

DEMOGRAPHIA



SAPPORO: CAPITAL OF TEXAS?

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	2,300,000	Portland
Urbanized Area* Population	2,100,000	St. Louis, Curitiba, Baltimore
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	175	Cairo, Barcelona, Concord (CA), Winnipeg
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	450	
Population per Square Mile	11,900	Belo Horizonte, Zurich, Buenos Aires
Population per Square Kilometer	4,600	
4 th largest urban area in Japan		
*Continuously built up area		

Sapporo had interested me for a long time. I had been a paper boy for the *Oregonian* in Hillsboro,¹ when the city of Portland acquired its first “sister city,” Sapporo. This city, capital and largest city on the island and prefecture of Hokkaido, was later to host the winter Olympics (1972). I had, however, never seriously considered visiting Sapporo until a trip to Japan in early 2003.

It was the day after New Year’s when I took the Yamanote Line from Ueno Station in Tokyo to the northern terminus of the Hameda International Airport Monorail line, for the flight to Sapporo.

What a change Sapporo is from Honshu and even northern Kyushu. As one crosses Tsugaro Kaikyo and approaches the southeastern coast of Hokkaido, it becomes clear that things are very different. My first thought was of Texas with a backdrop of Oregon’s snow-capped peaks. Compared to the seemingly uninterrupted 600-mile coastal strip of urbanization (except by sea approaching mountains from north of Tokyo to south of Fukuoka on Kyushu was long gone. Instead, there were spaces as wide open, by comparison, as west Texas compared to the urbanization of the U.S. Northeast.

Sapporo sits just a few miles from the western shore of Hokkaido, aside and climbing a mountain range to the south and southwest, and other mountains further to the north. The new international airport at Chitose seems, in imitation of Denver, to located far enough from the city to serve the next major city as well as Sapporo (a better code for the new Denver International Airport would be “DOA” --- for Denver-Omaha Airport... or another interpretation might be used). The more than 20 mile drive to Sapporo can be made either by tollway or by the generally four lane national road. I took the national road so that I could more closely inspect the strip malls, big box stores and other suburban forms that reminds one so of home in America, Canada or Europe. Then there is a long expanse, over the last few miles, of more but not very intense urbanization.

¹ My paper route began at the corner of 1st and Main, one-block from what is now the western terminus of the Tri-Met light rail line, which opened in 1997.

I had previously learned, in Seoul, that serious urban touring required using maps in the local language. Fortunately, Japan is well endowed with respect to urban maps. Virtually every major city in Japan has an atlas similar to the Western U. S. *Thomas Brothers* guides, *L'Indispensable* in Paris or *A to Z* in London, Delhi and Cairo. I had purchased my Sapporo atlas, along with atlases of Tokyo-Yokohama, Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto and Nagoya, Hiroshima, Fukuoka and Kitakyushu at a bookstore in central Kyoto. I was thus able to better acquaint myself with Sapporo on the airplane and plan an efficient itinerary.



There is more that is different about Hokkaido and Sapporo than the wide-open spaces. It is far enough to the north to truly be snow country. It was surprising, on the motorway trip back to the airport, to see a sign announcing that Sapporo's latitude was the same as Marseille and, not so surprising, Milwaukee. The climate is much more akin to that of Lake Michigan than of the Mediterranean.

