



OTAGO GLOBAL

Student Exchange Programme

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 Otago Global Student Exchange
 otago.ac.nz/study/studentexchange



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	The University of Tokyo
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 (2018) / Semester 1 (2019)
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts and Science
Major(s)	Physiology and Japanese

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Analysis of Japanese Education	English		2
Integrated Japanese I (2) (L2)	Japanese		4
Applied Japanese (3): Listening and Conversation (L2-L3)	Japanese		2
Applied Japanese (3): Reading for Pleasure (L2-L3)	Japanese		2
Applied Japanese (3): Writing, Speech and Pronunciation (L2-L3)	Japanese		2
Seminar in Global Liberal Arts IV (2)	English		2
Integrated Japanese I (3) (L3)	Japanese		4
Applied Japanese (4): Reading for Pleasure (L2-L3)	Japanese		2
Seminar in Global Liberal Arts III (21)	English		2
Seminar in Global Liberal Arts I (11)	English		2
Special Topics: Japan in East Asia XIII	English		2
Japanese (102): Tutorial (L2-L3)	Japanese		2

Any comments about these papers?

Although stated in the course category that all of the papers selected above are to be taught in English, there are quite a few that are taught in Japanese with teachers that don't have an adequate ability to speak English to explain their educational material. This can be very difficult so it would be a good idea to have a decent level of Japanese before taking some of these courses.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

- The style of teaching at The University of Tokyo is very different to that at The University of Otago. The Japanese language teachers are very strict and don't welcome questions openly. I personally didn't like their learning style and didn't feel supported in this regard.

- The Japanese language classes have weekly tests, so don't take too many of these at one time as the workload is too much. Take the time to understand the material instead of memorizing hundreds of vocabulary.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

The University of Tokyo Komaba International Lodge Main (Meguro-ku)



Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very affordable given the location i.e in Tokyo (~54,000Y per month) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of the students speak English, so it is hard to mix/ find the opportunity to talk to domestic students at this accommodation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located ~7mins walk from The University of Tokyo Komaba Campus (Keio Inokashira Line) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The kitchen can sometimes get a little dirty given it is a shared space and takes some time to understand the various functions of the appliances in Japanese.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great social environment- Students from all over the world. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly language course- 100Y (yen) for the semester. Local community members are very friendly and supportive. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of local community events to participate in. (I'd recommend getting involved in MIFA- Meguro International Friendship Association located in Nakameguro). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reception staff are very friendly and helpful. They have a support number available, or you can contact them at the main reception area (Main Building) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located close to the station (Komaba TodaiMae- Keio Inokashira Line). McDonalds is also located very close. In addition, there are also 2 convenience store's (convenience stores) and a small supermarket located within walking 	

distance.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rooms are very tidy with everything you need. Vacuums are also available to use for free. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is also a shared lounge, laundry and kitchen area. The laundry machines cost 150Y for washing and 100Y for each round of using the dryer. (You need to use the dryer for 2 or 3 times before your clothes are dry). 	

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visas, food, insurance

My accommodation was around 54,000Y (Yen) per month at the University of Tokyo Komaba International Lodge Main.

I brought a direct flight from Auckland Airport using Air New Zealand for around \$800NZD and then brought another direct flight from Narita Airport using Air New Zealand for around \$900NZD.

I cannot remember the student visa process.

Japan has National Health Insurance that every student has to register for which was around \$20NZD each month.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

I got a Japanese bank account where I accessed my JASSO Scholarship Funds to cover my accommodation.

To access my New Zealand bank funds I used a Cash Passport and withdrew my money at a local ATM.

I ate out twice a week, would eat at the Komaba Cafeteria, from the local convenience store and would occasionally cook my own meals.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

I can't quite remember.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

No, The University of Tokyo doesn't have mandatory insurance- but the Japanese government requires mandatory National Health Insurance.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extracurricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

There were club activities on campus, but are hard to access for international students given the language barrier. I would recommend volunteering through HandsOnTokyo and getting involved with MIFA (Meguro International Friendship Association).

