

Study Abroad Evaluation

General Information				
Your Name	[REDACTED]			
Host Country	Japan			
Host School/Agency	Nagoya Gakuin University			
Participation Dates	April 2013-February 2014			
Your Program of Study	Bachelor of Business Administration: Marketing Management			
Type of Study Abroad	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exchange	<input type="checkbox"/> Practicum	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
General Evaluation				
In a couple of sentences, summarize why you rated your experience the way you did	I enjoyed the community and environment for both studying Japanese and for getting know many different Japanese people. The dormitory was located right next to campus, and just 30 minutes by bike or train to downtown Nagoya, which made everything easily accessible and easy to explore. Being surrounded by Japanese speakers from multiple countries who were more advanced than me and having high expectations set by the Japanese language instructors helped me achieve proficiency in the language and kept me on my toes.			
Arrival				
How easy or challenging was it to obtain your travel documents (visa, permits, etc.)?	The forms were rather tedious and required a lot of medical details that were a bit bothersome to gather. It was a relief when I finished everything. The visa came just a few weeks before I was meant to be at the university, so I was anxious about that before departing. It didn't allow for much time in advance to buy the ticket and made it difficult to plan out travel before the orientation began at my university.			

<p>Describe your transportation arrangements to your host country. Would you alter any part of those arrangements?</p>	<p>I flew to Narita airport, via a direct flight through Japan Airlines. From there I traveled around Tokyo for a week before heading to my University in Nagoya by the bullet-train (shinkansen).</p> <p>If I did not plan to travel before the semester began, I would have taken a connecting flight from Narita to Tokyo just to save the hassle of going through Tokyo station. For first timers, Tokyo station can be quite stressful to find your way through as it gets very busy and the connecting trains lines can get confusing. I would fly with Japan Airlines again as I am always very pleased with the service, food, in-flight entertainment, and general experience of flying with them.</p>
<p>How was your experience clearing customs and immigration upon arrival in your host country? Any surprises?</p>	<p>No surprises. They can approve your student-visa work permit when you go through if you have the form ready, which is convenient and lets you work whenever the opportunity might come up.</p>
<p>Describe how you traveled to your host facility. How long did it take and how much did it cost?</p>	<p>From Tokyo station to Nagoya station via bullet train it costs 10,360 yen by non-reserved seat on any train, and around 11,000 yen by reserved seat. The travel time is 100 minutes via the fastest train, Nozomi, and 110 minutes by the second fastest/most common train, Hikari. It takes about 18 minutes from Nagoya station to Hibino station by Subway and costs 230 yen. Pick-up from the airport can be arranged through the International Centre at NGU, so that is the most convenient way to get to the university when traveling there directly.</p>
<p>Orientation and Assistance</p>	
<p>How satisfied were you with the orientation and student assistance available to at your host school?</p>	<p>They were thorough and welcoming. I got a lot of information from both the International centre and the International Lounge. During regular university class hours, it was easy to get assistance. I was very satisfied with both the orientation and student assistance.</p>

<p>What help did you receive from the international staff or office? What was your evaluation of your host schools international staff or office?</p>	<p>When I wasn't too proud or stubborn to ask for help, there was plenty of help available and many people who were happy help or simply talk to. The combination of the international office (university faculty) and international lounge (staffed by the head of the lounge, plus university students) was great. When I needed help with paperwork, health concerns, course registration, and other daily life questions, it was easy to find someone to answer my questions in the International office. When it came to Japanese language/homework help, social events, signing up for a cell phone, etc., it was really easy to go down to the International office and find someone willing to help me out. I made some of my closest friends through the international office and international lounge.</p>
<p>Orientation and Assistance (cont'd)</p>	
<p>How was new student orientation at the host university? How did it suit your needs?</p>	<p>It was thorough and catered to International Students. I felt prepared for life in the dormitory, my classes, and welcomed to the university.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>I had no major issues, given that I had already spent a year in Japan previously. Whenever I did get confused or wanted to know more, there were plenty of students who had been there since the last semester to talk to. The library is full of English language books about Japanese culture, so when I wanted to look deeper, there were resources available. At the international Lounge, it was easy to meet Japanese students and ask them directly about the culture, so I was able to get more than one perspective on culture points of Japan.</p>
<p>Housing</p>	
<p>Describe your accommodation in your host country.</p>	<p>I lived in a two person dormitory, which are two bedrooms, separated by a room divider (not a solid wall) equipped with a kitchen, toilet, shower/bath and balcony.</p>

