

General Information			
Host Country	Japan		
Host School	Ryukoku University		
Program start & end dates	Mar28, 2023-Aug21, 2023		
Program of Study	Asian Studies		
Type of Study Abroad	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exchange	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:
General Evaluation			
In a couple of sentences, summarize and explain your general evaluation of your experience.	<p>It is a very tough but nevertheless rewarding experience. I was put in the wrong program and the study workload is extremely heavy. This leaves little free time or energy for touring around, so I think quite a few of my fellow classmates “quitted” early in order to enjoy their study abroad their own ways. I also felt very isolated in the beginning, but it was wonderful after I made many local Japanese friends.</p> <p>(PS: I think this survey as well as many of the other materials we must complete for studying abroad are way too long and too time consuming. It would be great if they can be simplified for future students)</p>		
Arrival			
How easy or challenging was it to obtain your travel documents (visa, permits, etc.)?	Relatively easy. But Japanese residence registration is complicated due to language barriers		
Describe your transportation arrangements to your host country. Would you alter any part of those arrangements?	<p>I had travelled many times to Japan so basic travel arrangement was easy.</p> <p>Sightseeing travel after term was arranged but ended up disrupted by Typhoons. Hard to foresee but perhaps could have arranged differently.</p>		
How was your experience clearing customs and immigration upon arrival in your host country? Any surprises?	Relatively easy. But residence registration is complicated due to language barriers		
Describe how you traveled to your host facility. How long did it take and how much did it cost?	Flied to Kansai Airport then took a bus to Osaka (1+ hr) to stay one night. Next day took the subway to Kyoto (1 hr). Met tutor at Kyoto station and then travel to dorm (1 hr). Cost is around 30 CAD.		
Orientation and Assistance			
How satisfied were you with the orientation and student assistance available to at your host school?	OK. Language barrier made it challenging.		
What help did you receive from the international staff or office?	Minimum. Often asked to look at email or web. I am especially bothered to not be able to change my program before term starts		
Orientation and Assistance (cont'd)			
How was new student orientation	OK. Language barrier made it challenging. Hard to get clarifications		

at the host university? How did it suit your needs?	and male dorm tutor (who later got fired) was not very helpful.
What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site? Were there people and resources available for you to talk to about what you were experiencing?	I lost 7 pounds in the first few weeks! It was very hard for me in the first two months, especially since my fellow exchange student classmates were mostly very unrespectful perhaps because of my age. Last 2+ months were very rewarding as I cultivated friendship with many Japanese students and friends outside for language exchange, gatherings, and most importantly joining the university choir. The female dorm tutor was especially helpful. I had an ear infection and she helped me seek medical help in time. A Japanese family I met in the street also helped me with arranging blood tests and invited me twice to their home to have lunch with the family,
Housing & Daily Life	
Describe your accommodation in your host country.	Excellent. My dormitory room and environment were way better than I had expected. Unfortunately, most of my dorm mates were very unfriendly and even hostile at times. Eventually I revenged by giving them hostile looks instead of greetings like I used to 😊
When could you move into housing and how long were you allowed to stay?	Mar28-Aug14. I was to visit Seoul Aug14-20 but because of typhoon I cancelled my trip and stayed in Osaka for an extra week (Aug14-21)
What kinds of services and facilities were nearby where you lived (shop, cafe gym, parks, pharmacy, stations...)	The gym was not open due to renovation (anticipated to complete in Apr but still renovating in August when I left) and the food around are not great but inexpensive. (Kyoto food is not as good compared to other parts of Japan I visited before). Easy access to university and its many facilities.
Describe what you did about meals and what other options were available. How satisfied were you with the food?	I cooked or bought prepared food from the supermarket. I even went and shop at Costco half a dozen times (takes about 1.25 hours each way by subway then bus). I am glad I can made familiar food and this is especially import for my diabetes)
How close was your accommodation to where you studied?	Walking distance. Just a few minutes across from the main entrance.
Academics & Course Registration	
Please describe the registration process at your host institution. What assistance was available to you? Were you satisfied?	The registration was tedious, but no one was able to spot that I checked the wrong box. I ended up in the wrong program because of the mistake and was not allowed to change several weeks before the term starts. Part of the problem is the content of the program is not clear and we do not have full access to the syllabus until very late. Nevertheless, while tough the program I ended up in is quite worth it.
What advice would you offer to another exchange student about registration at your host institution?	Things can be very inflexible in Japan. Prepare well and be ready to accept courses you do not agree with.
What tips to you have for finding	The exact courses we must take are not available/ apparent until the

