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General information

From September (2016) till February (2017) I studied one semester at the Keio University in Tokyo, Japan. In this report, I will summarize my experience in Japan.

Preparation and arrival

First of all, Keio University is a private university. This means that all the other students (not the ones on exchange), meaning their parents, have to pay a fortune to get access to the university. In Japan, a Keio-boy stands for a rich young adult who is successful in studying, sports and music. So it is an great honor to study at this high class university. Applying is a bit of a hassle but in the end everything turns out well (in almost all cases).

Till the beginning of December I stayed in the Keio student dormitory, Shimoda. It is one of the best dorms to make new friends because there are a lot of shared rooms and kitchens. Early December I decided to move out of the dorm. I made acquaintance with all the cool people from Shimoda, the rent was high and I was travelling all the time. All in all, Shimoda is a nice place to stay, but once you have met new friends it is worth looking for a place closer to the center of Tokyo.

Courses

Studying in Japan is different from studying in the Netherlands. In most of the classes attendance is enough to pass the courses. However, I still need to get my grades. And because there are no mid and end terms, I honestly have no idea how I performed during my semester. This can be a bit annoying sometimes. It is hard to find out how much effort you have to put in your courses. I have heard from exchange students that passing courses doesn't cause you any problems. So I don't expect bad news when I get my grades by the end of March.

I took the courses 'Introduction to Finance', 'International Accounting', 'Estimating Volatility in high-frequency data', 'Corporate Finance', 'Case Analysis of Japanese Corporations' and 'Time Series Analysis'. The Finance courses have overlap with the B2 course 'Finance 1'. However 'Corporate Finance' is more focused on the daily news and this gives a different angle apart from the theoretical parts.

The econometric courses are given by a young teacher, who just finished his PhD. He knows a lot about the topics of the courses, but sometimes he is a bit difficult to understand. The final for both courses was a take-home exam.

The business course was my toughest course. Each week I had to write a three-page assignment about a Japanese corporation. According to other students, the courses were on a high level for a business course. However, I figured out during the course that business is not my expertise. For this reason, this was not my most enjoyable course.

There are a lot opportunities offered by the university to start learning Japanese. But if you are really interested in learning Japanese, I advise you to start already back home. The language is extremely difficult and most people who started in the beginning of the semester didn't improve a lot. A good start is learning the alphabets yourself, be prepared for a tough learning experience!

Each course at Keio is worth 2 Japanese credits. At Erasmus University one Japanese credit can be converted to 2,5 ECTS. So if I passed a my courses, I obtained 30 ECTS. I think the exam board won't let me incorporate 30 ECTS in my bachelor degree but I'll give it a try.

Finances

Although Japan is known as being expensive, it depends on what you want to do during your semester abroad. I decided to travel as much as possible to explore this fascinating country. So twice a month I planned a trip to interesting places. Not only in Japan but I've also been to South Korea and Philippines. Both absolutely worth a visit!

Clubbing in Japan is a super expensive thing. It is not an exception to pay over 20 euros only to enter a club. The prices of drinks in a club are so high that I most of the time skipped these (Strong Zero in the convenient stores are a perfect alternative). You will adapt quickly to the high prices and because the clubs are so amazing to visit, you will end up clubbing at least once a week. At least I did.

Is a hard to give an overview of what I exactly spent each month because it really depends your activities and plans.

Daily life

My first period in Japan could be called a culture shock. Everything is different and it takes quite some time to settle down. But after a few weeks, you'll find out that Japan is super convenient to live because everything is organized perfectly. The trains are always on time and people are super helpful when you're lost. It is a Japanese habit to guide you to your destination if it is within walking distance, people are extremely helpful!

By chance, I got in touch with English Adventures. This company organizes immersion camp for Japanese kids to learn English in a friendly and relaxed way. With them, I did an outdoor camp close to Mount Fuji. And later on I was asked to participate in two ski camps as a ski instructor in the Japanese mountains. Being a ski instructor for eight little Japanese girls must have been one of the best experiences I had in Japan. If you are going to Japan and interested in working for them, let me know. I still have contact with EA and I'm planning on working with them in the future again. The people are amazing and always looking for new staff.

I hope that this basic information will give you a little bit of an idea of my exchange. If you have any further questions about Japan or my exchange, don't hesitate to send me an email or to contact me through Facebook. I will be glad to help you, as the Japanese tradition has learned me during my truly inspiring exchange period.