<p>How early could you move into housing before term and how long after the end of term were you allowed to stay?</p>	<p>I was permitted to move in about a week and a half before the term started, but I knew of students that arrived earlier than that. I was permitted to stay approximately one month after the end of term.</p>
<p>How comfortable were you with your accommodation?</p>	<p>The room divider took some getting used to as it doesn't isolate the sound between rooms very well, not does it block the light very well. If my roommate had his room light on at night, it would be somewhat bright in my room too. It was really nice to have laundry facilities downstairs and a common lounge to hang out with other students in. I would have liked a closet which is in only the bigger room, but I chose the smaller room option to save on rent. The balcony was nice for hanging laundry to dry and to sit on when the weather was nice. Being so close to all the other students in the dorm was a great experience that I am grateful for. Overall, it was fairly comfortable and extremely convenient.</p>
<p>Describe what you did about meals and what other options were available. How satisfied were you with the food?</p>	<p>I went grocery shopping and cooked for the majority of my meals. During class hours, there are two cafeterias, a well-stocked 7-11 with plenty of good meal options, a fast-food burger place, a cafe, and more recently they have had food trucks available on campus during class hours as well. I was satisfied with the food as it was surprisingly affordable, good quality, convenient, tasty and full of variety.</p>
<p>How close was your accommodation to where you studied?</p>	<p>I lived literally next door to the University, so I could get from my dorm to class in under 5 minutes.</p>
<p>Academics & Course Registration</p>	

<p>Please describe the registration process at your host institution. What assistance was available to you? Were you satisfied?</p>	<p>You are able to sign up for whatever courses interest you, provided you meet the Japanese requirements for the courses taught in Japanese. There is a placement test before classes start that will decide what level course you will be put into. It is simple to unregister for courses you later decide you don't want to take and the International centre is able to answer any questions about registration. I was satisfied.</p>
<p>What advice would you offer to another exchange student about registration at your host institution?</p>	<p>Ask other students who have been in the classes you're interested in what their experience was like. Some of the electives weren't very popular for a good reason. Sit in on every class that you are curious about taking for the first class or two, then make your final decision.</p>
<p>What course load would you recommend for future students? Are there particular courses you recommend?</p>	<p>I would recommend taking three electives at most as the Japanese courses can be pretty heavy on the homework. The electives in general don't give out that much homework, so you will mostly be listening to lectures in those classes. I really enjoyed the discussions in Japanese Society, the physical activity in Badminton, and the knowledge about Japan I learned in Japanese tourism. I recommend all three of these courses.</p>
<p>Academics & Course Registration (cont'd)</p>	
<p>How satisfied were you with the amount of knowledge/skills you obtained from your host?</p>	<p>In terms of the Japanese knowledge I gained, I was very satisfied. I was in a class of three people for the latter half of my exchange so the instructors were very intimate and personalized to our levels. I was challenged even more than I thought I would be in that regard, which was very satisfying. The electives were a bit hit and miss though. I barely remember what was taught in Japanese management and Cross Cultural Communication, mostly because the instructors didn't prepare adequately for the classes and would ramble about unrelated topics whenever they liked. The business school side of me didn't gain much and my expectations were not met for what skills/knowledge I obtained in that regard.</p>

