Exchange Report

Partner University: Meiji Gakuin University
Country: Japan
Major: Computing Science
Term: Fall 2016
Japan is an excellent destination for exchange. From big urban areas like Tokyo to country sides like Hokkaido. Before your departure to Japan, there will be some things to note down. Although English is an international language, the only places where you can communicate with English are mainly tourist attractions and railway and JR train stations. I would recommend at least have some knowledge of the Japanese language or memorizing the Japanese Hiragana and Katakana characters. For packing, I would recommend bringing 2 suitcases since you will probably bring back a lot of things. I would recommend bringing around 1 week of cloths and winter jacket and buy more clothes in Japan. Bring clothes for both summer and winter, since September in Tokyo can still go up to 30 degrees Celsius. Make sure the suitcase is easy to carry since you will be traveling mostly by train in Japan. For visa, you’ll have to go to the Japanese embassy in downtown after you receive your letter of acceptance. If you want to work while on your exchange term, there will be an extra form to fill out. Once you arrive in Japan, Japanese customs will make a residence card for you and if wish to have a part time job during your stay, make sure you hand in the form at the airport customs or it is going to take a month of processing if you hand in at the city hall. You will have around 1 month of free time before school starts, you can take this time to explore and travel around Japan. For finance, I would recommend round 120,000 yen for each month since traveling and food expense does pile up if you are someone who loves to go out like me. Otherwise, 80,000 yen should be enough for basic living expense. Japan is mostly a cash based society. Although there are places that accepts credit card, it is still recommended to purchase with cash. Also, most places that accepts credit card will be accepting VISA cards, but some online stores only accepts Japanese credit cards. When wire transferring money from outside of Japan, note that banks charge quite a lot for transaction fee. Make sure to apply to as much scholarships as you can such as the international mobility award. JASSO will be automatically applied by your host institution unless instructed otherwise. If scholarship is not enough, BC Student Aid also provides financial aid for approved institutions. Finally, when booking your plane ticket, make sure to check on your dormitory’s check in time. For Meiji Gakuin University, the latest check in time is 4:00PM JST. It would take at least 1 hour from the airport to your dorm so plan ahead.

When you arrive in Japan, you will be pulled aside at the customs for making your resident card which you would have to later go to the city hall to register your address on the card. As mentioned earlier, if you wish to work during your stay, hand in the paper at the customs for a fast approval. Once you are released from customs and preparing to enter Tokyo, there are a few ways to travel. Bus is a good way to get in the city without much trouble. The ticket is pretty cheap ranging around 1000 yen for a single trip. However, the travel time is pretty lengthy compared to train and you would still have to transfer for train to arrive at the dorm. Train is also a good way to get into the city. I would recommend
getting a PASMO or SUICA pass, which is basically a compass card, at the train station. The fastest way to get to Tokyo is by the Keisei Skyliner. It only take around 40 minutes from Narita airport to Nippori JR station. The ticket would cost around 2000 yen which you might be able to buy at a cheaper price on the airplane if you are flying with JAL or ANA. Once you’ve settled down, you will have around 1 month of free time before school starts. MGU will help you out on basically everything from how to take trains to registering at the city hall. Make sure you sign up for the buddy program at MGU where they pair you up with a Japanese student to help you out. The caretaker will walk you through the dormitory and some of the rules of the dorm. The Wi-Fi in the dorm is basically non-existence in your room so I would recommend bringing an Ethernet cable adaptor or a mini router. Tokyo can still get quite hot in September and gets cold around November so make sure both the cooling and heat function of your air conditioner works in your room. For courses in MGU, the only challenging course I find would be intensive Japanese learning course. The other courses are pretty easy in my opinion. Classes other than your Japanese course will be taught in mostly English. Japan has a lot of events and festivals. Make sure to research for them before your departure. There should be some fireworks festivals around September. Some places to look around in Tokyo would be Shibuya, Shinjuku, and Harajuku…etc. The scramble crossing and the famous Hachiko statue in Shibuya, Kabuki Street in Shinjuku, Takeshita road and Meiji shrine in Harajuku are great place to visit. If you are into Japanese anime, I would recommend going to Akihabara. It is about 40 min commute from your dormitory. Akihabara is basically a paradise for Japanese anime fans. Almost all the stores there are anime related. If you have a twitter account, make sure to follow the shops’ twitter in Akihabara, that’s where they will post information about upcoming events and such. There will most likely be multiple events hosted in Akihabara during your stay. Also, in December, Comic Market will be host in Tokyo Big Sight. Comic Market is the world’s greatest anime convention. It is hosted for 3 consecutive days and each day attracts around 200,000 people.

After my exchange term in Japan, my Japanese has improved significantly. This is my first time living by myself and I learned many important skills such as financial management. Some of the challenges I faced at first would be the language barrier and the cultural difference. If there was something I could change before I depart, it would be to bring more money as I underestimate the living cost of Tokyo. My advice would be to enjoy yourself in Japan as you would have many exciting things coming your way. Wonder around in the urban city of Tokyo during your free time, you’ll find something new every time.
Outside the dormitory
MGU school cafeteria
Akihabara Welcome Party
Tokyo Game Show 2016
Fireworks Festival
New Years in Japan