the courses and course syllabuses/outlines?	term starts. Most courses are mandatory, and it was not clear what the contents were until we attended the first classes.
Academics & Course Registration (cont'd)	
How satisfied were you with the amount of knowledge/skills you obtained from your host?	Very satisfied. However, I was expecting to focus on Japanese language but had very limited time because of 7 other courses I have to take, some extremely challenging.
How did the style of teaching, and workload compare to Canada? Was it more independent or group learning?	I think teaching is mostly bad compared with Canada. Instructors often do not post information in time. We do not get much if any interim feedback on how well we did. The workload can be hard to plan and very high. In one extreme case we are asked to write an exam, answer a question with 1000-2000 words, and finish a project of 2000-4000 words in the last week of class! I tried but was not able to form study groups with my classmates. Many of them gave up and just spent time touring, socializing, or playing games. I am one of the few (if not the only) who stick out for every course till the very end.
How many courses did you take during your time abroad? Are there particular courses would you recommend?	8 courses. Most courses are mandatory, so we have no choice. A few are “propaganda” course to promote Japanese / Kyoto culture I think but are nevertheless quite interesting. The two optional courses I picked: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Japanese Religions A – Not recommended due to thin content, but it is a relatively easy course o Japanese Literature & Movies – Not recommended because of teaching style, but it is a very interesting course
If applicable, what impact did the language barrier have on your learning?	Quite a bit but manageable. We have three American professors so no language barriers. The other 4 professors (one taught 2 courses) often cannot explained things well and I was able to help them (or asked by them to help) to clarify for the class.
What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, internet access, specialized equipment and supplies available at your host facility?	Excellent. I bit inconvenient to use the printing services but I bought my own printer.
Cost	
Books and Supplies/per term:	1800 (CAD) – including 1500 for business office setup: printer, desk, chair, etc.)
Flight:	1800
Accommodation/per month:	450 x 4.5
Meals/per month:	450 x 4.5
Local transportation/per month:	40-100 x 4.5
Health insurance/per term:	100 + 100 approx. for medical attention
Communication (internet, phone, etc.) – per term	100 (using eSIM)
Travel documents (Passport, Study	100

permit, visa, etc.)	
Vaccinations:	150 (Shingles shots)
Personal spending (entertainment and extra travel) – per term	4500 (extra spending of \$2000 due to trip disruptions of typhoon: Stayed 7 more days in Okinawa – hotel and food etc; Cancelled trip to Seoul – hotel booking only partly refundable)
Were there unexpected costs you encounter? What items were less or more expensive than expected?	<p>Trip disruptions due to typhoon – very costly as I did not buy travel insurance.</p> <p>Food is more expensive than anticipated as had to eat out when no time to cook</p> <p>Medical expenses – pay 10% cost for ear infection and blood tests but relatively cost is quite low</p>
Extra-Curricular & Social Activities	
What type of organized activities were available to you? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future students?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ryukoku University Choir (lots of practices and three public performances) 2) Bridge International (Social Circle outside University) 3) English Student Advisor (1.5 hours per week) 4) International Week Canada Booth 5) Slide Presentation of Canada for Japanese students 6) Children’s workshop with primary school students (Primary grades 1-4)
Did you travel outside the host location? If so, where do you recommend?	Yes. I went to Okinawa, and not so far away: Uji, Himeji, Kobe, Osaka, Maiko and other places. I would have loved to go to Kagoshima, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Mt. Fuji. I think it really depends on what you want and search the web for where to go. I also hoped to drive but decided against it first due to lack of time and later because of a string of bad lucks in my sight-seeing trips
What opportunities were there to work or volunteer? Did you require special permits to do this?	For working as English Student Advisor you need work permit but easy to get. Very few hours are available so it is more of volunteer work. One can find work outside university (e.g., work at a restaurant) if money is a consideration
Health and Safety	
Describe any health/safety concerns or issues you had during your experience.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Diabetes – it went up to a dangerous level a couple months before I left for Japan, and I tried to control it without medication but with low-carb diet and lots of walking in Japan 2) Serious ear infection – I was so worried something was wrong with my right ear and luckily got help to see an ear doctor a few days later. 3) Accident in Osaka – I was knocked down at the subway station and the back of my head landed on concrete.
What helped you keep safe and healthy? Did you access any health care supports and if so how was the experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) I lost 7 pounds in the first few weeks probably due to stress and the diet I put myself into. With help with a Japanese (whom I befriended after getting lost) and his family, I booked to see a doctor who retired from WHO and was fluent in English and extremely friendly. I had two blood tests, both showing my diabetes have receded to tolerable levels. 2) I had a serious ear infection and was really worried. Luckily the