<p>How did the style of teaching compare to Canada? How did the workload compare to Canada?</p>	<p>The Japanese courses were pretty similar, only ramped up in difficulty. There was more expected in terms of class participation and course work compared to the Japanese courses I've taken in Canada. The electives were pretty heavily focused on lectures, with little to no homework for a lot of the classes. That was a big surprise as I am used to constant homework and readings being assigned at KPU, no matter the course subject. The Japanese homework was time consuming, but not outrageous. The elective coursework was a breeze.</p>
<p>How many courses did you take during your time abroad?</p>	<p>4 elective courses for the Spring Semester and 3 elective courses for the Fall Semester. The Japanese courses are set by your placement, so they are decided for you.</p>
<p>If applicable, what impact did the language barrier have on your learning?</p>	<p>I had to ask a lot of questions in class, use my dictionary, ask my friends, look up grammar points for clarification, and listen very carefully to what was said in class. Self-study was also necessary for me to improve my Kanji comprehension as I had some gaps in my ability there.</p>
<p>What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, internet access, specialized equipment and supplies available at your host facility?</p>	<p>The school was well equipped and it was easy access the facilities. The library has printers, computers, a decent selection of English books and a lot of interesting Japanese books, a great movie selection, and even some A/V equipment. One issue I did have was the wifi reception wasn't that great in my dorm room, but other students didn't have issues with that. Ethernet connections are available, so this solves that issue.</p>
Cost	
<p>Books and Supplies/per term:</p>	<p>I believe the textbook was about 3000 yen, and I only had to buy one during the Spring semester. Aside from that, a file folder, dividers, and stationary supplies cost me about 2000 yen.</p>
<p>Flight:</p>	<p>I booked one way both ways to give me more flexibility when leaving. My initial flight cost me</p>

Accommodation/per month:	30,000 yen
Meals/per month:	Unsure
Local transportation/per month:	Unsure
Health insurance/per term:	Unsure
Communication (internet, phone, etc.) – per term	Pocket wifi - 3000/month
Travel documents (passport, entry visa, etc.)	N/A
Vaccinations:	N/A
Personal spending (entertainment and extra travel) – per term	Unsure
Were there unexpected costs you encounter? What items were less or more expensive than expected?	I can't think of any costs that were unexpected as I had already lived in Japan and knew what to expect. The meals at the cafeteria were fairly cheap, especially compared to what we pay at KPU for most cafeteria food.
Extra-Curricular & Social Activities	
How satisfied were you with the out-of-class opportunities available at your host site?	I was satisfied. I had a lot of options available to me right from the start of the semester.
What type of organized activities were available to you? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future students?	I joined the Photography club for a few weeks, but didn't find it very social, so I stopped going. The Bakery/Cafe club, Mile Post, seemed cool but I always had class partway through their meetings so it didn't work out. The clubs seem very active if you really want to dedicate time to them. I know some students really enjoyed the Track club as well.

<p>What opportunities were there to work or volunteer? Did you require special permits to do this?</p>	<p>I got the opportunity to work in the International Lounge at my university, so I was working on campus with Japanese and exchange students. I volunteered for a few Open Campus events and helped organize some of the social events involving exchange students. You do need a special permit to work, which you can either get approved when you go through customs, or ask the International Centre to help you out with.</p>
<p>Health and Safety</p>	
<p>Did you feel safe in your host country?</p>	<p>I always felt safe while in Japan.</p>
<p>Describe any safety concerns you had during your experience.</p>	<p>I can't remember ever having concerns for my safety. I was never threatened or felt like I was in danger.</p>
<p>Personal and Cultural Connections</p>	
<p>How successful were you at making friends with local (not international) people and students?</p>	<p>Very successful. I met some really nice people while in Nagoya and became a few different groups/communities. I joined International organizations that I was part of in Canada (AIESEC and Toastmasters) which helped tremendously with making friends with local Japanese people and students. I also worked on campus with Japanese people, so that helped me make close Japanese friends as well.</p>
<p>How did you find it adjusting to the culture of your host site?</p>	<p>I do not remember all the adjustments I originally had to make the first time I went to Japan, so I might not have very deep insight into this. This exchange was my second time in Japan, so I had already grown accustomed to the culture.</p>

<p>What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging?</p>	<p>The varying dialects, speaking paces, slang, and style of speaking between Japanese people was and has always been a big challenge. There are people who I always had trouble understanding, and others who I understood for the majority of the time. Sticking out all the time got annoying sometimes. People looking concerned and crossing the street when I was walking on the same side of the street was depressing sometimes. I tried to appear friendly and non-threatening, but having to actively think about that is tiring and bothersome. The colour of my skin/me being foreign may or may not have something to do with that. It is not easy to say for sure. I stick out in Canada as well and feel alienated from time to time, but in Japan it got a bit annoying when people would constantly stare or behave strangely towards me on a daily basis.</p>
<p>What part(s) of the culture did you most appreciate?</p>	<p>There are a lot of comfortable parts of being Japan, especially the general level of service at most stores, restaurants, etc. Japanese people tend to be really considerate and aware of their surroundings. I enjoy that level of awareness of other people's feelings and find myself sometimes missing how intuitively a lot of people are able to read social situations and avoid causing others embarrassment.</p>

