

## Essay

# Essay from Expatriate in Germany and Spain

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## 1. Introduction

As a sales representative, I was expatriated to Munich, Germany from April 2018, and then to Pamplona, Spain from April 2019 to August 2024.

While in Germany, I participated in the project to establish the Munich Branch (as it was then called) of KYB Europe GmbH (KEU). In Pamplona, I worked at the Navarra Branch of KEU alongside local sales personnel.

The six and a half years of my expatriation coincided with the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of this novel infectious disease significantly impacted my expatriation activities.

Since the pandemic greatly changed my professional and personal life, either positively or negatively, I would like to share my experience as an expatriate by comparing life before and after the pandemic, conveying the unprecedented experience as well.

## 2. Expatriation in Germany

### 2.1 Introduction to the City

Munich is a city located in southern Germany.

During my time there, I did not experience any inconvenience. More than 4,000 Japanese people lived there, and many foreign companies, including Japanese companies such as MUJI (Ryohin Keikaku Co., Ltd.), had established a presence, along with various Japanese grocery stores.

While overall security is good, you should be careful in places with many tourists, late at night, on streets with few people, and around large railway stations like the Hauptbahnhof (Central Station). This is something to keep in mind when visiting any European country.

The city has an extensive public transportation system with buses, trams, subways, and trains. You can easily get around the city without a car. Children six and under can ride public transportation for free, which their parents will appreciate.

Munich is famous for its beer festival called Oktoberfest, which attracts more than five million visitors who enjoy drinking beer in large mugs

(Photo 1).

Like Japan, Munich has four distinct seasons. Due to its high latitude, the city is generally considered cool in summer and cold in winter. However, due to the effects of recent global warming, summers have become very hot. Conversely, during the winter of 2018 when I was living there, the city experienced one of its coldest winters in years.



Photo 1 Oktoberfest venue and my son wearing traditional clothing

### 2.2 Work

My work in Germany began with the establishment of the Munich Branch (as it was then called). At that time, the headquarters of KEU was located in Düsseldorf. Accordingly, my expatriate life began in Düsseldorf.

My top priority was travelling to Munich every week to lay the groundwork for my life there. I was unfamiliar with the area and had no acquaintances in Munich. I remember having difficulty finding my house.

The initial office was a rented space. I quickly found the office space, received the keys, and moved in by the end of April, right after arriving in Germany. Despite being small enough for only four people, the office was a comfortable space with good sunlight (Photo 2).

My next task in Munich was to hire employees. First, I needed Germans who spoke Japanese.

Despite the high penetration of English, German was essential in applying for a visa, opening a bank account, and doing other procedures in Munich. I interviewed several Germans for recruitment at the Düsseldorf headquarters and successfully hired the desired employee. This was followed by hiring another German designer. Finally, KEU's Munich Branch began operating with a four-person team consisting of two Germans and two expatriates.



**Photo 2** Inside the initial Munich Branch

As a sales representative, my role was sales planning.

I took periodic business trips to Spain to meet with the local sales personnel at the Navarra Branch of KEU. KEU's manufacturing sites were located at KYB Suspensions Europe, S.A.U. (KYBSE), where the Navarra Branch was located; at KYB Advanced Manufacturing Spain S.A.U. (KAMS), also in Spain; and at KYB Manufacturing Czech, s.r.o. (KMCZ), in the Czech Republic. Consequently, I spent much less time in Munich and was primarily in Spain or the Czech Republic.

Munich Airport was in a very convenient location for traveling around Europe. To get to Pamplona Airport in Spain, I had to take two flights, either via Frankfurt Airport in Germany or Madrid Airport in Spain.

Bilbao Airport, located nearly two hours north of Pamplona, is accessible from Munich with a direct flight. Therefore, there were two options for reaching Pamplona from Munich: taking two flights or taking a flight and a nearly two-hour ride.

During the initial stage of my expatriation, I flew to Pamplona Airport via Frankfurt Airport because I enjoyed flying.

On the other hand, it was somewhat difficult to reach KMCZ in the Czech Republic. While it was

easy to reach Prague Airport from Munich Airport with a flight of nearly one hour, getting to Pardubice, where KMCZ was located, required a one-and-a-half-hour ride from Prague Airport.

After noticing that it was easier for me to travel directly from Munich to Pardubice, taking into account the time spent waiting for flights and the hassle of security checks, I took the five-hour, 500-kilometer ride.

