.

The overseas students studying in Japan can make use of the Special Payment System for Students. If your application is approved, you will be exempted from paying all the pension premium. You can apply for it at the central municipal office, general branch offices, and pension offices. Necessary documents are a pension handbook, a Social Security and Tax Number (My Number), a student ID card, or a certificate of enrollment, which shows the actual enrolled term.

The national pension is paid to those whose payment term of the premium is longer than ten years. If your period of stay in Japan is shorter than 10 years, there is a lump-sum withdrawal system. And, upon request, you can get a certain amount of refund in accordance with your payment term. In order to receive a lump-sum withdrawal, it is necessary for you to make a claim within two years from your return to your country.

People in Japan have an obligation to pay the premium of the national pension. So, even if you are foreign residents, you are to pay properly. Those who want to apply for 'permanent residency' or 'naturalization' must be very careful because the records of payment are necessary.

2. Concerning ‘Special Relief Payment for Lower Income Households’

The Special Relief Payment for Lower Income Households is a stipend or fixed allowance to rescue those who have had the hardships of life because of COVID-19. The amount of the payment is 100,000 yen.

The payment targets are the resident tax exempt households that have a resident registration in Tochigi City as of December 10, 2021 and that have NOT paid inhabitant tax on per capita basis in the fiscal year of 2021. In addition to that, the stipend is paid to the households with sudden financial situation change, of which family finances have been changed since January, 2021 because of COVID-19. They should have resident registration on the day of application.

Tochigi City will mail out “confirmation forms” (kakuninsho) to all lower income households, so you can know how to apply for it and the application deadline. After filling out the form, please send it back in a return envelope by March 31, 2022.

Application forms have been sent to those who moved into Tochigi City after January 2, 2022. So please fill out the form and send it back in a return envelope by September 30, 2022.

In case of the households with sudden financial situation change, please call the Call Center for application. The deadline is September 30, 2022.

The phone number of Tochigi City’s Call Center concerning the Special Relief Payment for Lower Income Households is 0282-28-7721. The office hour is from 9:00 to 17:00 only on weekdays. Reception service is done only in Japanese. Because of the influence resulting from the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, please do not come to the City Hall directly so as to avoid the congestion at the counter, but call the Call Center.

Or rather, please contact the inquiry counter at Tochigi City International Center (TIC).

3. A Guide to Cherry Blossom Spots in Tochigi City

The season of cherry blossoms has come around. There are quite a few cherry blossom Spots in Tochigi City, so let me introduce some to you today.

‘Kanasaki-no-Sakura-Zutsumi’ in Nishikata town, which is designated as one of Tochigi’s 100 Scenic Spots, famous for its cherry blossoms. The rows of two hundred cherry blossom trees along the sides of the Omoi River are breathtaking.

At ‘Tsuga-no-Sato’ in Tsuga town, where you can enjoy not only the 170-year-old cherry blossom tree called “Tsuga-Sato Cherry Blossoms,” but you can also enjoy various cherry blossoms, which have different blossoming periods. So, you can enjoy the cherry-blossom viewing for a long time.

In the immediate vicinity of Miyano Bridge over the Nagano River, where there are 500 cherry blossom trees running along both sides of the river’s embankments for 1.5 kilometers long.

The cherry blossoms of Mt. Ohira, designated as one of Japan’s Top 100 Cherry Blossom Viewing Sites. The two-kilometer tunnel of cherry blossom trees along the Ohira-san Sightseeing Road is quite well-known. At the mountaintop, which commands a fine view, you can taste Mt. Ohira’s three major specialties—dumplings, grilled chicken, and rolled eggs—while viewing the cherry blossoms.

The Sakura Street in front of Ohira Sports Park selected as one of Tochigi’s Top 100 Roads and Rivers where the illumination of the street at night is lovely.

Also, at the Fujioka-Watarase Sports Park, where the rows of cherry blossom trees are being lit up at night.

Let’s go and see all the great sights of cherry blossoms.