What was the university/ city like?

Busy. There is always something going on in Tokyo. There are a lot of people always on a mission which can be overwhelming at first coming from New Zealand.

Japan is also very safe. If you lose something visit a local Koban (police station) and you might be surprised to find that there is a chance someone has returned your lost item.

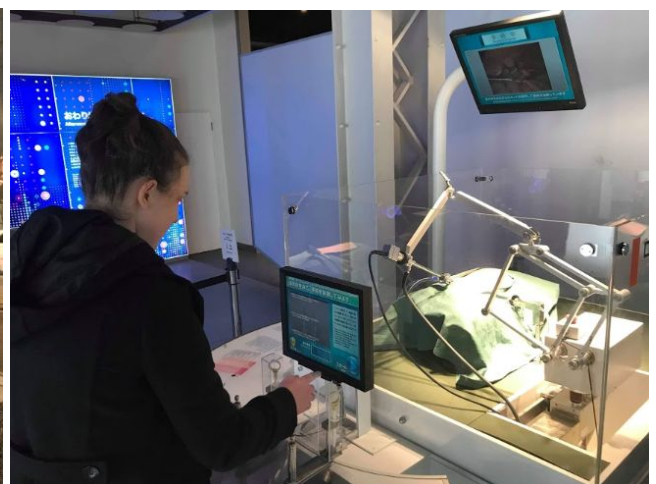
People keep to themselves. Which is a good and a big thing. During my exchange I fell quite badly and despite seeing me, the person who saw me continued as if he saw nothing. This is a common occurrence in Japan. If someone falls at the station people will just walk past without helping.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

- Tokyo is a busy busy place! There is so much to do. I would recommend checking all the places on the **Yamanote Line**.
- Check out the **Hachiko** dog statue in Shibuya if you get the chance.



- In terms of weekend trips- Grab a **Odakyu Free Pass** to Hakone (you can use a number of different transport options i.e the boat, ropeway, selected Odakyu trains, cable car). The freepass also gives you a discount to some local attractions (Gora Park) and some restaurants.
- If you get a chance check out **Torikizoku** for some yummy chicken. I also love their cabbage bowl which has free refills after the first one. They are located all over Japan and are so delicious.
- **Odaiba** is also another awesome place to check out with a lot to see and do. There are always events going on in the area, but if there is not any one when you go, make sure to check out the **Ferris Wheel** (great at sunset) or the **Miraikan** (Science Museum)- Japan's museums are so awesome!





Any tips for future students?

- If you decide to go to Tokyo with the sole intention of learning Japanese take the time to get involved in the local community. People in Tokyo are busy, and often don't have the time to teach foreigners Japanese so make sure to reach out and decline those who strictly want free English lessons without helping you with your Japanese. Instead get involved in some volunteer activities. HandsOnTokyo have an event calendar and MIFA (Meguro International Friendship Association) always have a list of great events to get involved in.
- Reach out leading Kiwi suppliers/ organisations in your area of interest based in Tokyo/Japan and offer to help them out. It's a great opportunity to gain experience and see the behind the scene of some awesome kiwi companies. Looks create on the CV too.
- Going to Japan is a trip of a lifetime so make the most of every opportunity. Say yes to things and relax when it comes to learning the language. Laugh when you make mistakes, but make sure you ask how to say/ do things properly as Japan has many many unwritten rules many foreigners are unaware of.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

Japan- where to start?

First impressions:

- 1.) **Japanese toilets are very high tech.** When I first arrived in Japan it was typhoon season and was super humid. I was very tired and headed straight to my capsule hotel. During the night I needed to use the bathroom and stumbled sleepily from the top capsule to the bathroom only to be fully woken up by the surprise of the Japanese warm toilet seats! To top it off the toilets play nature sounds and often flush by themselves.