<p>How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?</p>	<p>The local people I got to know treated me extremely well. I was invited into people's home's, greeted warmly and often, given gifts, surprised with parties, invited out to dinners and on trips, etc. The university staff and faculty were awesome and I was happy to interact with them whenever we crossed paths, I needed assistance, or just to say hello. The students at the school seemed a little shy sometimes and some clearly didn't expect me to speak Japanese, which explains some of their hesitation. English speaking doesn't seem to be a strong point for most of the Japanese students there. There are great English speakers, for sure, but not a whole lot. The students that frequent the International Lounge are pretty open to meeting and talking to foreign students.</p>
<p>As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university?</p>	<p>I knew one Japanese student who was physically disabled (in a wheelchair) who did not seem to have any difficulties in this regard. The school is equipped with several elevators and the building seems well equipped to accommodate students with disabilities</p>
<p>As far as you could tell, for students who are visible minorities in your host country?</p>	<p>Other than students of Asian descent that could be mistaken as Japanese, all International students will be visible minorities in Japan. I can't think of any problems affecting their studies.</p>
<p>For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?</p>	<p>Japan doesn't seem as open about talking about these groups as Canada, in general. I knew a gay international student that roomed with a Japanese guy who occasionally made jokes at the expense of gay people, but those two ended up being really close friends. Other than this anecdote of one persons' positive outcome, it is hard to say what type of discrimination might arise for these groups in Japan.</p>
<p>Overall</p>	
<p>What are five important things other students should know before going to your host country/region?</p>	

1. Study your Kanji as much as possible before you go and after you arrive. This will greatly improve your study experience and daily life experience. It gives you a better sense of the language where you are able to guess meanings of words that you haven't explicitly studied yet. Kanji will also be a major roadblock if you don't put much effort into it and can prevent you from advancing to the next Japanese class.

2. Be open to challenging your expectations about Japan. While there are plenty of things that will confirm your image of Japan, there are plenty more opportunities to see Japan in a light that a tourist doesn't get to. Talk to people you normally would not start a conversation with in Japan and learn their story. Find parts of the culture that you won't see listed in travel guides and take advantage of new experiences that aren't easily available in Canada.

3. Find a few communities/groups to join. In-group, out-group social dynamics are prevalent in Japan, so you will miss out on some more intimate experiences if you do not join any groups. It's great to have the freedom to float around as an individual, making friends with all types of people, but investing time into a community/group where you're working together towards similar goals or on a project together will let you get really close to local Japanese people. In this situation, you have something to give to and receive from the other people in the community, and this cooperation can help create really strong bonds.

4. Buy a bicycle (they're cheap) and explore your neighbourhood as much as possible. Get to know your surroundings better than anyone in your dormitory. A tourist doesn't get the opportunity or time to explore quiet neighbourhoods the way an exchange student does. Be more than a tourist and get a real sense of what your neighbourhood looks like, the kind of people who live there, and what it has to offer. Exploring provides a level of excitement and novelty that will persist throughout your exchange and always give you something interesting to do. It is also when you'll find the most curious things to photograph.

5. Don't expect to keep in touch with all of your Canadian friends while you are away. The time difference alone makes this a little difficult. On top of that, you will be less grounded in the relationships and community around you in Japan if you spend all your time communicating with people back home. Let people know that you won't be able to keep in touch like you do in Japan, but that you are still thinking of them and will catch up with them when you're back. I felt guilty about a lot of this because I overestimated how many people I could reasonably keep in touch with, but underestimated how much my attention would be divided by all the things going on in Japan.

What are **ten** important things you would tell another student who is going to your host facility/agency?

Buy a bike. Japan is super bicycle friendly. Having a bike gives you a nice way to explore, get some fresh air and exercise, inexpensively travel to and from downtown/karaoke/restaurants, and feel refreshed after a long session of studying.