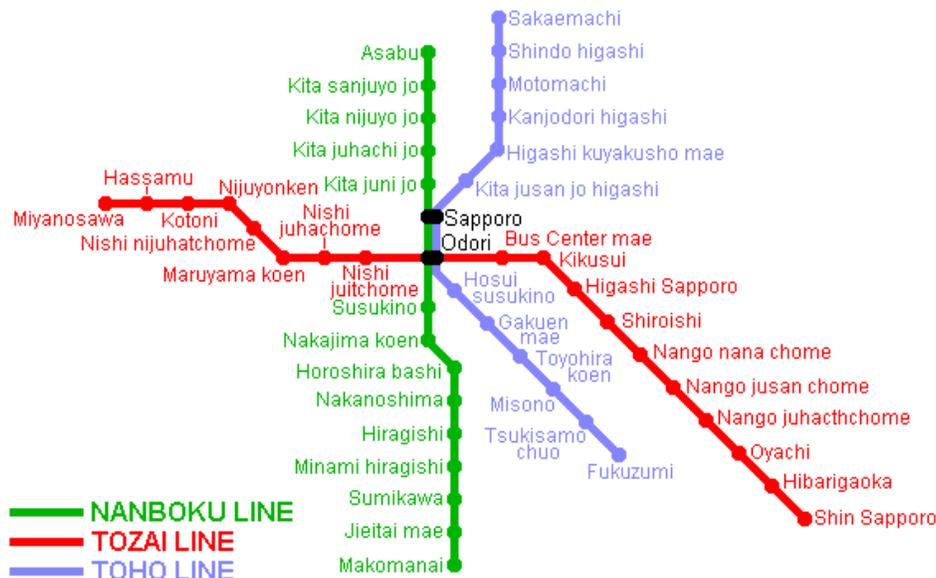
The architecture is also different. Gone are the typical roof treatments that one sees in the rest of Japan. Houses are absent the imitative rooflines of Buddhist temples. Moreover, despite the heavy snows, residential roofs are, more often than not, flat. While I was intrigued by the architecture of Honshu and Kyushu, there was little inspirational from most of the residential development of Sapporo.

Much of the city is organized on a grid street system, with generally very wide streets. In some areas the grid is oriented in different directions, giving the type of impression that one receives in a number of the western U.S. cities that began with a 45-215 degree oriented grid and then, under the U.S. township system, converted to a 0-180 degree system (this is very obvious in Los Angeles, where Hoover Street is the boundary between the Spanish and American plans.

Sapporo's central business district is large, though the buildings are not terribly tall. The core ward has approximately 220,000 jobs, more than double that of sister Portland's downtown, representing more than 20 percent of the metropolitan area's employment. To the west are residential districts, rising up the mountain, that would be quite at home in any American city, but especially a California city with modern, flat roofed housing.

Despite the strong central orientation, however, there are large enclosed shopping centers. There is also a large edge city developing on the east side, outside the belt motorway, Shin Sapporo (New Sapporo). There is what may be the tallest building in the metropolitan area, a large shopping center and considerable commercial development, especially electronics. The center is at the end of the six subway spurs that radiate from the central business district, showing again the limitation of such fixed public transport systems. In an area with so little traffic congestion, travel to growing Shin Sapporo will virtually always be quicker by car, unless the trip origin happens to be on the line that directly serves the new development.

Throughout the central area will be found a mix of high and mid-rise apartment buildings and single-family residences. Further out are large numbers of single-family dwellings, which appear to house a majority of the population.



Sapporo Subway

Now, decades later, sisters Portland and Sapporo are both similar and different.

- Sapporo has 25 percent more residents than Portland, but covers 60 percent less land. As a result, Sapporo is more than three times as dense as Portland.

- Sapporo's extensive subway system is augmented by a regional rail system operated by a former Japanese National Railway segment. Approximately 22 percent of travel is on public transport in the Sapporo area. Approximately two percent is in Portland.
- Both urban areas have grown comparatively rapidly.
- Sapporo hosted the winter Olympics Surely, someday Portland will as well at its incomparable Mount Hood (unless it should follow the example of nearby Mount St. Helens).
- Portland is much farther north and warmer.

But despite the fact that Sapporo is very Japanese, one cannot escape the impression that this is the most Western of Japan's urban areas. The wide, grid pattern of streets, Shin Sapporo, comparatively low density central business district and adjacent mountains could as easily be Salt Lake City... or Texas.



National Road Entrance to Sapporo from Chitose



Strip Mall, Southern Suburbs



Apartment District: North of Central Business District



Residential District: North of Central Business District



Typical Single Family House: Northern Sector



Central Business District



Residential District: Northwest Sapporo



House in the Western Hills



New Urbanism: Northwest Sapporo
Mixed Use: Power Plant at the End of the Block



Strip Mall: Northern Sapporo



Residences: Northern Sapporo

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