

Japan

The city I've been to is in Japan, near Tokyo, but it actually isn't in Tokyo itself but just next to it called Kodaira City about an hour away of central Tokyo. The University was called Hitotsubashi University and it actually is one of the most prestigious universities in Japan. When Japanese people asked where I studied, the answer Hitotsubashi University usually was a familiar one to them and they immediately thought I was a smart student. The period I spend there is a little bit conflicting with my courses back at Erasmus University. The semester starts at the end of September and lasts until the beginning of February. Whereas the courses at ESE Erasmus University start in January already. So I missed out quite some lessons. However it is possible to leave Japan earlier if wanted. By choosing the right courses and asking teachers in advance whether the final project can be done before the end of the semester you might be able to leave earlier. This is what some exchange students at Hitotsubashi University did.

Preparation

Before you come to Japan there are plenty of things to take care of. You will get send a bunch of forms through email which you have to fill in and return via email and some even by post. The most annoying form was the health checkup form. There needed to be done a chest X-ray to test for tuberculosis along with some other measurements like eyesight, etc. One of the forms that needed to be hand in needed a proof of English proficiency attached to it. I myself took the TOEFL test (which is very expensive) and I thought this test was necessary but after arriving in Japan I heard that a TOEFL test was not necessary and that other language proficiency tests might be sufficient, such as the test offered by Erasmus for about 90 euros. It might be worth to double check this since it can save you a lot of money. After submitting everything it will take up quite some time before you get accepted. But after receiving your letter of acceptance and an official document stating that you will start studying in Japan, you can apply for a visa at the embassy in The Hague. This process is really easy and fast. Just take the required documents to the embassy and you will be able to pick up your visa the next day. Also now you can apply for accommodation. It is all very easy to follow, because you will get all the necessary documents send by email. Basically everyone that applies for accommodation will be accepted and put in the dorm which is about 20 minutes by bike away from the University and 30 minutes by train. Just make sure you apply in time. Also you have to submit flight details, but they will clearly state what information they need and before when it has to be submitted. So do not worry too much about the preparation it is all really straightforward. Just make sure you do everything in time.

Arrival

Hitotsubashi University will start its semester at a certain date with the introduction week. You will have to move in at a particular date before the introduction week. For us this was the 22th of September. You could either choose to travel to the campus on your own, or take a bus from Narita airport provided by the university. It left on the 22th of September at 1PM and thus I chose to arrive at 21th to the Airport and stay one night at a hotel. It might be easiest to take the bus provided by the university unless you plan on going to Japan a little bit earlier and you are already familiar with the train system. After taking the bus and arriving at the university dorm, we were shown to our rooms and had some time to settle in and meet your flat mates. The introduction week started the day after we arrived and it contained a lot of administrative parts, such as registering at the city hall

and applying for a bank card. After the introduction week there was also an introduction week for the courses, which basically meant that you could try out a lot of courses to see which one you'd like to take for the semester. So do not worry about your courses too much before arriving in Japan, you will have quite some time to change and check out different courses.

Courses

As mentioned above, there will be a try out period to check out different courses at Hitotsubashi University. There is a wide variety of courses, just make sure to check out as much as possible, because something might be really interesting. For instance I myself took the following courses: Basic Seminar A, Basic Seminar B, Banking and Finance, Japanese, Explore Japan Seminar and Special Topics in Economics: Language and Virtual Reality.

Basic Seminar A was my most interesting course. The workload was very much spread over the semester and easy to keep up. It was about behavioral economics, the teacher has no clear outline of the course, but decides as the semester goes on what exactly will be looked upon. It was worth 2 credits. Basic Seminar B was also a very interesting course. It was about Value Investing. A course for beginners, but it teaches about how to look at balance sheets of companies and how to value them. A project is done about one company which has to be handed in at the end of the semester. Workload for this course was not too big either and the teacher was not too strict on attendance, which made it possible to make trips to Taipei or Okinawa for me. Also this course was worth 2 credits. Teachers for Basic Seminar A and B were not Japanese, making it easier to follow because of the better English. Then Banking and Finance, basically similar to Macroeconomics but it focuses on money supply and demand. Teacher was Japanese so hard to follow. I only attended one lecture, but this made me stress a little bit at the final exam. If you do not follow the lectures, make sure to start learning early for this course, because it has a lot of content. It is worth 4 credits. I also took a Japanese class, just the most basic one though. Can be difficult depending on how much time you put in and how good you are at languages. But you should not be able to fail this course unless you do not show any effort at all. It is also possible to take more intensive Japanese courses, but you will have to take first period five times a week, which can be tiring as a student. At the end of the semester your Japanese will be very limited, but it is fun to at least learn something about the language. It is worth 2 credits. Explore Japan Seminar was by far the easiest course, since it almost completely depended on attendance. You will have several activities throughout the semester and in the end a report has to be made about it. The activities are fun to do and you will meet some fun people in this course. Recommend this one for easy and fun credits. It is worth 2 credits. And finally Special Topics in Economics: Language and Virtual Reality. It was one of the easiest courses available as it had almost no workload besides an essay at the end of the semester. You will learn some interesting things about influence of language on the world, but the lessons can be very boring at times. (Depending on your interest in the topic). Teacher was good in English and course was worth 2 credits.

Finance

First and foremost I'd like to note that you will probably receive a Jasso scholarship if the exchange coordinator or you apply for it. This will be a very nice 80000 yen per month, for 5 months, adding up to 400000 yen or around 3000 euro!! Besides the financially lucrative Jasso, Hitotsubashi University also offers very cheap housing. In the dorm you will most likely pay anywhere between 100 and 200

euro per month depending on your personal energy use. These are two big reasons to choose for Hitotsubashi University as it leaves you a lot of money for travelling or whatever you will want to do with it. Japan is however a quite expensive country and a lot of money will go up to train fares. These are really expensive and since you live far from Tokyo center a day to Tokyo will cost a lot. But with the Jasso and cheap housing I did not watch my expenses that much, since I had enough money on my bank account every month. One extra tip: Get a bicycle! Do not use the train to go to university it will cost you around 5 euros per day at the university, whereas a bicycle can either be rented (But be quick!) for as low as 7 euros for a semester or bought for around 70 euros.

Daily Life

Daily life is not that complicated, on free days I made trips to different parts of Tokyo or Japan, and on long weekends I made trips to places like South Korea, Taiwan or Okinawa. (Okinawa is definitely worth going! Check out Zamami Island). Days where I had lessons could be a bit boring at times. Take your classes eat at the university café (very convenient) and go home, do some sports, nap, eat and in the night meet up with friends. It might be worth finding activities to do at night, since you will probably not hang out every night with friends. For the gym fanatics one extra tip: The gym that the dorm offers is very limited in its appliances. If you ask around though you may find out that the Football team has its own gym, where you can easily walk in to if they are not training. It contains some bench press, squat racks and a lot of barbells. You can use them to do your heavy exercises. Communicating with Japanese also might be difficult but you will have a Community Assistant (CA) living in your dorm, who can help you out with a lot of stuff in Japanese. There will also always be students who studied some Japanese and therefore are able to communicate with Japanese people. Do not worry too much about the language barrier. How many Japanese friends you will make depends on yourself but you can have a great time with your fellow exchange students.

All in all I highly recommend Japan as an exchange location as the difference in culture is very interesting to get to know. Japan also is a very safe location where you will easily feel at home. People are very polite and friendly and always want to help you out. You can definitely have a great time in Japan!

If you have any questions about Japan, feel free to e-mail me: marcel1111111@hotmail.com

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