During a visit to Fukuoka I stayed with my friend and her family and they owned a toilet whose lid would automatically open when you opened the door to the toilet. It's a little creepy, but super cool!

- 2.) **The trains are fantastic once you get your head around how to use them!** When arriving at my Japanese friend helped me buy a Pasma train card (I even got my name put on!). I would highly recommend using Google Maps which mapped out which lines and stations I need to transfer at.
- 3.) **Fashion is very important in Japan.** When coming to Japan I packed some of my nice gear and wore my favourite outfit when meeting my friend who came to pick me up from the airport. When meeting up with her I realised the level and the next day had to bin most of my clothes to buy some much better ones. Everyday Japanese girls (and guys) make a real effort. The Japanese girls always wear makeup and are very well presented. Nike slides and socks will definitely not cut it (haha).

Difficulties:

- 1.) Public ward/ hospital visits to organise Japanese National Health Insurance/ medical check ups are very difficult to do with a limited knowledge of Japanese (technical terms). I would highly recommend inviting a Japanese friend who speaks English to help you with these processes. If you don't know anyone (often the case when you first arrive in Japan) pre-translate your medical problem/ what you want to get sorted- even if it's in small sentences because anything helps.
- 2.) People in Japan are very busy so it's quite hard to find time to develop meaningful friendships or language exchange partners to improve your Japanese.
- 3.) The Japanese language teachers I had were a little strict and didn't create the most friendly learning environment. Personally I feel learning a language is all about being confident enough to trial and error and make a bunch of mistakes with supportive peers that are willing to correct mistakes. This was definitely not the case when I was on exchange. The courses often involved a lot of long vocab lists (often multiple pages in small font) which we had to memorise. Because of this I learnt a bunch of vocab, would sit a test and then completely forget them a few days later.

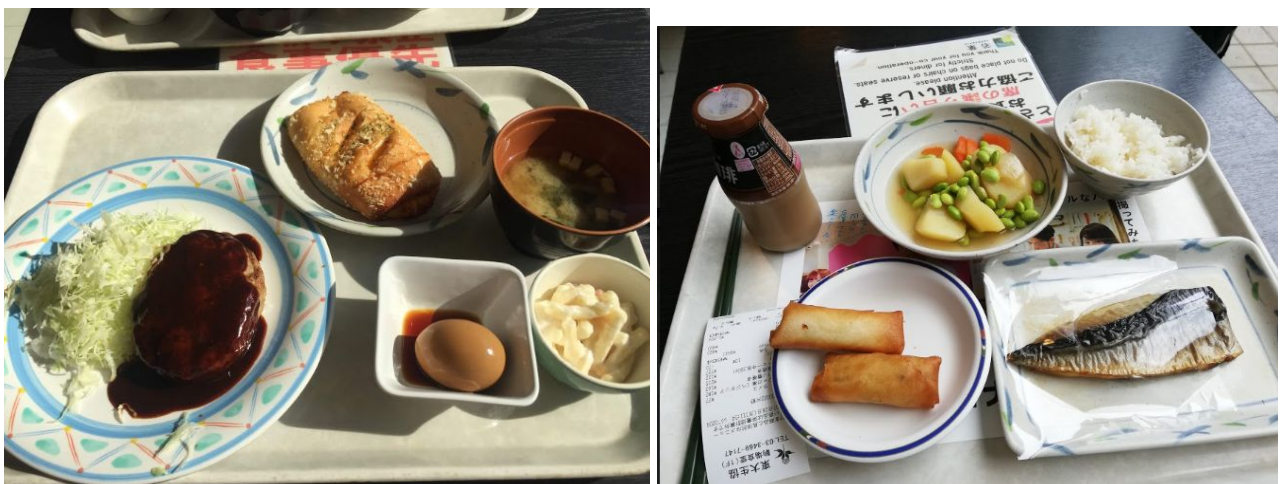
Food (食べ物) :

- 1.) The food at the convenience stores is fantastic! The convenience stores are open 24/7 and offer a range of snacks and pre-made meals. I really recommend trying a tuna mayo rice ball (onigiri), they are delicious!



