

TOKYO UNIVERSITY

Semester 1 & 2 2016

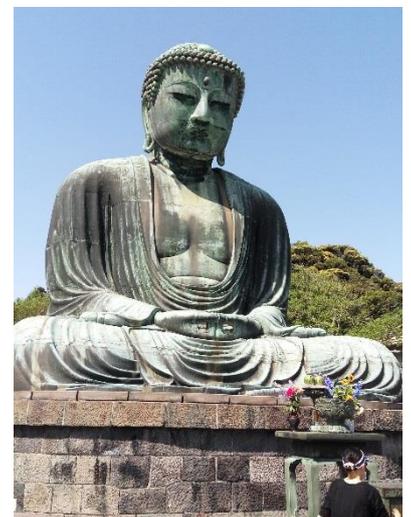
BA Japanese & BSci Physics

First things first; I would not class myself as a “regular” exchange student. I went to Japan because I wanted to train at the top Aikido dojo’s in the world with the best teachers. I spent almost every day at the Headquarters Aikido dojo located in Tokyo, and undertook at least 10 trips to Nagoya to train with a friend of mine and his teacher who is a VERY impressive Aikido practitioner. This meant that I did not spend all my time making friends and exploring the city, I spent my time training. When I did go out I found it to be exhausting most of time, but I guess sight-seeing isn’t really what I am in to.

What I enjoyed more were the day to day regular things that could have happened right here in New Zealand, but took on a new novelty in a different county. Studying at the local Starbucks – a 20 minute walk from my dorm in Kichijoji, shopping for wacky socks, going to the movies with my friends in both English and Japanese, or planning lunch at the busy ramen shops where you have to wait in line for an hour or more! It was the little things that really made me enjoy my time there, and made me feel like I had developed some semblance of a life. The most rewarding experiences were drinking outside the conbini after Aikido training in Nagoya, going out for drinks with my Aikido teachers after class. It was really exciting to be able to form these kind of relationships.

I’m not saying that I didn’t do any of the tourist things – I went to Disney world and Universal studios, I climbed Mt Fuji and took photos outside the shrines in Kyoto, but they weren’t what made my day to day life in Tokyo really exciting. It was finding like-minded people who had a passion or an interest in what I was excited about, be it anime, Aikido or ramen.

Below are some picture of what I did in Tokyo:



And now for some handy tips:

Rakuten

A website that you can book buses for, it is all in Japanese – but once you have made an account and booked your first bus, it is very easy to follow (I used it every time I went to Nagoya). Just be warned to know exactly where the bus terminal is before you set out. One of the cheaper bus tickets I bought was not in the Shinjuku bus station but slightly outside it. Wandering around in the dark when your phone is running out of battery is not a fun time.

Wifi and data

Phone usage in Japan is very different to how it is in New Zealand. Nobody that I knew used texting or calls. You can either buy a portable wifi box for your phone and computer or (what I did) was to buy a sim card from Sakura mobile (about \$28NZD for 3GB of data per month). The only thing was I could then only use my laptop plugged into the Ethernet cable at my dorm, or the ones at the university (Starbucks always has free wifi and so do the convenience stores if you are ever stuck). On that note there is this great thing called “eduroam” which is internet for universities anywhere in that world, unfortunately I couldn’t for the life of me figure out what login in to use since for some reason Otago doesn’t dabble in that.

Tokyo university campus

There are two campuses, one where most students spend their first two years (Komaba), and one where most of the facilities are and where students go when they choose their major (Hongo). Since you are an exchange student you have the option of taking classes at both campuses. These campuses are an hour apart! So plan you course wisely.

Tokyo University – selecting classes

The prospectus is very confusing and not always accurate. Make sure you select classes under the big green INTERNATIONAL bubble. But don’t spend hours like I did finding classes to cross-credit back since it is subject to change, but find something vaguely suitable and just get in touch with heads of department when you know what is going on once you have arrived.

<http://catalog.he.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ug-index?usep=true>

Dorms

I had a dorm (RUTIL) which included power, internet (via Ethernet), breakfast and dinner for about \$800NZD a month. I know people who lived in Mitaka dorm and paid less than half the price – but they were also much further away from the station and would have to bus or bike to get there, where as I could walk in 5 minutes. So it depends on what you want. There are also rooms on campus with all international students for a bit more than my dorm – but they didn’t have to commute. My dorm included local (Japanese) students and internationals, and I really enjoyed coming home to meals.

It's okay not to feel happy all of the time

I wish someone had told me this since all you get from most people is the rosy tinted view of exchange. Life does just continue while you are overseas, there will be stress from university and all other parts of your life the same as in Dunedin and while you are having this great adventure, sometimes it's okay to just sit in your room and not want to do anything. ☺

FINAL SUGGESTIONS:

- Go to a baseball game with some friends, you can find cheap tickets and are allowed to bring your own drink in as long as you pour then into one of the provided cups at the gate. The atmosphere is just amazing!
- Kichijoji and Shimokitazawa are two awesome little towns with lots to see. Both are on the Inokashira line which connects with Shibuya.
- Karaoke is a must! Don't go in the major centers (so expensive) but in Kichijoji and Shimokitazawa there are ones where you can take your own drinks and some have student deals/deals after 11, or if you go in the daytime (sometimes with cheap ice-cream as part of the deal).
- The Ghibli Museum is fantastic! You have to book a month in advance, but the tickets aren't expensive.