ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:
In this weekly feature China Daily gives voice to Asia and its people. The stories presented come mainly from the Asia News Network (ANN), of which China Daily is among its 20 leading titles.



Pet owners with their dogs at the Jeju International Airport in Jeju, South Korea, on March 16, 2023. PHOTOS BY YONHAP

PET PEEVE

Pet-friendly cafes in South Korea find themselves in the doghouse

Cho, a 31-year-old cafe owner in Seoul who did not want to give her full name, used to run a popular spot for pet owners.

Her cafe, known for its dog-friendly atmosphere and puppuccinos, a drink for dogs, regularly welcomed customers with their pets. Occasionally, she would bring her own dog to work.

But recent government warnings have made it difficult to allow dogs on the premises.

"I received a warning from the government about having dogs here," Cho said. "They told me a complaint was filed, claiming the cafe was unhygienic because of the dogs."

Cho said most pet-friendly cafes and restaurants operate unaware of a ban on pets. Owners typically become aware of the regulation when a civil complaint is filed, she said.

Current laws prohibit pets from entering food-handling establishments such as restaurants and cafes. The ban applies to animals in crates and strollers and includes outdoor seating areas that are registered as part of the business.

Businesses receive a warning for a first offense. A second violation results in a 15-day suspension and a third incurs a 30-day suspension. A fourth violation or more can lead to a 60-day suspension, revocation of the operating permit, or even an administrative order to close the business.

Pet owners say the rule is out of sync with current trends in South Korea.

Nearly a quarter of the country's population, about 15 million people, are pet owners and the country is witnessing a surge in pet-friendly services, particularly in dining and traveling, they pointed out.

Park Hee-jung, 31, who owns a 10-year-old golden retriever, expressed frustration with the inconsistent pet policies at restaurants.



A dog takes part in a pet supplies show in Seoul on Oct 16, 2020.

"I've had several experiences where I went to a restaurant based on reviews saying it was pet-friendly, only to find they had changed their policy," she said, adding that she hopes the law will evolve to offer more options and clearer guidelines.

"Different restaurants have different rules and they usually don't state them clearly. It's very confusing and challenging to find a place where I can dine with my dog in peace," Park said.

In response to growing demand for pet-friendly dining, the government launched a two-year pilot project in December 2022 to explore regulatory sandbox permits for some restaurants and cafes.

"As of July 2024, 141 stores from 38 brands are legally registered as pet-friendly," said Jung In-kwon, an official of the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety of South Korea.

Seo Yul-hee, the owner of cafe Beryl Kiki in Pohang, North Gyeongsang Province, is one of them.

"There are agencies that charge around 3 to 5 million won ($3,700) for assistance (in obtaining the sandbox permit)," Seo said, who handled the application process on her own.

She said that while it requires some effort, such as renovating the store, it is manageable. "It's not a walk in the park, but with proper preparation, it's achievable for a business owner."

Establishments with permits must follow a set of guidelines from the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety, such as posting signs that pets are allowed, ensuring dogs are leashed and covering food when served or displayed. Permits are valid for two years.

Information on pet-friendly establishments with the permit is available on the government's Regulatory Information portal. Seo said she believes many businesses are simply unaware of the permit.

She also advocates for a change in the law, suggesting that restaurants should be allowed to accommodate pets if their staff completes requirements like hygiene training, rather than enforcing an outright ban.

As the pilot program on pet-friendly dining nears its conclusion, the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety is studying possible revisions of the current regulations, with December 2025 set as its initial timeline for any changes.

"We will assess the pilot project's results and gather expert opinions first," Jung said.

However, there are some who do not support the idea of pets in restaurants and cafes.

"I think small dogs are cute, but imagining their fur and dust in my food puts me off. If a restaurant is pet-friendly, I wouldn't go," said Yoon Hye-jung, a 33-year-old Seoul resident.

"I think outdoor seating at cafes is fine for dogs, but I believe many people would feel uncomfortable with dogs inside restaurants," said Kim Hyo-jin, a 30-year-old owner of a Maltipoo, a small mixed-breed poodle. "Besides, there could be people who are allergic to dogs or cats."

Veterinarian Choi In-young, a director at the Seoul Veterinary Medical Association, said pet-friendly restaurants are necessary but should follow specific legal guidelines.

"There should be designated areas for pets, and shop owners must inform customers in advance," he said. "The interior and equipment should be designed to prevent food contamination from pet fur."

Choi also emphasized that pet owners need to take responsibility.

"If your pet hasn't been taught basic etiquette, like not barking or biting, you may need to sign a waiver. Shop owners should have the right to ask disruptive customers to leave," he said.

THE KOREA HERALD, SOUTH KOREA

More Malaysian seniors seek jobs amid rising costs

A growing number of seniors in Malaysia are applying for jobs after retirement to cope with the rising cost of living and longer life expectancy, according to Jobstreet, a Southeast Asian employment website.

The online employment company's managing director Vic Sithasanan said there has been a 13 percent rise in job applications from seniors aged 60 and above between January 2023 and the end of August 2024.

He said the trend was likely due to factors such as the rising cost of living and extended life expectancy, which necessitates longer careers for financial stability.

"The reasons reflect personal motivations and broader economic factors, but the most pressing is the rising cost of living," Sithasanan said.

"On Jobstreet's platform, we've seen the number of senior users aged 60 to 99 grow 2.6 times from 2022 to 2023, with a 2.4-fold increase in Q1 (the first quarter) of 2024 alone compared with 2022.

"Seniors are motivated to extend their careers to increase their financial safety net."

He added that with longer life expectancies, seniors feel the need to sustain their income for a longer duration, prompting many to seek employment opportunities beyond the retirement age.