Another thing to keep in mind when traveling in Europe is that flights often run behind schedule. First flights in the morning are usually on time, but afternoon flights rarely are.

In fact, I often missed connecting flights and failed to reach my destinations. On other occasions, my flight arrived at a different airport because the destination airport had bad weather.

When this happened, the airline gave me a boarding pass for the next day and a hotel voucher. Sometimes I ended up staying in a city or country I had never expected.

Whether you view this situation as a crisis or an opportunity to gain experience is up to you. I believe that being able to enjoy yourself in these situations is an important mindset for a low-stress expatriate life.

## **2.3 Life**

### **2.3.1 Daily Life**

When I first moved overseas with my family (my son was three years old at the time), I looked for a house there by considering the educational environment for my son and the convenience of transportation for my family.

The city had two IKEA stores, which made it easy for German residents to buy kitchen parts and assemble them themselves. The do-it-yourself (DIY) spirit of the Germans moved me somewhat.

Because of this mentality, I had to do a lot of DIY work when setting up the house. I had quite a bit of difficulty with the electrical connections for the room lighting. Luckily, there was no electric shock or fire.

German houses generally have no air conditioners. In the summer, it was very hot, partly due to the effect of global warming.

Conversely, German houses are well insulated in the winter. We spent the winter very comfortably with the central heating system.

Although it was warm inside the house, the heavy snowfall allowed us to build large snowmen on the balcony. We also bought a sled to go sledding. Sometimes my son went to kindergarten in a sled.

I found supermarkets and drugstores full of goods. Most commercial facilities were closed on Sundays, which are designated rest days. However, bakeries, gas stations, and small shops were open. We could buy basic necessities in small supermarkets attached to gas stations even on Sundays.



There were also hospitals run by Japanese physicians that provided medical treatment in Japanese. However, prescriptions must be taken to Apotheken (pharmacies in Germany), where only German is spoken. In Munich, German is basically the only language spoken, although English may be understood at tourist sites and by young staff in shops due to the city's size.

Gas stations are self-service. The way cars are cleaned at German gas stations is interesting: Customers can walk alongside their car through a corridor on a conveyor belt that carries the car through the washing machine. Families with young children should definitely try this style of car wash.

In Munich, you can enjoy not only German cuisine but also dishes from other countries in their authentic flavors. The kebabs, in particular, are superb thanks to the large Turkish immigrant population. There was a kebab restaurant near the Oktoberfest grounds that was so good I went there every week.

German cuisine is typified by the tastes of German bread, potato salad, sausages, dairy products, and smoked fish. Even after repatriation, my family remembers these flavors fondly.

During the winter, when the sun sets earlier and the city takes on a gloomy atmosphere, the streets come alive with activity as Christmas approaches. The highlight of winter is definitely Weihnachtsmarkt (Christmas markets).

Munich alone has at least 20 Christmas markets of various sizes (Photo 3).

A popular way to enjoy Christmas markets is to drink gluhwein (hot wine) to warm up in the cold winter weather. Each Christmas market provides

a different design of gluhwein cups. Collecting the cups was one of my favorite things to do there.

Christmas markets are also held in cities other than Munich. Visiting other cities to enjoy Christmas markets was so much fun.

### 2.3.2 Traveling

Due to its location in southern Germany, Munich was an ideal place from which to easily travel by land to Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and the Czech Republic. I really enjoyed the traveling to these countries.

I visited several beautiful places that could not be seen in Japan, including Garmisch-Partenkirchen at the foot of Zugspitze Mountain in the summer and Český Krumlov in the Czech Republic in the winter. I will always remember these places.

Additionally, northern Germany has a different atmosphere than southern Germany. Berlin, in particular, was an interesting city with a slightly gloomy ambiance and traces of communism.

Instead of traveling to faraway places, it was fun to go on picnics to nearby farms and parks (Photo 4).

The Autobahn (highway) was very convenient for traveling between cities and accessing suburbs. There were a relatively high number of service areas along the Autobahn, all of which were very clean. However, be aware that they only had paid restrooms, most of which required coins.

When crossing a border, you may be required to show your ID at a checkpoint or passport control. Be sure to carry your ID with you.

