

# Exchange Japan

Winter 2015-2016



### **General information**

Never had I expected to go on exchange to Japan. As I was not selected for my three preferred choices, I luckily got the opportunity to go to Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo. At that moment I knew barely anything about this country, but I decided to give it a go. Looking back at it, I am so glad I ended up here! While you might not think about going to Japan in the first place, I hope to spark some interest in this country with this report.

Before applying, there is one thing you should take into consideration. The semesters are different from the Erasmus University. The winter semester will start at the end of September and the final exams are in the last week of January or first week of February. While some students arranged something with the professors so they can return earlier, others choose to stay until the end.

### **Preparation**

The application process is not difficult, but requires a lot of paperwork. You have to submit mostly university related information, but you also have to make an x-ray scan. Make sure you prepare it on time because you have to send half of the forms by postal mail to them. By the end of June, they will inform you about the acceptance. After this, you need to go to the Japanese embassy to get a visa. I did not have to pay anything and could pick it up the next day.

Signing up for accommodation was straightforward. I choose to stay in the dormitories of the university, which I recommend because almost every exchange student lives there. I just filled in a form about my living preferences. One week before the start of the semester, they will inform you about your room number.

### **Arrival**

After you have arrived at the airport in Tokyo, you can get picked up by students of the university. In my case, as I arrived earlier in Tokyo, I choose to go by myself. It was not hard to find the way to the dorm, as the university provided a whole arrival information package.

Before the classes start, the university holds an introduction week. They basically provided us all the information we needed to know about living and studying here. We also went to the city hall for registration and opened a Japanese banking account. The university has organized and prepared everything well for us, so we didn't have to arrange anything by yourself.

### **Courses**

Hitotsubashi University requires you to take a minimum of 12 Japanese credits, which is more than sufficient for 24 ECTS. You can take courses from all the faculties, but you have to keep the requirements of Erasmus University in mind. I used all courses that I took to incorporate them into my elective space.

Classes of Hitotsubashi University are organized at small scale. Most classes consist of around twenty students. The university also offers a lot of seminars. During these classes you will actively discuss and talk about the subjects, which makes the classes more personal. Sometimes the professor invites the students for dinner or drinks after class.

As I wanted to travel a lot, I didn't take many seminars and chose most of the courses without attendance requirements. I took three finance-related courses: 'Banking and Finance' (8ECTS), 'Special topics in Commerce and Management VI' (4ECTS) and 'Intermediate course in finance'

(4ECTS). The level of the courses was quite similar compared to the courses of Erasmus University. I also took a course to learn Japanese: 'Basic Japanese 4-skills' (4ECTS). This class is fine if you want to get a little taste of the Japanese language. The level is really easy and the teachers are students who learned to become teacher, so they are really nice and patient. Their English can sometimes be poor, but they are always willing to help. However, if you have a serious interest in learning the language, I suggest taking the intensive course which has class everyday and a real teacher. Another course I took was 'Explore Japan Seminar' (4ECTS). I definitely recommend this one, everything you do in this class is fun. The professor takes the group every time on a trip to experience the culture. For instance, we went to a baseball game, attended a tea ceremony and had a kimono fitting. We finished this course with a weekend trip, where we went hiking and enjoyed onsen (Japanese hot springs).

Besides the courses, the university also offered us an internship program this semester. This consist of a two-week internship by one of the top leading companies in Tokyo. The internship is planned after the finals, in the last weeks of February. If you want to participate, you have to go through two selection rounds. Luckily I got selected and I look really forward to it. (When I am handing in this report, I haven't start the internship yet.)

### **Finances**

A lot of people think that living in Tokyo is quite expensive. In real life, this depends mostly on your own lifestyle. Most of the students get the JASSO Scholarship, which is 80,000 yen (600 euro) a month. This definitely reimbursed my expenses.

The rent of the dorm is 5900 yen (50 euro). Including the utility costs, like common fees, water, electricity etc., it will not be more than 180 euro. Internet in the room and a mobile contract cost around 10 euro a month for each. Students often go out for dinner. It is the same price as if you cook by yourself. Noodles and simple rice dishes cost around €4 - €8. However, if you go for another restaurant it will cost on average €20. The biggest cost drivers are the costs for transportation and social life. If you go into the city, a round trip costs around €10. Women pay €20, while men pay €35, for club entrance. A lot of students also choose to travel around during the weekends. Depending on how much you want to travel, you can expect to spend at least €200 per month on this.

#### Summary Costs

Rent: €180

Cost of living: €400

Transportation: €200

Social life and travel: €200 - €600

### **Daily life**

All the exchange students live in the same building at the campus. This makes it really fun and people often throw dorm parties. From the dorm to university is 20 minutes by bike, or two stops by train. A standard week consist of going to university in the first few days and going to travel or downtown during the weekends.

One of the remarkable things in Japan is that people barely speak English. It might be convenient to learn some Japanese before you go. However, I did not prepare for that and I did not have hard times living there. People are extremely polite and kind. They always try to help you. Japan is also one of the safest countries in the world. I have never felt unsafe here. You can leave your bag somewhere and no one will steal it. If you lose or forget something, you most likely get it back.

Living in Tokyo is great! The city is really big, you will never get bored. Japan as country has also lots to offer. There are many beautiful places. I went from snowboarding in the mountains to the tropical beaches of Okinawa. Besides travelling in Japan, you can also go abroad. Many students go to South-Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan for example. Tickets are relatively cheap and it will not take you more than four hours by plane to get there.

I would definitely recommend you to go on exchange in Tokyo. It is the place for the best sushi and you can find anime and manga things. However, Japan is so much more and different from that. Going on exchange was for me a unique and amazing experience. I got the opportunity to travel around, explore different cultures and made a lot of international friends. It turned out to be so much better than I could ever imagine.

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