Image sourced from: <https://images.app.goo.gl/GVGA4HstGk7km51W8>

- 2.) When I was busy during the semester I often ate at the Komaba Campus Cafeteria. The food was very cheap and there was a range of healthy meals to choose from. The cafeteria has two storeys (I recommend checking out both, but I prefer the second floor).



- 3.) During my exchange I often ate out at local restaurants with my friends. There are a lot of 'family restaurants' and 'fast food' places. I personally loved Torikizoku, Matsuya and Mos Burger. Each offer very cheap set meals that are very delicious.



Favourite memories:

- 1.) **Hakone Trip-** During my semester break I went with my friend to Hakone; a hot spring haven just out of Tokyo. We both brought the Odakyu Free 2 Pass and were able to use it to ride the train to Hakone. On the way we stopped at Gora Station and rode the cable car and then the ropeway to the bus stop to the hotel. We arrived a little late so all of the shops were closed and there were no convenience stores close so we found a 24/7 hot food vending machine.

After eating some food we got changed and headed to the onsen (indoor hot spring). The hotel we stayed at had four private hot springs each with varying levels of water temperature. They were so relaxing!

In the morning we rode a boat across the lake and then brought some gloves and heat packs from the convenience store. We packed the heat packs under our gloves and then hired bikes for the day. (1000Y for one day). We then rode alongside the lake through the forest back to the boat terminal. One the way we stopped off and had a look at a temple which was so pretty.

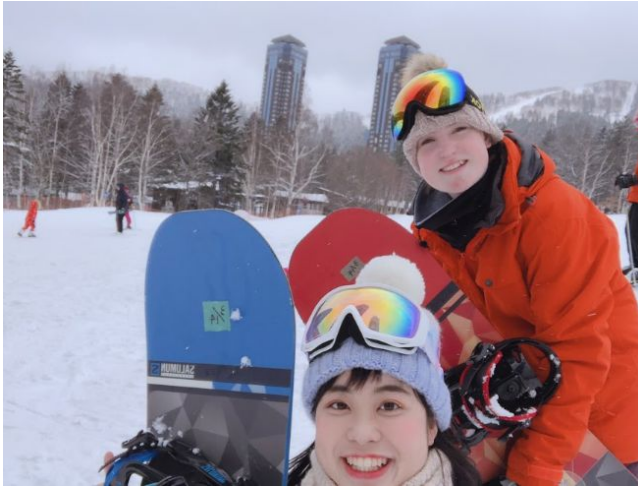
Once arriving back we returned our bikes and grabbed a hot drink with a fantastic view of the waterside. We then rode the ropeway back to Gora and then visited Gora Park. We then caught the train back to Tokyo.



2.) **Hokkaido Snowboarding Trip**- So during my exchange I met a Japanese girl at the skatepark who was skateboarding with her friend. Together with my friend I taught them all how to ollie and then afterwards she asked to catch up again. After catching up a couple times to skate she invited me to try Taïdo. During a training session she suggested a trip to Hokkaido to go snowboarding as I had never been before.



So we packed our gear (not the same day as the Taïdo training) and flew up to Hokkaido where we stayed at Hoshino Resort located right on the ski field. We were so lucky because our hotel got upgraded to the 29th floor. We quickly got changed and then hit the slopes. I was absolutely useless on the first day and spent most of the time on the ground. Afterwards we went to check out the Ice Village. They even had an ice slide where we could ride down on inflatable rings- so much fun!



Alongside snowboarding each day we would wake up and have a buffet breakfast down at the kitchen area. The view was incredible and there was so much selection in terms of the food options.

At night we also checked out their indoor pool and relaxed in the outdoor onsen which was great because my muscles were often sore from snowboarding.