Also, note that the Autobahn is free in Germany, but may be charged once you cross a border. In Switzerland, you need to purchase a pass sticker similar to Japan's vehicle inspection certificate and attach it to your front windshield. According to



Photo 3 Munich during Christmas market season



Photo 4 Neuschwanstein Castle



my research, the sticker must be purchased in Switzerland. In fact, I crossed the border into Switzerland with no specific check. I was nervous about whether I could buy the sticker at the next service area after crossing the border.

In hindsight, it might have been possible to purchase the sticker in Germany beforehand. As of 2024, the sticker is available online.

### 3. Expatriation in Spain

#### 3.1 Introduction to the City

Pamplona is a city located in northern Spain.

This charming city has a long history, but it is a small city with a population of 200,000. I think there are fewer than 20 Japanese residents.

Pamplona hosts the San Fermín Festival. This grand and spectacular event is commonly known as the “running of the bulls” and is one of Spain's three major festivals.

As depicted in Hemingway's novel, the festival transforms the entire city into a festive atmosphere (Photos 5 and 6).

During the initial period of my expatriation in Pamplona, I found it slightly more difficult to live in this small city than in Munich. However, being able to live a compact life was good because necessities were conveniently available.

Stores are also closed on Sundays in Spain. Additionally, many small businesses close for siesta from around 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

In the city center, you can walk or take the bus to manage daily life. However, you need a car to get to shops like McDonald's, shopping malls, and large stores, as they are located in suburban areas. Autopistas are toll roads, and many sections have no service areas. The city has a moderate climate throughout the year, similar to that in Aichi Prefecture in Japan, where I live. However, I experienced very hot summers with increased temperatures due to heat waves from the Sahara Desert, which were probably affected by global warming. There were casualties in some places. In the winter, it snows about once per season. Before leaving for work each morning, I often checked the thermometer on the street in front of my house through the window. I noticed significant temperature differences between morning and evening, which sometimes made it difficult to choose what to wear. Because of the city's high latitude, it was light outside until after 10 p.m. in the summer, while the sun set very early in the winter. The running of the bulls' festival lasts about one week, and the fireworks start at 11 p.m., right after sunset, which is very late by Japanese standards. Although I could see the fireworks very well from my house, which was next to the display site, the loud noise for successive nights after 11 p.m. was quite hard to endure. Spain celebrates Christmas on December 25, though not as extravagantly as Germany, and Epiphany on

January 6, the day the three wise men visited Jesus.

Children are happy to receive presents twice a year. During the Christmas season, a bread-like cake called Roscón de Reyes is available at every bakery and supermarket (Photo 7). This cake contains small porcelain dolls or beans. Whoever



Photo 5 Formal dressing at the San Fermín Festival



Photo 6 Pamplona during the San Fermín Festival





**Photo 7** Roscón de Reyes

finds a doll or a bean when the cake is cut is considered to have good luck for the year, much like with a fortune cookie.

I found one in the Roscón de Reyes served at the office. I heard that whoever gets the fortune is supposed to buy the Roscón de Reyes the following year. I wonder if someone else would have bought one for me since I was not in Spain the following year.

### 3.2 Work

In April 2019, I was transferred to KEU Navarra Branch, where I worked in the office alongside local sales personnel. Although I had already been able to communicate with them while stationed in Munich, it became clear that working together in the same office would be easier.

While the transfer eliminated the need for business trips to Spain from Germany, I now needed to have long business trips to the Czech Republic where KMCZ was located. It took almost a whole day to travel from Navarra to KMCZ.

I always flew to reach any destination for business or personal reasons, so I was a frequent flyer.

Working hours in Spain differ significantly from those in other countries. Spanish people typically take a one-hour lunch break between about 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Since there was no company cafeteria, some employees went home for lunch. Expatriates usually ate lunch at the nearby affiliated restaurant, Don Javier. Ororbia, where KYBSE was located, was a small village with a few restaurants (Photo 8).

The restaurant served a quite large lunch, including an appetizer, main course, dessert, and coffee. However, the menu lacked variety. The appetizer was a large plate of vegetable salad, and the main course was grilled beef, pork, chicken, or fish. For dessert, we often had Cuajada, a yogurt made from goat milk that originated in northern Spain. I learned most of the Spanish words used in restaurants at Don Javier.

The way of working changed greatly before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. At the height of the outbreak, the plant and office were closed, forcing us to work from home.

