

1. Introduction

In this report I will write about the semester I studied abroad in Japan. I studied abroad at Osaka University from April 2016 till August 2016. During this period I experienced a lot and learned a lot. In this report I will try to give a brief summary of my time in Osaka as well as the period before I left for Japan.

2. Before leaving

Language and culture

When I left for Osaka, my knowledge of the Japanese language was very poor. I only studied a little bit of basic Japanese. I would recommend students that are going to Japan to put in some more effort than I did to learn some of the language. I advise so because the English level of the Japanese people is very low. Even at the university most students could only speak some basic English. It was enough to get through daily life, but it will greatly enhance your experience in Japan if you are able to communicate with the people around you.

I learned basic Japanese during my stay in Japan through the Japanese classes that were offered by the university and I learned some by just living there. I was able to communicate well enough with the Japanese students and the residents of Osaka, however I would advise anyone to start learning the language before you leave. It will make your stay a lot more interesting.

I would also recommend students to learn a bit about Japanese culture before you leave. The Japanese society is a very high context culture. There are a lot of social conventions you should know of. You don't want to be that rude foreigner. Luckily there are a lot of sources on the internet that go into topics like this.

Application and Visa procedure

When you are selected by the University of Groningen you can start on your application for Osaka University. Try to do this as soon as possible so you won't get in trouble with the deadlines. Missing a deadline in Japan is serious and there probably will not be a way to fix it afterwards. Osaka University will inform you about housing as well and in my case the faculty of law took care of my application for the dormitory so I didn't have to do anything for this.

You will also be informed by Osaka University about the visa procedure. After I sent some documents to Osaka University they sent me a document. I had to take this document to the Japanese embassy in The Hague to apply for my visa. A day later I could pick up my visa there.

Extra tips

- Try to book a flight with a changeable return date. You might want to change your return date because of extending your stay or making some other travel plans.
- Get a converter for power sockets in Japan.
- For my phone I bought a simcard from IJmio in Japan. This simcard offered data only, but that was all I needed really.
- There's no need to get Japanese Yen before leaving for Japan. I arrived at Kansai International Airport (KIX) and there was an ATM at the airport. Also you can use your debit card (pinpas) to retrieve money at ATM's at 7-11 convenience stores, which are almost on every corner of every street.

3. When arriving

Upon your arrival at the airport you have to show your visa to the immigration officer and apply for a resident card immediately. You also have to fill out some forms if you plan on having a part-time job in Japan.

After you arrive at your dorm you have to do some paperwork there but the manager of your dorm will tell you about this.

As soon as possible you have to register yourself as a resident at the city hall. I lived in Toyonaka-shi so I had to go the city hall in Toyonaka-shi to register myself there. I also had to apply for national health insurance and enter the national pension plan.

4. Dorms

Osaka University has several dormitories. Some are male-only, some female-only and a mixed one. I didn't have a choice and I was placed in Seimei Dormitory. This is a male-only dorm that is near Toyonaka campus. I had all my classes at Toyonaka campus so this was very convenient.

Other dorms are Toneyama (near Toyonaka campus), Suita (near Suita campus) and Tsukumodai (somewhere in between). If you actually have a choice I would recommend applying for Tsukumodai. This is a mixed dorm and they have a large living room where they have parties etcetera. However, Seimei is very conveniently located near the campus and near train stations that can get you to the city center, but it is less lively than Tsukumodai.

5. Studying and living in Osaka

Finances

I would like to start by stating that Japan is an expensive country. Especially grocery shopping and drinking are pretty expensive. Luckily the campus has some restaurants where you can eat for pretty cheap and going out for dinner is relatively cheap anyway. Public transport is also pretty expensive and there is no discount for students. Apart

from those daily expenses I had to pay around 120eu rent every month. In total I spent around 600eu every month.

Food

The food might be one of the best things about Japan, however it can also be one of the most confusing. When you walk into a supermarket there are probably only a few things you recognize. A lot of people buy a rice cooker so they can easily prepare food for themselves. I would also recommend doing this, if you don't plan on going out for dinner or going to the campus restaurants every day. Other options for dinner are buying a bento or onigiri at a convenience store.

Study Program

The study program was pretty confusing for me at first. I thought I was going to be in the OUSSEP program which is not a faculty exchange, but a university-wide exchange. Most international students are in this program, I think. I was in a faculty exchange organized by the faculty of law. The subjects I could choose were the same as the OUSSEP courses, though. So in all of the classes were a lot of exchange students, but also Japanese students.