- 3.) **Taiwan (Penghu/Kinmen) Trip-** After arriving back from Hokkaido I caught a plane to Taiwan to meet my French friend who had been travelling there with our other friend. Unfortunately our Chinese Canadian friend had to head back to China so we were both in Taiwan not being able to speak any Chinese whatsoever.



Together we first headed to Penghu (a small island off the coast of Taiwan) where we hire push bikes and rode around the island visiting local beaches and temples. During our adventure we ended up on the motorway which was also pretty interesting. We then got super hungry and went to a local restaurant where

we met a lovely lady who helped us order some food and offered to give us a tour of the island. Although a little dodgy we agreed and left our bikes outside the restaurant. We got to check out the beach and then she offered to show us around the following day.



The following day she rolled up to our hotel (we were waiting with bubble tea in hand- we had 2 every day because they were so cheap and delicious!) and took us on a tour of the island. When we went to the Rainbow bridge we saw some local skateboarders and I told her that skateboarding was my hobby. She then organised for me to have a turn on the skateboard and locals from the nearby playground area came over to take photos. A little embarrassing, but an unforgettable experience!



She then took us to a local fish market, street market and brought us stinky tofu which was very interesting. I'd recommend trying it once, but only once and only a little at a time.

The next day my friend and I flew to Kinmen where we went on a mission to find some food and accidentally order A LOT of dumplings. After my friend left back to Japan I had one more day in Kinmen before I headed to Nagoya. So I ended up hiring a moped (no license required!) and spent the next day exploring Kinmen. I had no plan and just indicated in when I saw a sign that looked interesting. Spots included; a giant lake, war tunnel (where soldiers hid boats during the war), a number of beaches and a local village where I was invited for dinner by a local hotel owner. When I asked him if he wanted me to bring anything we simply asked for two bottles of cola so I had to go on a mission to pick up some cola on my moped. The night was fantastic and afterward he interviewed me about my trip to Kinmen and taught me some Chinese.



4.) **MIFA International Friendship Network Cultural Ambassador New Zealand Presentation-** During my second semester I applied to be a MIFA International Cultural Ambassador and fortunately was selected to give a 15min entirely in Japanese about New Zealand. With the help of two fantastic mentors I worked on this presentation for around 6 weeks and then presented about New Zealand to around 60 local Japanese residents. It was an absolutely amazing experience and I learnt so much (both Japanese, but also about New Zealand and the view of New Zealand from the perspective of Japanese residents (from all different age groups)).





5.) HandsOnTokyo Volunteering- Elderly Home, Running with the Blind at Yoyogi and Basketball with students with intellectual disabilities- During my exchange I volunteered at a Japanese elderly home. I was a little nervous my Japanese wouldn't be enough to communicate as this was quite early on in my exchange, but it wasn't a problem at all and I really enjoyed taking the elderly out to the park to give candy to the children around Halloween.

When I was in NZ I often joined running events and was keen to get involved in Japan, but didn't know who to contact. But when I saw HandOnTokyo ran a volunteer event to assist blind runners in training at Yoyogi Park I was super keen to get involved. Again, I was a little nervous about my language ability (even more dangerous this time), but was paired up with another volunteer and really enjoyed getting to know my runner and hearing her travels all over the world.

Lastly, back in NZ I also loved playing basketball at the local courts, but given Japan's population there were hardly any public courts and the private courts had to be hired- a process I had no clue about. Despite this, I joined up to assist in some basketball training session for local students with intellectual disabilities. This was a fantastic opportunity to speak Japanese, practice basketball and most importantly meet some local students in Japan.



6.) Meeting Abe-san and going activities out in Saitama (Children Cafeteria): During a trip one of my friends was invited to the home of a lovely Japanese lady called Abe-san. As he was a little nervous about the trip he invited me and our Australian/Chinese friend and headed out on a train for 45min out to Saitama. Not only did Abe-san invite us into her home she became my Japanese grandma and invited me to many events held out in Saitama including a monthly children's cafeteria where lunch was prepared at one of Abe-san's friends house and served to children in the community with disabilities. I was also invited to a cultural day between South Africa and Japan- even through I'm from NZ but enjoyed being dressed in a kimono, eating tempura and making origami fortune tellers.