Even after the pandemic calmed down, the work-from-home system remained. Many local employees came to the office in the morning and worked from home in the afternoon.

Although we had fewer opportunities to meet each other at the company, a work environment in which people could work anywhere became available thanks to the dramatic development of online meeting tools, such as Teams.

Many discussions about minor issues were held during Teams meetings, instead of taking the trouble to take business trips by air to foreign countries. In this sense, we have become able to work more easily with more flexibility.



**Photo 8** Church at Ororbia Village, where KYBSE was located

### 3.3 Life

#### 3.3.1 Daily Life Before COVID-19 Pandemic (with my family)

Since there was no Japanese school in Pamplona, my son attended a local kindergarten where only Spanish was spoken.

Of course, he could not speak Spanish at first, but he watched Spanish children's programs persistently to learn Spanish words before enrolling in the kindergarten. After about one month of eight hours a day of exposure to Spanish in kindergarten, my son had made amigos (friends). I was impressed by his ability to adapt to new environments.

Due to the nature of my work, I frequently traveled for business purposes to different places in Europe. My wife and son spent many nights alone together.

Pamplona was so convenient that any place in the city center was accessible by bus or on foot. We interacted with other expatriates who had been transferred there at the same time and had children around the same age. My wife and son seemed to enjoy spending time with them. I am very grateful to my family for having to move twice across borders and live in unfamiliar lands.

Pamplona has big supermarkets in the suburbs. We went there every Saturday to buy food. Spanish large supermarkets typically have raw ham and wine sections. In the cured ham section, lines of pig legs were hung up. We could buy delicious cured ham and wine at the supermarket. Unfortunately, Spanish dairy products were not as good as those in Germany, despite the presence of DANONE, a familiar yogurt brand in Japan.

Because Pamplona is the birthplace of ZARA, it has many fast fashion brands that sell clothing suitable for the Japanese body type.

When I was sent there, I found vacant land with an IKEA sign. However, IKEA ultimately did not open. It was like the Sagrada Familia of Pamplona.

The nearest IKEA stores were located in Bilbao and Zaragoza, both of which were about a two-hour ride from Pamplona. Visiting these large cities for shopping and sightseeing was enjoyable.

Another "Sagrada Familia" or unfinished project of Pamplona was the Starbucks. I heard that a Starbucks finally opened in the fall of 2024.

The Spanish love coffee. Even bars and bakeries can serve good coffee at reasonable prices. I wonder if this fact had prevented Starbucks from opening shops earlier.

A variety of international cuisines, including Chinese, Thai, Japanese, and Indian, were available. These dishes were not spicy, which made them easily accepted by Spanish people. Sometimes, I felt slightly unsatisfied with the Spanish taste, which is neither spicy nor hot.

Local restaurants operate according to the typical Spanish schedule: opening at 2 p.m. for lunch and at 8 p.m. for dinner. This may be difficult for families with children, but bars open around 5 p.m. However, be aware that they only

serve a few types of pinchos right after opening because their ovens are not yet lit (Photo 9).

The most difficult thing about living in Pamplona may be the language barrier. Basically, I was required to speak Spanish no matter what I wanted to do. Fortunately, I love language. I'm glad I was able to understand Spanish before I left.



Photo 9 Pamplona's famous foie gras

### 3.3.2 Traveling

About an hour's drive north of Pamplona will take you to a city called San Sebastián.

The city is famous in Japan as the "city of gourmets". While there are several Michelin-starred restaurants, I think the best way to enjoy San Sebastián is to hop around to the bars (Photo 10).

The narrow streets are full of bars of all kinds. Why not try bar hopping, tasting a dish and having a drink at one bar before moving on to the next? Another famous thing in San Sebastián is Basque cheesecake. You can try the authentic "Baschee" in the city.

A bar-hopping tip is to strike up a conversation with the staff instead of waiting in line for your turn.

The San Sebastián region is known as French Basque. Although the land belongs to Spain, the atmosphere is French. The region has a unique cuisine that differs from Spanish cuisine.

I also frequently went to Bilbao, which was a



nearly two-hour ride from Pamplona. Due to its airport, Bilbao was convenient to access anywhere inside and outside Spain.

The city of Bilbao is home to the Guggenheim Museum, which has an extraordinary appearance, as well as the Vizcaya Bridge, which is registered as a World Heritage Site and was the first bridge in the world to carry people and traffic. The Vizcaya Bridge is sometimes featured on the Japanese children's TV program Pythagora Switch, produced by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK). My son gets excited every time he sees it because he has been there (Photo 11).

