
It was my great honor going exchange to Ritsumeikan University for one semester. I am in Communication major in SFU, and I joined the OSE track (Open Study in English).

Ritsumeikan University is a famous private university in Japan, and I had my cheerful and unforgettable time in Kinugasa Campus (KIC) in Kyoto.

Preparation for the Exchange

Documents

The very first matter is to be sure you have all your documents that are important and you think you may use there. The Japanese student visa takes seven business days to transact. If you would like to do part-time jobs in Japan, it is a better fill in a form before you go through the customs in Japan. You can fill it again after you arrive in Japan, but it can take as long as one month for you to get the qualification to do part-time.

For all the academic and school documents inquiries, please do not be hesitate to talk to your advisors, they are all kind and can give you very useful suggestions and help.

Packing

I believe the baggage follows “less is more” for exchanging in Japan. You will find that Japan has almost everything you may need.

Based on my experience, comfortable and daily clothes, useful books (for instance, Japanese textbook), and are necessary for the baggage. If you will live in the university dorm (I-House), you may like to bring your own pillow (though you can also buy one there). For bringing electronic devices, the electricity in Japan is 100 volts.

One thing should be pay attention is the weather in Kyoto. Kyoto’s Semester is as warm as summer, and the winter is not that cold as in Vancouver. Therefore, please make sure that you have enough clothes for a hot temperature.

Financial Details

Japan is a “cash nation”, so please have enough cash with you there every day. The ATMs that can get cash from overseas bank cards can be found in convenience stores, shopping malls, and even the post office. However, the
service fee among these places and different time periods are different. The afternoon is the period with the cheapest service fee on the ATM.

Language

I can speak some Japanese, so I do not have many problems in this part. Nevertheless, if you cannot speak any Japanese, I recommend learning some survival Japanese before your arrival. Ritsumeikan has such Japanese course for the OSE track, but you will need this knowledge before the course starts. Some of the survival words are “Sumimasen” (excuse me), “Arigatou” (thank you).

During the Exchange

Accommodation

KIC has three dorms for international students, and I live in the Taishogun international house. The accommodation has careful management, and the managers are cordial.

We are required to use the bedding provided by the I-House in general, and the public place gives us a place to cook (the cookware is available there)

Food

Japanese food is lighter than western food. There are three cafeterias, one bento selling point, and several convenient stores in Ritsumeikan Kinugasa Campus. They serve us delicious and nutrition-balanced meals.

Transportation

For the transfer among different cities, taking the flights and Shinkansen (train) are both good ideas. The one-way ticket price for Shinkansen from Kyoto to Tokyo is around 140 Canadian dollars. Both the most famous Japanese airlines ANA and JAL have the promotional price for passengers with foreign passports, and one-way ticket price for from Kyoto to Tokyo takes around 100 Canadian dollars.

Some different rules from Canada that we must follow there are phone calls, eating, and loud talking are not allowed in public transportation. What’s more, you should tap your transport card before you get off the bus instead of getting on.

Academic details

There are three campuses in Ritsumeikan University in Kansai, as I
mentioned, I was studying at the Kinugasa Campus (KIC). The other two campuses are Biwako-Kusatsu Campus (BKC) and Osaka-Ibaraki Campus (OIC). Except the BKC is for business students, students like me who are in the non-business program can take courses in both the other two campuses, and it takes around 1 hour to transfer between them.

Since I was in the English program, most of my courses there were taught in English. The exception is the Japanese traditional art courses, which I highly recommend you experience. These traditional courses are set for foreign students to learn the traditional culture in Japan, and they are all extremely interesting. These courses are different in every semester. During my exchange period, I take the tea ceremony. We learned the way to make matcha and the complete routine for a formal tea ceremony in Japan, which is less-known currently in Japan. The only thing you should pay attention to is that all these traditional art courses are taught in Japanese, though it is not a big problem (your classmates will help you), it is better for you to learn some basic Japanese before enrolling.

Moreover, the course schedule is a little different from SFU, the courses are all 1.5 hours, and there are no tutorials for all courses.

Social and extra-curricular activities

The international dormitory and the Ritsumeikan society for international students have occasional activities for us to get into the Japanese students’ life and experience the culture. If you have time, you should not miss it.

I spent my weekends to travel around Kyoto. I found different cities have distinct cultures. Shinkansen is well advanced to take you almost everywhere in Japan. If you like Japan and want to explore more, I strongly recommend you go around if it does not conflict with your academic schedule. Osaka, Kobe, Uji, and Nara are the famous sightseeing cities near Kyoto.

Reflection After Exchange

During the class, I noticed it is still not easy for me to communicate well with my Japanese classmates since my Japanese is not good enough, and every time when others helped me translating, I felt sorry. To prevent it, I know I need to study Japanese harder and try to speak more. However, after the final class, I do not think it is something I should to feel sorry about. I will try my best
to express myself and give my Japanese friends more stories about English next time. I would like to adjust my attitude.

Therefore, please do not feel stressful in talking with your Japanese classmates in no matter English or simple Japanese.

I hope you enjoy your time in Ritsumeikan University, and I am sure you will not regret.
Photos

Single room in dorm

Street in Kyoto

Sightseeing