	<p>female dorm tutor (whom we are now good friends) offered to visit the ear clinic with me. I think I visited about 6 times before the infection was cured. I also have conditions with accumulating ear wax which he cleaned, and I even went back to see him just before returning to Canada to clear my ears as they were clogging. He hardly speaks any English, so I am lucky to get the initial help from the tutor.</p> <p>3) I fell backwards but was so lucky my head landed on my backpack. I am back in Canada now. My neck and fingers are still hurting but is needing two family doctor's appointments before I can take an x-ray of my neck and spine.</p>
Personal and Cultural Connections	
<p>How successful were you at making friends with local (not international) people and students?</p>	<p>Very successful. 1) I joined the university choir as the only foreign student. We practiced 3 or even 4 times each week and performed on stage together and practiced 2) I joint a language exchange group and go out for social events including BBQ, dinners, and watching fireworks together. 3) I befriended a Japanese family and helped the son win first place in an international innovation competition. 4) I volunteered to present Canada twice for local students 5) I find many partners for language exchange and we can expect to be helping each other through social media after my return to Canada.</p>
<p>How did you find it adjusting to the culture of your host site?</p>	<p>Quite OK. I visited Japan several times before including a 10-week language school in Sapporo and a 2--week language exchange in Kanazawa. So, I have no problem adjusting to the culture.</p>
<p>What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging?</p>	<p>Japanese culture can be very rigid and expects everyone to conform. If you are out of the norm don't be surprised to be frowned upon</p>
<p>What part(s) of the culture did you most appreciate?</p>	<p>1) Friendliness of the people. However, according to my friend Japanese can be very indifferent too despite their outward friendliness. After I fell on the subway only one lady stopped to check and she called the subway staff for me.</p> <p>2) Preservation of their culture. Japanese culture to me is by no means perfect but I really appreciate their tremendous effort to preserve it for everyone to understand and appreciate. They also are very successful in packaging and marketing their culture as entertainment for mass consumption all over the world (e.g., manga, anime, and movies)</p>
<p>How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?</p>	<p>1) Local people mostly treated me well and I made a lot of friends. They alone were worthy my trip.</p> <p>2) University staff are courteous by perhaps can be more helpful. They also like to make last minute announcement on what is needed from us.</p> <p>3) Faculty teaching is not good quality in my opinion, but all but one professors are very friendly. I made friends with 6 out of the 7 professors, and even the last one has a very good opinion of me even</p>