The foreign destinations we travelled to were Ireland and Portugal.

I went to Ireland in August. Unlike Spain in midsummer, it was already very cold in Ireland, as if it were fall. The famous Irish stew was tasty and warmed my cold body.

It was also a great experience to visit Galway, which appeared in an English singer Ed Sheeran's music video. While living in Germany, I also visited the filming location of another music video in the Hintertux mountains (Photo 12).

I went to Portugal in early January, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was approaching. Compared to Spain, Portugal was warmer and more comfortable. I went as far as Cape Roca, the westernmost point of continental Europe, and visited many shops to try different kinds of pastel de nata, a famous Portuguese egg tart (Photo 13).



Photo 11 Vizcaya Bridge in Bilbao



Photo 12 Port city of Galway



Photo 10 Bar street in San Sebastián



Photo 13 Cape Roca in Portugal



### 3.3.3 Emergency Return to Japan During the Height of COVID-19 Pandemic

At the end of 2019, there was an outbreak of bronchitis among children in Pamplona. Hospitals in the city were full. Some children had to be hospitalized in other cities.

We traveled to Portugal during the 2020 New Year's holiday. I remember many passengers coughing heavily on my flight back to Pamplona.

News outlets began reporting that a mysterious infectious disease was spreading throughout the world. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

On February 1, Japan identified passengers with positive results for the novel coronavirus on the Diamond Princess cruise ship. In Spain, according to reports, some of the participants in the International Women's Day demonstration had become patients. Meanwhile, Italy suffered a pandemic. The news reported that Spain had many casualties in nursing homes and was already experiencing a pandemic. Panic buying at supermarkets began, resulting in empty shelves of toilet paper, rice, pasta, and other goods (Photo 14).



Photo 14 Panic buying at a supermarket

On Friday after kindergarten, my son said "See you next week" to his friends as usual. However, as rumored, the kindergarten was closed starting next week, and suddenly lockdown began. During the lockdown, we were basically prohibited from going out, and only one family member was allowed to go for shopping at supermarkets. The restrictions were so strict that we could only go to supermarkets in different time zones according to our age (Photo 15).

At the end of March, the company had finally decided to temporarily send the expatriates back to Japan.

By that time, most land and air routes had been closed. The EU borders were closed. Madrid Airport, one of Spain's hub airports, was only open to flights from the U.K., which was outside the EU. Fortunately, the only way to come back from



Photo 15 Even your smartphone tells you to stay at home

Europe to Japan was to fly from the U.K., so we traveled to Madrid by land and then flew back to Japan from the U.K.

The photo below shows the arrival information signboard at Haneda Airport on the day I returned to Japan. The service from Heathrow Airport was operating, but all the other flights had been canceled (Photo 16).

到着時間	航空会社	機体	到着地	状況
4:55	到着 香港			
10:55	10:43 ロンドン(LHR) 羽田(LHR)	UO624	ロンドン	欠航
12:10	12:00 ハルビン(CDG) 羽田(CDG)	BAS	ハルビン	欠航
12:10	12:00 フランクフルト 羽田(フランクフルト)	AF272	フランクフルト	欠航
12:15	12:05 上海・香港 羽田/香港	LH716	上海・香港	欠航
12:20	12:10 上海・香港 羽田/香港	NH972	上海・香港	欠航
12:30	12:20 北京・香港 羽田/香港	CA181	北京・香港	欠航
12:30	12:20 北京・香港 羽田/香港	PM815	北京・香港	欠航
12:50	12:40 北京・香港 羽田/香港	NH864	北京・香港	欠航
13:00	12:50 北京・香港 羽田/香港	JL20	北京・香港	欠航
13:05	12:55 上海・香港 羽田/香港	JL80	上海・香港	欠航
13:10	13:00 台北(松山) 羽田(松山)	CI220	台北(松山)	欠航
13:20	13:10 台北(松山) 羽田(松山)	JL96	台北(松山)	欠航
13:30	13:20 上海・香港 羽田/香港	MU537	上海・香港	欠航
13:35	13:25 ニューヨーク・ニューヨーク 羽田/ニューヨーク	UA131	ニューヨーク	欠航
13:40	13:30 マニラ 羽田	DL121	マニラ	欠航
13:45	13:35 ミネアポリス ミネアポリス	CK548	ミネアポリス	欠航
13:55	13:45 香港 羽田	JL46	香港	欠航
13:55	13:45 ハルビン(CDG) 羽田(CDG)	UA875	ハルビン	欠航
13:55	13:45 サンフランシスコ 羽田	DL7	サンフランシスコ	欠航
14:00	13:50 ロサンゼルス 羽田	GA9507	ロサンゼルス	欠航