7.) **Teaching English at a community center out in Saitama-** After being introduced by Abe-san I met Abe-san's teacher who invited me to some of her English classes to teach about New Zealand. After my lesson we would go out for lunch and discuss all different topics in both English and Japanese. During one of these sessions I also met an author of many Japanese children's books and shared my idea for a childrens book. Since they all like my concept I am currently in the process of creating and publishing the book. Abe-san's teacher also invited my friends and I over for lunch and showed us the pottery she had made and displayed around her home. She also took us to a local park to see the cherry blossoms and also to see a small shrine which was very beautiful. Towards the end of my exchange I was also invited to learn how to some pottery.





One of the students at Abe-san's teacher's class also invited me to her home to teach me about Japanese calligraphy. This was so much fun, but I wasn't very good.



8.) **'Hisashiburi Trip' from Tokyo to Fukuoka with New Years in Fukuoka.** -In Japanese 'Hisashiburi' means 'long time no see'. During high school I befriended some exchange students from Japan and since I came to Japan, I went on a big trip to catch up with some of them. Here's how it went:

Over the Christmas break I caught a flight to Kobe to catch up with my Japanese friend who I met in New Zealand during her high school exchange. We were super lucky because the day I arrived it snowed for the first time in the year (In Kobe). I stayed with her family for a couple of days and during the trip we went for a day to Kyoto to check out the temples and try takoyaki (fried octopus balls). When we returned from our day trip my friend's dad was outside cooking us yakitori (grilled skewered chicken) which was super lovely of him.





The next day I caught a shinkansen (bullet train) to Fukuoka and stayed with another of my Japanese friends that I met in New Zealand. Staying with her and her family was so much fun and we celebrated New Years together. It was a very traditional experience filled with mikan (mandarins), soba (noodles), and a lovely New Year's lunch. Every year at New Years family's give their children some money in a small envelopes. I was so surprised because my friend's family had prepared an envelope just for me. After lunch we went to visit a large temple in Fukuoka and ate a bunch of local food which was delicious.



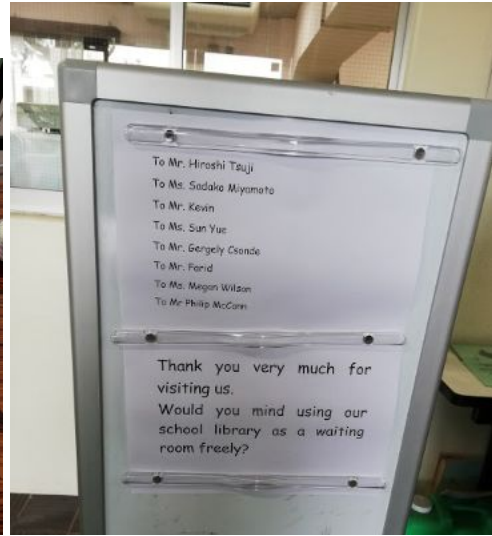


The next day I caught up with another friend and ate brunch at her mother’s workplace. We then went shopping, visited a temple and ate some yummy pastries at my friend's workplace. It was awesome to catch up with her!

