



Student Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Otago degree(s):	Master of Planning	Major(s)	
Host University:	University of Tokyo	Semester & Year of Exchange	Otago's Semester Two 2017, Tokyo's Semester 2 (A1/A2)

Academics/Course load

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
3716-161 Basic I Integrated Japanese of Urban Engineering B	English	-	(6) = 50 points
3717-018 Studio Work in Urban Development 3	English	-	(2) = 15 points
3717-019 Studio Work in Urban Development 4	English	-	(2) = 15 points
3717-026 Urban planning in Developing Countries	English	-	(2) = 15 points
3717-031 Regional Planning	English	-	(1) = 7.5 points

*(2.5 UTokyo Credits = 1x Otago 400 level paper (20 points), therefore, 2 credit papers are 15 points, 1 credit papers are 7.5 points)
 **Also note that these are graduate courses and were only available to graduate students

Japan and Tokyo are truly amazing, and looking back now, I can honestly say that my time at the University of Tokyo was a blast! Your time on exchange will be one of the best times of your life and when people say that it will change you, they are completely right. I hope the following points may help you as you on your way through your exchange journey towards your stay at UTokyo.

1 Before you Leave for UTokyo

1.1 Do some Research

I was a bit slow before I left for Japan and didn't really do a lot of research on things that I could do once I arrived. I would recommend booking a tour or trip before university starts to get a feel of Japan/Tokyo, a great way to unwind before classes start and also to get your bearings within the city (if you are like me and it's your first time in such a large city). I used TokioTours, you can find them in Facebook, and my tour guide was fantastic! Took me to some touristy places, as well as some more lesser known sights that were quiet and cultural.

I also took the Summer School Japanese paper, so I could use some limited Japanese when I arrived. If like me, you don't speak Japanese but are willing to learn, then learn as much as you can before you arrive as this will certainly aid in your daily interactions.

I would also recommend flying into Haneda airport, as this is much closer to the centre of Tokyo compared with Narita. If you do fly into Narita, you can take the Skyliner train to Ueno station; it's a little more expensive, though is faster and with the fewest stops. It costs around ¥2500.

Another tip would be preparing to be confused by all the online information that you will be using while at UTokyo, whether it be admin, language course, or extracurricular stuff organised by the University. There seems to be a different site used for everything and keeping track of them can be difficult!

1.2 Visas & Insurance

I applied for my visa via mail, and it took around 2 and a half weeks to be processed (from memory). I picked my visa and passport up in person from Wellington, though I do believe it can be mailed to you. I would double check this. Also, the visa processing was free.

Because you will be in Japan longer than three months, you are required to go on the national health insurance system, even if you have insurance of your own. This will be posted to you (once you've complete ward office procedures), and you can just pay for the number of months you will be staying. This can be paid at any Lawson.

2 Courses at UTokyo

As I entered UTokyo as USTEP Type G Student, all of my classes were at Hongo Campus. I found the most informative courses were the two Studio courses (combined into one course) about eco cities within one of Tokyo's smaller cities. These were the most work intensive though they were interesting and engaging.

Firstly, beware that not all classes start at the beginning of the semester. Three of my courses started after October the 18th (semester starts Sept 21st). Most classes will take place in the afternoon which leaves your mornings free (depending on whether/which Japanese language course you take). Most of these classes started around 3pm, so most of the weeks mornings were free. The language course started at 8:30am on two mornings, though I did find this very valuable, given my level of Japanese and because of how close I lived to the university campus.

Secondly, the work load was not overly strenuous. I found it to be significantly lighter than that of Otago (compared to writing my dissertation and taking Plan 535). For my language class, the exam was just to present a short speech in Japanese about any topic of your choosing, and you were able to have the speech on hand. For my other course work, I had to write one five-page report and deliver presentations on planning within New Zealand. The Studio course require many presentations and posters.

3 Accommodation

I was unsuccessful in getting a place within University accommodation, but this had both positives and negatives. The negative aspect was that it was initially difficult to make friends as it wasn't as easy to meet people, especially since classes didn't begin at the beginning of the semester. A positive of not getting into the University housing was



that I was able to get accommodation that was a 10 minute walk to Hongo campus (right near Ueno Park!), rather than having to take the three train route for 40 – 50 minutes each way, every day as most of the student accommodation is close to Komaba campus.