Photo 16 Flight information with most services canceled

We managed to return to Japan with only the bare necessities. We then had to take PCR tests, undergo two weeks of health monitoring and isolation, and do things we had never done before.

In the situation, I began working remotely from a place ten thousand kilometers away from Spain. Due to the time difference, some meetings were held at midnight in Japan. Nevertheless, I was able to handle the remote meetings thanks to the scheduling of meetings that required my attendance to be held at times as early as possible in Spain. The most difficult thing was the amount of time computers were connected to the server at the Spain site due to the long distance. We had to wait several minutes just to open a single file.

### 3.3.4 Daily Life During the Convergence of COVID-19 Pandemic (Expatriation Alone)

As the COVID-19 pandemic settled down, we were supposed to return to Spain. However, considering that the future situation was still uncertain, I decided to become an expatriate alone.



The single expatriates in Spain started their expatriate lifestyle in an atmosphere somewhat like a male student camp.

We lived work-centered lives, only coming home to sleep. Fortunately, Don Javier, the affiliated restaurant mentioned above, helped us a lot with nutrition. However, when the pandemic started to settle down, Don Javier was acquired by a Chinese owner who requested a raise in price. Ultimately, we stopped using Don Javier around 2024 and started using another restaurant under a new contract.

Since many restaurants and bars welcomed groups of men, we were not stressed about eating in Pamplona.

Unlike Munich, northern Spain was rich in fresh seafood due to its proximity to the sea. The locals had a habit of eating octopus and squid, which were particularly delicious. Pamplona was also rich in meat dishes because it is surrounded by mountains. Chuletón, a steak of aged meat, was especially tasty (Photo 17).



Photo 17 Chuletón

I didn't always eat out. Sometimes, I tried cooking at home, making Nagoya-style chicken wings and twice-cooked pork.

However, I did not stick with cooking for very long. During the final stage of my time abroad, I often relied on delivery services. I highly recommend online ordering services that allow you to easily enjoy food from various restaurants. Note that this system may be difficult to use because delivery personnel may call you in

Spanish if they cannot locate your address.

I talked with my family in Japan every weekend via FaceTime and played online games with my son. I am grateful for technological advancements.

After the 2023 fiscal year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had passed, I enjoyed a fulfilling expatriate life. The lifting of the ban on overseas travel allowed Japanese businesspeople to visit foreign countries, including Spain. It was always a pleasure to meet other Japanese people, as well as expatriates. With more opportunities to eat out with my Japanese colleagues on business trips, I started trying new restaurants as well.

The Japanese restaurants in Pamplona only served so-called "fake Japanese food". Personally, I didn't miss Japanese food because I liked Spanish food and could eat whatever was served. Nevertheless, there were some occasions when I actually wanted to eat Japanese food.

In early 2024, when my colleagues were staying in Pamplona for long-term business trips, we tried two new Japanese food restaurants that had just opened.

The first was a ramen shop called Buga Ramen. Inside, the shop had Japanese signs on the walls and many anime figurines on display, creating a somewhat suspicious atmosphere. We first tried the gyoza, which was pretty good. However, I could not tell if the gyoza was worth the price because Spanish supermarkets sell frozen gyoza that tastes pretty good. Then, we finally tried the ramen. It looked good, but only the appearance was good. The other dishes were nice, though, so if you visit Pamplona, it's worth trying Muga Ramen.

The second one was a hot pot restaurant. The staff were Chinese, who explained how to eat the hot pot to us in fluent Chinese when we first visited the restaurant. They probably did not expect to find Japanese residents in Pamplona. In response to their fluency, I replied "Vale", which means "okay" in Spanish.

This hot pot restaurant turned out to be excellent. I loved it so much that I went almost every week. The great thing about this restaurant was that they served thinly sliced meat, which is very difficult to find overseas. In general, overseas supermarkets do not sell thinly sliced meat.