The classes I took were:

Topics in Japanese Law

It could be said that Japanese Law is relatively recent and, in many aspects, owes considerably to several foreign legal systems of Western countries such as those of Germany, France and United States. Nevertheless, over the time Japanese Law has developed its own idiosyncrasy acquiring its place within the different legal families of the World. The main objective of this course is to introduce the students to those institutions and concepts which are genuine of Japanese Law, so as to help them to better understand the role of Law in Japanese society.

Topics in Comparative Law

The chief objective of this lecture is to map the globe out so as to identify the main legal families and traditions which coexist nowadays. Furthermore, the students will be compelled to think about the role to be played by Japanese Law within the unstoppable advance of globalization.

Anthropology I

This course introduces students to the key aspects of anthropology. Topics covered included health and disease, food, environment and migration; one class will be dedicated to the understanding of Japan as a heterogeneous cultural phenomenon. The course aims to provide students with a diverse foundation of anthropological knowledge, and study skills that are required for further levels of study in anthropology.

Politics I

Topics related to domestic as well as international realms of politics will be discussed, including: ideologies, political systems, approaches to international development assistance, and security issues. This course will provide a comprehensive overview of the subject of politics, laying the necessary groundwork for students who want to advance their knowledge and research further any of the subfields within the political science discipline.

Bioethics and Health Law

Rapid advancement of Biotechnology has begun to pose controversial ethical, social and legal issues. For instance, while the Human Genome Project brings about tremendous medical benefits such as the possibility of genetic therapy and prevention of human diseases caused by the defects of DNA, on the other hand, it also raises serious social problems such as genetic discrimination in employment and insurance, etc. Advancement of assisted reproductive techniques not only enable infertile couples to have a child by using such medical technology, but also enable couples who don't want to have a baby with handicaps to select fetus based on their preferences. The primary objective of this course is to provide a framework to identify and understand the legal and ethical issues in present biotechnology and health care system in comparison between Japan and other countries, especially the USA.

Introduction to Sociology of Marriage and Family

This course is designed to enable you to study sociological concepts, theoretical perspectives and contemporary issues related to the institution of family and the institution of marriage as both private and public social institutions. In the class we will explore the nature of and change in family structure throughout history and in contemporary society with particular focus on Japanese families. Since the family is intertwined with gender and social class inequalities, we will also cover these topics in terms of family and marriage.

A Glimpse at Japanese Arts

A variety of arts created and/or performed in Japan from the distant past through the recent past up to the present will be presented. In addition, discussion will be made as to how the foreign influences were, have been, and are being seen. Furthermore, Japanese influences over foreign countries will be dealt with. The art forms discussed covered paintings, sculpture, literature, theater and music.

Travelling and Sightseeing

One of the best things about Osaka is the convenient location of the city. Of course there is a lot to see in Osaka itself, but it also serves as a hub for travelling. All the major railways in the Kansai region lead to Osaka. This makes it very easy to travel to nearby cities such as Kyoto, Nara or Kobe. Especially Kyoto and Nara have a lot of historical value as they both served as Japan's capital for some time. Because of this there are many Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples and castles to see.

For longer journeys it is easy to take a night bus (Willer Express) from Osaka. I used this to travel to Tokyo twice. This is a lot cheaper than the shinkansen. You could also use these busses to travel to cities like Nagoya or Hiroshima.

Osaka also has several airports. Itami airport is located near the city centre but I think you can only take domestic flights from here. For international flights you have to go to Kansai International Airport (KIX). There is a Japanese budget airline called Peach that operates from this airport. You can book cheap flights to destinations like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea and mainland China. I would recommend anyone to go on as many of these trips as possible. I went to Taiwan for five days and really enjoyed it. I would have loved to go to Korea as well, but I will have to save that for another time.

5. Conclusion

I am very thankful for the opportunity I was given. Studying in Osaka for half a year has taught me a lot. Starting from zero and having to build up an entire new social life on the other side of the world has helped me mature a lot and also greatly enhanced my confidence. It has given me so many new friends from around the world and memories that will never be forgotten. Living in such a completely different country has also learned me to adapt to different cultures and learned me how to see things from a different perspective.

The actual studying was only a tiny part of the experience. But still it was interesting to be in a class with people from many different cultures and this has really broadened my perspective on many topics.

Again, I am grateful for having been given this opportunity and I would recommend any student to study abroad for a while.