	<p>though I complained a lot about his classes behind his back 😊 . For end of term celebration, I organized a Chinese dinner for one of our classes and invited the professor and his wife to join. We had a great time together!</p> <p>4) Fellow students are terrible especially those in my dorm. I felt I was being isolated. I did make friends with some study abroad students from another dorm and we had some good times together.</p>
As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university?	I think they have good facilities for people with disabilities, but the best is to check with the university. I don't recall seeing many students with disabilities though.
As far as you could tell, for students who are visible minorities in your host country?	This is not a problem as I think the university respects all students and Japanese people try to be friendly to all visitors. But it does seem "white privilege" is pervasive in the Japanese society. You can see subtle examples in restaurants and in interactions with local students – whites seem to have higher statuses and will receive more attention / better service.
For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?	I am not aware of this, but University seems to be accepting for diversity in sexual orientation.
Overall	
What are five important things other students should know before going to your host country/region?	
1. Japanese system can be rigid. Japanese people are very friendly.	
2. Weather is extremely hot in the summer in Kyoto	
3. Beware of typhoons that can disrupt travel plans in July and August	
4. Eating healthily is more important than eating food you like. Medical system is extremely efficient in Japan compared with in Canada. E.g., a blood test without appointment is 1.5 hours from arrival to results while in Canada it can take a week. (I am still waiting for my neck x-ray in Canada at the moment after injured in Osaka and for returned for 2 days.) Note we paid 10% of the fee only with our student medical insurance in Japan.	
5. Be respectful of others. Even for an old person like me!	
What are ten important things you would tell another student who is going to your host facility/agency?	
1. To prepare to be disappointed by the courses you are assigned, or even picked	
2. To prepare to be discouraged by the teaching quality	
3. Try to meet local students and others to better understand the culture and society, and have fun	
4. Try to join a club / circle	
5. Be prepared to not understand most interactions with Japanese but that is OK. More important to pick a considerate group with nice people.	
6. I was a (paid) student advisor for Japanese students, and this is a great experience to consider	
7. I did a booth and a presentation on Canada to Japanese students, another great experience to consider	

8.	Do not expect you will get all the needed information pushed to you. Learn to tap into various resources (dorm manager, university staff, fellow classmates...) to complete the picture
9.	Dorm rules can be quite unreasonable from our perspective. For example, I bought a small desk as part of my office setup to support business back home. I was told when moving out to donate to my choir that such items are not allowed to be moved out and must be destroyed! Luckily the dorm manager let us go and I hope I did not get them into any trouble with administration.
10.	When leaving, plan early to clean up as you will not get much help especially with large items/garbage disposal etc. on your final move out
What was the most rewarding part of your study abroad experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Intensive learning of Japanese history, culture, and society 2) Improved my language skills even though way below my initial expectations because I got into the wrong program 3) Made a lot of friends with the locals and the professors
What was the greatest challenge you faced during your experience abroad?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Isolation by fellow study abroad students 2) Essential information not pushed to me or in a format hard to decipher because of language barriers 3) Health issues (Diabetes, Serious Ear Infection, Accident in Osaka Subway) 3) Poor teaching quality and incredible workload of homework 4) Balance between study, play, choir, volunteer, and working for business back at home
How has your perspective changed as a result of your study abroad experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) I learn to better protect myself against hostilities 2) I Worried about the new generation of students educated with presumably Western influence of Individualism (sorry!) 3) I can understand many of the difficulties facing Japan that may justify (but I do not necessarily condone) some of the Japanese actions in the international stage (e.g., revival of militarism)
What else do you want to add about your study abroad experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) I almost got killed in Osaka! I had a terrible accident last Friday in the Umeda station – I was knocked down by a big rushing man and landed heavily on concrete on the back of my head! Luckily, my backpack cushioned and protected my head, but my neck and fingers have been injured. As my medical insurance in Japan had already been cancelled and my injuries do not seem life threatening, I did not go for an immediate medical check but did report the incident to the police. I am now back in Canada seeing doctors, but the process to even get an x-ray of my neck is extremely slow! I assume it could be done in hours in Japan if I still had my medical insurance.) 2) I put in a lot of effort did a very special project for my Japanese class that is way more than what is required. It is a presentation of “Sukiyaki”, a very famous and inspiring Japanese song, especially for the Japanese. It helped me make many local friends, and even when I was stuck in Okinawa it helped me connect with people I met there.

Below is a space to share any photos (this is optional and may be shared on our website).



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Farewell Party from Ryukoku University Choir I joined (And many other activities I posted/will be posted on Facebook). For this post, please scroll to the end to see a video of one of the songs we performed in public:

<https://www.facebook.com/PatrickLui888/posts/pfbid02KhzRWSzYTuzZzjF9jy7y9VL2Uw6vQZjnfqEkanjeRQAmZXRxEydncnJ7ctfruEKcl>