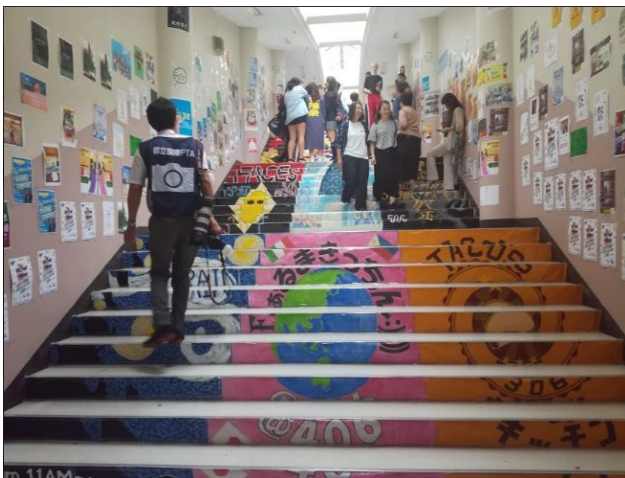


9.) Meguro School Visit- During the semester I signed up to visit a local Junior High School where I would present about New Zealand and then participate in activities organised by students. During my presentation I organised a game where students would choose true or false in response to some facts about New Zealand. I was surprised to see that the majority of students thought that everyone in New Zealand owns a pet sheep and that my family pet sheep is named Barry! It was also super cool to surprise the students with my ability to use chopsticks despite playing dumb during their tutorial.





10.) Visiting a local 'Bunkasai'. - A couple of days after arriving I looked out my window to see the high school across the road was hosting some kind of event. Curious, I invited my neighbour and we went downstairs to check it out. At the door we asked if we could enter and it turned out to be a culture day where students from each classroom would decorate their rooms and organise activities for their peers (not foreigners) to get involved in. But despite the event not really being for 20 year old university students we had a great time and got involved participating in the horror maze, listening to their shows and buying some snacks they had made.



What I learnt:

- 1.) It is so important to swallow your pride and ask for help. Learning Japanese is very difficult and there are so many unwritten in Japan that only the locals know. It is so important to ask questions respectfully and to take the time to listen to those around you.
- 2.) Although Japan is a technology giant there are aspects of Japanese society that are years behind. The big two are the separation between the Japanese and foreigners and the second is the gender difference. Women are largely expected to follow their husbands and take on reception or domestic roles in society which I personally disagree with. Some foreigners are also tokenized and are seen as a source of free English tutoring. I really disliked these aspects.
- 3.) The Japanese work life is hard. It only takes a trip to Shibuya Station to see the thousands of Japanese salary men coming home from work; all in identical suits, probably making a decent living but looking so sad. They wake up early, ride the train, work all day, ride the train home, eat some food, sleep (a little) and then wake up and do the same thing again. I personally could never fit this lifestyle as I personally value a strong work/life balance. (Don't even get me started on overtime work! -it's crazy!)

What I would do differently:

- 1.) When you arrive at the airport they ask if you would like to work in Japan. (You're allowed up to 20h per week on a student visa). I couldn't quite understand this, and insisted that I was strictly here as a student. Because I said that I didn't want to work, I couldn't - but this prevented me from obtaining any small paid jobs/ internships.
- 2.) Although I got involved in a few community projects I mainly did this in the second semester so I wish I organised this a little earlier to make the most of my time.
- 3.) I gave up trying to join a club at my university as I couldn't communicate fluently and I often felt like a communicational burden to the group. But if I go back, I would make more of an effort to get involved with Japanese students my age.

Other recommendations:

- 1.) Make sure to write a travel/ exchange diary! It was awesome to look back on and to stick small souvenirs inside.
- 2.) Buy a Pasmo cover with a bungee cord from Daiso! The best purchase I have ever made in my exchange life!
- 3.) Go to Daiso or any other 100Yen shops to buy things for setting up your dorm. They have a bunch of useful (and useless but cute/weird) things. Nitori and Muji are also helpful in setting up!

Other highlights:

- **University of Tokyo Komaba Festival**



- **TEDxYouth_Tokyo**



- **Japanese Traditional Drumming Performance**



- **Ueno Park Swan Boat Ride**



- Visiting a variety of temples in Tokyo



- Meeting some iconic kiwi's



- JASSO Education New Zealand Seminar in Akihabara (University of Otago Promotion)