Sithasanan said an estimated 1 percent of the current 3.9 million seniors are actively searching for jobs, which reflects a significant portion of the aged population in the job market.

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>
> **Vic Sithasanan,** managing director of Southeast Asian employment portal Jobstreet

"As the workforce ages and the value of experience becomes more apparent, companies will — if they have not yet already — recognize the benefits of hiring senior talent," he said.

"This requires a shift in perception, and the need to create a working environment that supports and encourages the hiring of older workers."

Sithasanan said many companies are implementing upskilling and reskilling programs specifically designed for older employees, ensuring they are in line with the latest technologies and industry trends.

"Doing this will appeal to senior hires, who are looking for ways to remain relevant and leverage their vast experience to mentor and guide younger employees, fostering a culture of knowledge transfer and intergenerational collaboration," he said.

Sithasanan said companies offering flexibility at the workplace could also appeal to older talent prioritizing the ability to manage family or health commitments.

He added that the government has several initiatives that support and incentivize older workers in the workforce, such as income tax reductions for employers who hire older workers, as well as training and development programs to help older workers acquire new skills.

"The Human Resources Ministry (of Malaysia) has also stepped in to issue age-friendly workplace guidelines to address the specific needs of older workers, such as ergonomic workstations and accessible facilities," he said.

Sithasanan said a Jobstreet survey showed that Malaysian talent is largely driven by salary and compensation, but more mature generations such as Gen X and baby boomers typically look for roles that can showcase their wealth of experience and knowledge, with job security at the forefront of their minds.

"Seniors have also expressed a desire to stay active and engaged in the workforce, as a way to maintain a sense of purpose and contribute to society," he said.

He said in terms of competitiveness in the workforce, the inclusion of senior workers complements the workforce as they prefer roles that differ from those sought by younger candidates, such as part-time, consultancy, or mentorship positions.

Sithasanan said companies are increasingly aware of the unique skills and perspectives of senior employees, particularly those who can mentor younger employees and position the company for sustained success.

"Their experience enables them to efficiently navigate challenges, making them valuable assets in decision-making processes, especially in roles that require specialized knowledge," he said.

"This can be particularly beneficial to productivity and stability, especially in industries facing skills shortages."

In terms of the type of jobs senior citizens are seeking, the highest number of job applications on Jobstreet are from the manufacturing, transport and logistics industries (15 percent), followed by accounting (12 percent), and human resources and recruitment sectors (10 percent).

Sithasanan said awareness, government support, age-friendly workplace policies and a commitment to inclusivity is necessary to help seniors rejoin the workforce.

"Employers must be made aware of various policies and initiatives that exist to incentivize the hiring of senior citizens," he said.

"The government could also expand funding for training and development programs that help senior workers acquire new skills, ensuring they remain competitive in a rapidly evolving job market."

THE STAR, MALAYSIA

Nepalese Sherpa, 18, breaks 14-peak youngest record



Nepalese mountaineer Nima Rinji Sherpa waves upon his arrival at the airport in Kathmandu on Oct 14. PRAKASH MATHEMA / AFP

Nima Rinji Sherpa, 18, reached the summit of Mount Shishapangma in the Xizang autonomous region, China, on the morning of Oct 9, becoming the youngest person in the world to summit all 14 of the planet's 8,000-meter peaks.

Bikram Karki, Nima's spokesperson said the young climber reached the summit at 6:05 am of local time in Xizang. Mount Shishapangma is 8,027 meters high.

With the feat, Nima has overtaken his uncle, Mingma Gyabu Sherpa, for the world record. Mingma Gyabu had held the record for being the youngest to climb all 14 peaks above 8,000 meters, which he achieved in 2019 at the age of 30.

"Congratulations, Nima! Your journey continues to inspire us all," his father, Tashi Lakpa Sherpa, managing director of Seven Summit Treks, Nepal's largest expedition company, wrote in an online post.

Nima's father holds the record for climbing Qomolangma, known as Mount Everest in the West, without bottled oxygen at the age of 19, becoming the youngest climber to scale the world's highest peak.

Nima started climbing at 16 and debuted on Sept 30, 2022, with Mount Manaslu, the eighth-highest mountain in the world at 8,163 meters.

Over two years, he has broken multiple world records and become the youngest to summit several major mountains. In 2023, at the age of 17, he climbed nine peaks above 8,000 meters in a single year.

His conquest of Mount Shishapangma marks the completion of an "extraordinary journey", Karki said.

Nima's historic accomplishment is part of his larger vision for the "SherpaPower" initiative, which aims to reshape the global perception of Sherpas.

"Sherpas are not just mountain guides but elite athletes and adventurers capable of creating unique paths on the world stage," he said.

"Today, as I stand atop my 14th 8,000-meter peak, I dedicate this world record to my parents, especially my father, Tashi Lakpa Sherpa and my mother, Leema Sherpa, and my project, #SherpaPower," Nima said in a statement following his feat.

"This summit is not just the culmination of my journey but a tribute to every Sherpa who has dared to dream beyond the traditional boundaries set for us. Mountaineering is more than labor; it is a testament to our strength, resilience, and passion," he said.

"Through #SherpaPower, I want to show the younger generation of Sherpas that they can rise above the stereotype of being only support climbers and embrace their potential as top-tier athletes, adventurers, and creators.

"We are not just guides; we are trailblazers. Let this be a call to every Sherpa to see the dignity in our work, the power in our heritage, and the limitless possibilities in our future."

On Oct 16, 1986, Italian Reinhold Messner, at the age of 42, became the first climber to reach the peaks of all 14 eight-thousanders without using supplementary oxygen.

THE KATHMANDU POST, NEPAL