I found accommodation using the Oakhouse website. The site is in English and offers many accommodation styles, and you can search for these by the map to see what is near to campus (if that is what you are interested in). My accommodation was a sharehouse, which is like a studio room with shared facilities. This accommodation was pricy, though the quick commute time to University, and the lovely housemates made up for it. Nearly all house mates were international students, either studying at the University of Tokyo, a language school, or another University. I was initially on an all-female floor, and to be honest, it wasn't a good time, so I would recommend avoiding this if possible. My house mates were honestly lovely and it was great to meet so many people of different nationalities and who were in Tokyo for a number of reasons.

4 Money matters

I was paying ¥71,000 per month for rent (also with an initial one-off, non-refundable fee of ¥30,000). For this price you could get your own apartment further away from Uni, though I wanted to be close and to have a more social living experience, so be sure to look around for a place that suits you and your budget.

I was spending around ¥10,000 every two to two and half weeks on food and shopping (if I was trying to extend my money...). Fruit and vegetables are expensive within Japan (though they are super tasty!), but generally meals are incredibly cheap and good food places can be found everywhere! For the last two months of my stay I hardly ever cooked because going out for food was soo cheap and easy. Japan is also one of the best most convenient countries to travel! I thoroughly loved traveling while I was there and this is where most of my budget went.



To access my funds, I just used my credit card. As Japan is a cash based society, it's easier to carry cash with you, as often places will only accept cash. My card was accepted at all 7eleven ATMS, and some Lawson ATMS, so be wary of this when you need to get cash out that not all ATMs accept foreign credit or debit cards.

5 Extra-curricular/Social Activities

Tokyo is a truly amazing city! You will honestly not run out of things to do, while not even leaving the city (though I highly recommend exploring further if you get the chance!).

For graduate students, initially there aren't many meet and greets. The orientations don't happen at the very start of the semester, which is a bit of a pain, but they are very helpful. I would highly recommend liking the "TGIF Todia Global Interaction Friends" page on facebook, as they organised a trip away at the start of the semester. There is also International Friday Lunch, where international students and Japanese students can meet up and just chat, which is also pretty nice. The university also offers field trips and experiences, through the email mailing list, that you sign up for when you go through the procedures of signing up for orientation seminar.



I highly recommend going to Kyoto and Nara if you get the chance! I loved this part of Japan. I have also been told that Osaka is a lovely place to visit for a weekend trip. There are so many places you can visit and they are often really easy to access, either by bus or bullet train (highway bus from Shinjuku Bus terminal is pretty cheap, though not as fast as the trains obviously). Fuji is as beautiful as you'd imagine; the lake tours that are offered are pretty worthwhile. I really enjoyed Tokyo Dome, and actually rated it a bit higher than either Disneyland/ DisneySea, seeing as it was far less crowded and the lines were shorter. If you are a keen roller-coaster fan, I recommend Fuji Q Highlands, this park had some amazing roller coasters and great views of Mount Fuji while you are up on them!

6. Overall Experience



My time in Japan was initially tough. I arrived a bit underprepared in terms of knowledge of the city and in terms of the university term system. I was homesick for the first time in my life! My classes had a staggered start, and some didn't even start until mid October! I found booking a city tour with a private guide really worthwhile, and then eventually exploring more on my own really beneficial (I just needed to brave up and get used to doing things by myself!). I found that going on some student trips were a great way to make friends, seeing as I was not living in student accommodation, and it certainly was. I made some absolutely lovely and life long friends and we still keep in contact now. Japan is a truly crazy and amazing place, but the people are incredibly kind. I definitely recommend having a large fund to support yourself, as the more money you have, the more travelling you can do! We travelled to Kyoto, Nara, Nikko, Kusatsu, Nagano, Kamakura, and

Enoshima to name a few. We even got to travel to Vietnam in the final month of my stay! The people you meet will be lovely and to get the chance to go on trips like these really just requires being around at the right time, or just simply being up for the opportunity. Japan is honestly amazing, and Tokyo is such a vibrant city that you will find yourself fall in love with it in no time!