



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Tokyo
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 2024
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts with Honours
Major(s)	Japanese

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Seminar in Global Liberal Arts II (4)	English	6.66 points
Seminar in Global Liberal Arts II (44)	English	6.66 points
Seminar in Global Liberal Arts II (41)	English	6.66 points
Japanese (103): Tutorial (L3-L4)	Japanese/English	6.66 points
Integrated Japanese II (14) (L4)	Japanese	13.33 points

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points 40 points

Any comments about these papers?

I found the Japanese language classes much more intensive than the ones back in Otago. The materials used (i.e. textbooks) were also exclusive to the University of Tokyo, so the contents taught was quite different from what was taught back home (in Otago).

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

It was definitely more lecture-focused and less discussion and hands-on experience. Each period was also 1.5 hours long instead of the typical 50 minutes per period at Otago University. The expectation for each class required a significant amount of preparation and pre-reading.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in Komaba Lodge (Main).

Pros: Own bathroom, decent size, easy access to laundry and dryer, warm (at least for my room)

Cons: Had to pay rent by physical cash, couldn't hang out in the common rooms past 10pm, couldn't hold 'parties' or gatherings with large groups of people without submitting an application prior (which they could also reject)

Money matters

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

Accommodation: 69,800 yen/month (including Wi-Fi and electricity)

Insurance: 9840 yen for 5 months (National Health Insurance)

Flights: 800 NZD (one way)

Food: If eating out, average ~1200-1300 yen/meal

If convenience store food, ranges from 450-600 yen/meal

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

If you are staying in Japan for longer than 6 months, I recommend getting a bank account in Japan – Japanese credit cards are very useful, and they often do not allow foreign credit cards as payment methods. If not, an international Visa card should work.

Personally, I used the Wise card and a combination of physical cash. Physical cash is also very important if you need to pay bills (i.e. rent), and a lot of places only accept cash or PayPay (a Japanese payment method).

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes. It was relatively straightforward, though it required quite a bit of documentation for submission. The only inconvenience I had was that I had to pick up my visa in person at the Embassy of Japan in New Zealand (which was Wellington). It may take some time (months) before the visa is processed, so it's best to get it done as early as possible.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes. The National Health Insurance is a nation-wide mandatory insurance. However, the university also offers additional coverage (you will need to enquire about the fees and payment methods).

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

There are a lot of events for international students organized by the GSA department in Tokyo University, such as festivals, outings, food and drink parties, etc. They also have co-curricular activities categorized as either サークル (circles) or 部活動 (co-curricular activities). The former is a more casual and relaxed type of group, whereas the latter is often competitive and requires more commitment. Circles are formed and led by students, and each circle has a unique theme/focus. I would recommend getting into a circle or participating in the activities the GSA hosts frequently.

What was the university/ city like?

The campus I went to (Komaba) was relatively peaceful and quiet, save for the train. The university campus isn't anything too old or too fancy. It's much smaller than the Hongo (main) campus, however, I did struggle initially to find my way around the different buildings. The signage (or lack of) can be too vague and a bit confusing.

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

If you intend on living in Komaba Lodge or nearby, Shimokitazawa's really nice! My friends also recommend Kichijoji and Sangenjaya (slightly further).

Shibuya is also very near (you can even walk there!), but it gets very crowded.

Shibuya, Shinjuku, Omotesando and Ikebukuro are all areas near the Komaba campus and are worth visiting especially if you want to get some shopping done.

For cheap dine-outs, Saizeriya for sure (meals as low as 300 yen!) and the trio: Yoshinoya, Sukiya and Matsunoya (with Matsunoya having free rice refills).

I didn't really eat much variety to be honest ^^;; I mostly ate convenience-store food...

There's usually student-discounted rates for karaoke, and there's this thing called 'free time' where you can sing from 11pm-5am (you can leave anytime) at a fixed price (per person) in Manekineko, and from 8pm-5am in Joysound if I remember correctly – the prices are cheap and these places offer free flow drinks (Manekineko has free flow soft serve ice cream!) so do go if you're up for it.

There's lots of student discounts everywhere, actually – if you're unsure, always ask if they have 学割 (gakuwari).

Don't be afraid to travel out of the city as well, there's so many cool places to explore! I went to Kawagoe, Kamakura and Hakone, and they're wonderful areas to explore (albeit cold). I recommend going to Hakone to go see Mount Fuji!

Any tips for future students?

Be proactive – I missed out on a lot of things because I was too shy and stayed in my dorm pretty much every day, haha...

It would be very advantageous to know (at least) basic Japanese when you come to Japan, especially if you are alone, so please prepare! A lot of places don't speak English or have menus entirely in Japanese. Alternatively, befriend people who can speak both English and Japanese!

If you intend on taking Japanese language classes on exchange, it's best to brush up on whatever you've learnt previously before taking the placement test – the way they test is very different from

what Otago does. They also only give you a short time to answer each question, so try to answer everything rather than skip a question!

Overall Experience

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

I unfortunately was unable to fully immerse myself in the exchange as I was too focused on my studies and catching up with my classes; however, I did manage to have my fair share of fun in Japan. Thanks to my friends, I found out that there were a lot of unique events, festivals and affordable trips to areas outside of the city – as long as you do a bit of online research and/or ask around for recommendations! I also found Japan a very safe and good place to travel around by myself even when it's really late out at night, as bars and convenience stores will always be open during those times, so the streets will never be completely empty or dark. I also really liked that most (if not all) convenience stores in Japan are open 24/7, and because my dorm was within a walking distance to a variety of convenience stores (Lawson, My Basket, 7-11), I never had to worry about running out of food or drinks, or grabbing a quick meal or snack whenever I felt peckish in the wee hours of the morning. I was also able to travel to areas that seemed so far away from where I stayed because the transport system is much more accessible and efficient than Dunedin (as Dunedin does not have a railway system and buses are few), so I even managed to do whole-day trips to places outside of Tokyo and still manage to make it back home before the last train, even to places as far as Hakone! I also enjoyed the variety of food that Japan had to offer, and even more so because the price of food is significantly cheaper than Dunedin, so I was not afraid to splurge a bit more occasionally, though I did stick mostly to places such as Saizeriya and Matsunoya, where I could gorge out on multiple dishes without breaking the bank.