Customers are supposed to make their own dips. There was sesame paste on the tables, and you could thin the paste with the hot pot soup to make a sesame dip. Customers were also allowed to bring their favorite ingredients. We brought ponzu sauce and seasonings with us every time we visited. Right before I returned to Japan, I brought sukiyaki sauce to the restaurant and asked the staff to let us set up a sukiyaki pot. The hot pot restaurant had become a place that could be called a Japanese restaurant. From now on, it would be more accurate to say that Pamplona has good Japanese restaurants (Photo 18).





Photo 18 Hot pot

### 3.3.5 Preparing for Repatriation

My long life as an expatriate had almost come to an end when my successor was selected. During that time, I was a single expatriate who no longer went out traveling or sightseeing. However, I decided to do the things I had wanted to do.

First, I decided to watch the running of the bulls' festival. I had experienced the festive atmosphere during festival season before, but I had never watched the running of the bulls itself. The world-famous bullring in Pamplona has the capacity to hold a large audience, making it one of the five biggest bullrings in the world (Photo 19).



Photo 19 Bullring in Pamplona

Although fewer cities practice bullfighting in the traditional way - actually killing the bulls with swords - Pamplona is one of the few that still does. However, traditional bullfighting may eventually fade away with time.

Next, I traveled around the cities I had wanted to visit with my wife, including Guernica, which appears in Picasso's painting, and Altamira, famous for its cave paintings.

Finally, on my last trip, I decided to visit Santiago de Compostela, located in western Spain.

Spain has a pilgrimage route called the Camino, similar to Ohenro, Japan's pilgrimage routes. The final destination of the Camino is the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

Pamplona is also one of the stops along the pilgrimage route. I sometimes saw pilgrims walking the long route. The distance from Pamplona to Santiago de Compostela is about 800 kilometers. It typically takes pilgrims one month or longer to reach the final destination on foot. That was beyond my ability, so I opted for an easier pilgrimage by car.

The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela is one of the most majestic churches I have ever visited. Simply visiting it made me feel sacred (Photo 20).



Photo 20 Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela

By the way, one of my favorite Spanish dishes is Pimientos de Padrón. It's stir-fried pimientos (a type of Spanish sweet pepper) with olive oil, from a city called Padrón. Located just south of Santiago de Compostela, Padrón hosts the Pimientos de Padrón festival on the first Saturday in August. I decided to visit Padrón to see the festival just before leaving Spain.

The festival takes place in a very small village. The audience was local residents, with no tourists except us. I participated in the festival and was rather excited wearing the Pimientos de Padrón T-shirt that I had received as a farewell gift. Because of that, I was photographed and featured in a local Galician newspaper article. It's the





Photo 21 Pimientos de Padrón festival



Photo 22 Pimientos de Padrón

perfect memory to end my time in Spain (Photos 21, 22, and 23).

#### 4. In Closing

Writing this essay about my life as an expatriate gave me a good opportunity to reflect on the past six and a half years.

Despite suffering from the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which no one could have anticipated the changes that would occur, I was able to complete my assignments abroad without encountering any major problems. This was thanks to my colleagues, with whom I shared the expatriate experience in Europe.

Fortunately, I worked with excellent supervisors and staff in both Munich and Pamplona. Even when exploring a new style of work, I was able to make the right decisions. I was also fortunate to receive cordial support for business and personal matters. I am reminded again of how worry-free I was able to work.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who supported me during my time abroad.

I hope we will work together again someday.

Before the pandemic outbreak, I lived in Germany and Spain with my family. After the outbreak, however, I was an expatriate alone. At the time, my son was still preschool-aged and cried every time I left for Spain after temporarily returning home. I am sorry that I made him sad.



Photo 23 T-shirt I received as a farewell gift

Before leaving, I held my son's hand that was tightly gripping mine. I felt so grateful for his tolerance. I silently vowed that we would continue together.

I could not have completed my assignments abroad without my family's understanding. I cannot thank my wife enough for taking on most of the child-rearing and daily life responsibilities in the foreign countries. Additionally, she had to raise our son alone while I was away.

Now that I am back home, I want to gradually

make up for the days we could not spend together.

I hope that the three of us will visit Munich and Pamplona together someday and create family memories based on our expatriate experience. This is one of my life goals.

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