Purchase an IC travel card as soon as you can to load credit onto for buses/trains/subways. Buying individual tickets every time is a waste of time and can be stressful when you're in a rush, trying to catch your train. You can also earn points by using the IC card (Manaca card in Nagoya) that can be later spent on merchandise. The IC card is universal throughout Japan as well, so you can load it up and travel using it all across Japan.

Invite Japanese people out to hang out, even if you aren't sure if they will say yes. I met some people that were a lot of fun to hang out with, but might not have approached me directly to hang out if I hadn't initiated conversation with them.

Find the exchange students you don't exactly have a lot of common with, say if they are from another country or are into different things that you, and get to know them too. It's too easy just to hang out with people who are already obviously similar to you. You have a unique chance to get to know people who don't at first seem very similar to you as an exchange student with no personal connections going into your exchange.

Be selective of who you spend the most time with. These are the people you will most closely resemble by the end of your exchange. If there are students who are better at you in Japanese, they can be really good role models for your own learning and you will likely pick up some of their positive study habits and attitudes.

Use sites like Meet-Up, Facebook, Twitter, etc. to find groups, communities, events, etc to meet people outside of your university. Do some research in both English and Japanese into your interests and see what groups are meeting up in your city.

Try to avoid too much time in your room, especially when there are plenty of people to hang out with in the dormitory alone. Study properly and often, but don't rely on solely the internet for your entertainment.

Studying schedules can help you stay on top of all the tests and assignments. Categorize your homework and folders to keep track of the different Japanese courses and things due.

<p>Make time to enjoy the natural beauty, the urban excitement, and the cultural heritage of Japan. It is unreal seeing the contrasts of Japan and a real pleasure.</p>	
<p>When people back home ask you what the strangest things about Japan are, and they will, include some things that you've become accustomed to or even prefer about Japan. Paint a more in-depth picture for them that the internet and the media tends to overlook when covering Japan.</p>	
<p>What was the most rewarding part of your study abroad experience?</p>	<p>Working together with Japanese people in AIESEC, Toastmasters, and as a teaching assistant in the International Lounge was the most rewarding part of my study abroad experience. It introduced me to some of the people I admired most and felt closest to during my time there. I met my mentor through Toastmasters and even found work through her. I felt more equal and close to the Japanese people I worked with than I did with some of the Japanese students I saw regularly. Despite many students being initially friendly, it was much harder to find close friends who were interested in hanging out together. It was also great to be able to contribute to these groups, and it was motivating to feel useful and part of the community when I was volunteering and working along side Japanese people.</p>
<p>What was the greatest challenge you faced during your experience abroad?</p>	<p>Constantly finding people, situations, topics, vocabulary, etc, that I didn't understand. I would make mistakes quite a bit or completely misunderstand what someone was saying to me, so this was a bit disheartening at times. I had to adjust my expectations for what I could reasonably do with my language skills and what I could expect to understand. Admitting when you don't understand takes a lot of humility and was challenging when I let my pride get in the way.</p>

<p>How has your perspective changed as a result of your study abroad experience?</p>	<p>I feel like Japan has changed my own level of humility and gratitude. I feel much more open to admitting when I don't understand something, when I need help from others, and how much I depend on others to get where I need to go. I am can be stubbornly independent, to my detriment, so seeking out assistance and relying on others challenges this fault of mine. Japan helped me acknowledge more of how much I need other people to be successful. Knowing how much certain people matter to me in my life and how much I matter to them has helped me better recognize who I want to spend time with, as well as help me reciprocate more gratitude and love to the people I care about.</p>
<p>What else do you want to add out your study abroad experience?</p>	<p>While I went over to study Japanese and experience Japan, I got even more than I expected from the experience. Learning with other International students taught me a lot about other countries as well as my own. I came back much more aware of Canadian customs and how our society values differ from some Japanese values. The self-made-success attitude is much more prevalent in Canada, where as in Japan the group that helps you become successful is shown a lot of respect. I feel like I can better follow my own values, taking parts I like from both Japanese and Canadian customs and applying those I agree with most. It's nice to feel like you can go between cultures and countries, adapting where necessary and being able to enjoy life and thrive on both sides.</p>