Waseda University (Tokyo, Japan) Fall 2016 Exchange Report

I was a 3rd year student when I applied for the exchange program in the Beedie School of Business. I applied for a one-semester exchange to Waseda University. The semester started in late September 2016 and ended in late February 2017.

Preface
Exchanging to Japan was one of the best decisions I have made in my life. It was the greatest and most unforgettable 5 months I have ever experienced.

It was the first time I left my family and lived alone in a new country for almost half year, so, for sure, I was quite nervous. However, luckily, I have been to Japan twice before and have learned Japanese for a whole year, which made me feel a little bit better.

Preparation for Exchange
I received my acceptance package from Waseda University in late June or in early July. It included certificate of admission, certificate of eligibility, some notices, and an application form for part-time job permission in Japan. I personally strongly recommend getting the permission at the airport because it saves a lot of time even though you think that you will not work in during exchange. The form was easy and straightforward, and the application in airport only took you one to two minutes. Otherwise, you would spend a whole day, literally, in the city office. You could submit the application form along with your letter of acceptance and certificate of eligibility when passing through the customs.

Before receiving the acceptance package, I received an email in late May from Waseda University asking me fill out an online housing questionnaire in June. It was important to fill this out as soon as possible if you want to live in dorm and in a single room. My friend who wished to have a single room submitted the questionnaire 40 minutes after the starting time, but he ended up having a roommate.

I applied for my Student Visa at the Japanese Consulate in downtown, Vancouver. It took me around $35 and approximately a week to process. Required materials can be found in its website, which were quite straightforward and easy to prepare.

Actually, Japan is very convenient, so not many things are needed to be brought to Japan. Most things can be bought easily, and much cheaper than in Canada. Beddings were provided in Waseda's dorm. However, if your quality of sleep largely depends on the pillow, you'd better bring your own pillow.

Transportation is fantastic in Japan. Most places can be reached by taking densha, which is similar as our skytrain. Unfortunately, they do not have something like U-Pass, so students do not get discount in transportation.

Japan is a cash based society, which I think would be weird for us for bringing a lot cash in
our wallet. The overall prices in Japan for most aspects are cheaper than Canada. I spent around 1 million Japanese Yen (around $12,000) during my exchange (5 months), everything included.

**During Exchange**

I arrived in Tokyo on Sep 9 at around 2pm from Guangzhou, and then directly went to the dorm, Waseda Hoshien, following the instruction and map provided by the dorm by densha. It was located in Shinjuku, so it was quite convenient to get there. Each dorm has its own check-in time. If you miss the check-in time, you will not be allowed to check-in after that time. In addition, Tokyo has two airports, Haneda and Narita. Thus, it is important to know which airport you are going to land, and then calculate how long takes you from airport to the dorm.

Hoshien has 3 buildings with different structures. All rooms in Hoshien are single room and have private washroom. I lived in building No.3. It has public kitchen, public bathroom, and public washing machine in each floor. Wi-Fi is available in each building and in each room. Although meals are not provided, there are countless restaurants, cheap and expensive, around the dorm.

I got 3 orientations in total. The first one was held by the dorm, teaching the rules and what is expecting to do when there is an earthquake. It was important because it was well known that Japan has lots of earthquakes. After the orientation, everyone was invited to a welcome party. The second orientation was held by Waseda University talking about rules, clubs, and some documents or IDs that are mandatorily required in Japan. Therefore, it is highly recommended to attend this orientation. The last one was held by own school or departments. Staffs will talk about all the requirements about enrolment, such as the maximum or minimum credits required per semester.

Waseda has 7 periods for classes from 9am to 9:25pm. Each period lasts for 90 minutes. Depending on the credits of courses and school you are in, the number of classes for each course varies. All my commerce courses have only 1 class per week. However, because my Japanese course is Comprehensive Japanese, I got 3 classes each week. Attendance is important, but presentation is not that common.

Tokyo rains a lot in September and October. It is hot at that time, but luckily, air conditioner is almost everywhere. It is not that cold in Tokyo. The temperature rarely goes under 0°C, though it is windy. Hand lotion is recommended.

Tokyo, or Japan, is great because there are tons of events or festivals almost everywhere and every week. I saw a dancing festival in Ikebukuro, and also attended two Anime events in October in Akihabara. Most firework festivals are in summer, but luckily there was one on September in Enoshima, Kanagawa. It was amazing and unbelievable. That one was the best firework I have ever seen in my life. In the last 3 days of each year, there is always an Anime event called Comic Market in Tokyo Big Sight, which is the largest Anime event in the world.
Around 550,000 participants in total in 2016.

**Reflection after Exchange**


As I mentioned above, it was my first time living on my own. Cooking and health management were the largest challenges I faced.

I wished I could know that the resident card which will be introduced in Waseda’s orientation is required by lots of things. If I know this before I left, I will not go to apply for a bank account and apply for a sim card before I got my resident card.

There are a lot of monthly sim-card plans in Japan, provided by different companies. The largest three companies, AU, Softbank, and Docomo are more expensive than other firms. I applied for a sim card in Bic Camera, one of the largest electronic shop in Japan, for only 1500 yen (about $18) per month. It is a one-year contract includes 3G data and a phone number. Although there is penalty if you do not finish the one-year contract, the total amount is still cheaper than the large three companies’ plans.

I felt regretted after I finished my exchange semester. If I can choose again, I will apply for a one-year exchange program.
Akihabara
Firework Festival in Enoshima

Waseda University
Waseda Festival

Waseda Hoshien and Its Surroundings.