SFU to Waseda University
Spring | Summer 2019
March to August in Tokyo

Exchange Report

*With a Focus on Advice and Tips for Future Exchange Students*
Introduction

Hello, my name is Brandon. I wrote this report to provide future Waseda University and Tokyo exchange students key points and information that may be extremely helpful to you! Research can be contradictory, time consuming, and exhausting. That is why I want to provide highlights, key points and information throughout my personal web info-scraping and my personal experiences in Tokyo during summer 2019. With that said, best wishes on your exchange trip and get the most out of it as you can. The experience will be shorter than you’ll imagine.

Preparation for exchange

Generally speaking, preparation is simple as any other travelling trips. The main point here is to have sufficient finances, emergency funds, and access to your credit card in Tokyo! So, budget accordingly to what you want to accomplish in Tokyo. Other than that, here are some key points to consider:

- **Don’t overpack** – all of my friends, myself included, needed about 20% of their luggage space to bring back items, gifts, food, clothes, and more. Plan ahead and make sure to save some space.
- **Bringing living supplies are not necessary** – they are very affordable and available. Instead, I encourage you to try out Japanese living supplies to have a better cultural experience. Here’s one cultural difference: Japanese people do not like mint.
- **Weather (for spring/summer)** – spring is mostly windy and averages to about 15°C until early-May. The weather improves up until mid-June to an average of 30°C, highest being 35°C in August. The temperature then drops down in early September.
- **Bring some cash** – a lot of independent rental places only accept cash or bank transfers that require you to have a Japanese bank account. Most big stores and restaurants will accept VISA
credit cards, but there are some that only accept cash or if you’re splitting the bill among friends.

- **Have your accommodation figured out as soon as possible** – it is very competitive in Tokyo so the more affordable ones will be gone fast. If accommodation is difficult to find, consider using Waseda Housing Support for international students or even AirBnb for long-term stay.

### During Exchange

#### Upon Arrival and Orientation

When you arrive, expect to be hit hard during the first week and a half from jet lag and a ton of paperwork. Japan prefers to deal with physical copies of written paperwork so not a lot will be online. After Waseda orientation, you will have a few weeks to rest up and do paperwork. Here are some outlined tasks that can be completed during that time:

- **Get your address registered on your residence card at city hall** – there will be English translators at city halls, so don’t worry so much about language barriers.
- **Get national health insurance even if you have travel insurance** – it’s mandatory.
- **Get a mobile plan, not a pocket wifi** – you will need to use Google Translate and Google Maps. Also, only get a Japanese phone number if you’re planning on working, and if you need to call locally, I recommend using Skype Calling. For pocket wifi, many of my friends hate it even if it’s cheaper. It is a hassle to carry it around, keep it recharged, and switch connection between school wifi and pocket wifi. Most data plans are unlimited for very good pricing.
- **Get an IC Card (PASMO or SUICA card)** – it’s essentially our Compass card, but you can use it to pay at almost every store as well. I recommend getting SUICA because it’s easier to return the card and get your deposit back at Narita airport. People also say that there a minor difference in monthly pass costs: SUICA has cheaper JR Lines (the ones with the square icon on Google Maps) and PASMO has cheaper Tokyo Metro Lines (the ones with the circle icon on Google Maps). They’re identical on fares, however.
- **Consider getting a line-specific monthly pass** – there are three types of monthly passes: one-month, two-month, and three-month being the cheapest. On average, if you do more than 20 round trips each month, monthly passes will be more cost-efficient. Be sure to present your student card as you might get student discounts. The closest station to get a monthly pass near Waseda University is Takadanobaba Station.
Cost Saving Tips for Living Expenses

Tokyo is one of the more expensive cities to live in, so budget accordingly. When it comes to cost-saving, there are many ways to do so. Here are my main tips to save living costs:

- **Go onto “Tokyo Sayonara / Move-out Sale” Facebook Pages** and browse frequently – there are many items that are free or at extremely low costs. The pages are in all in English so don’t worry about language.
- **Going to discount stores** for supplies – I recommend going to Daiso first and then Don Quijote. You will have everything you need in those stores. Some Don Quijotes are larger or smaller than others. If you can’t find something, Asakusa Don Quijote is by far the largest I’ve seen.
- To save money on food, I recommend going to discount stores such as Don Quijote, Lawson 100 (the green one), Seiyu (owned by Walmart), and Maruetsu. Restaurant food can be fairly cheap as well. For pre-mades in supermarkets, I recommend going in the evening before closing as there are always something on sale. If you’re hardcore, you can even track the best-before dates.
- For cheaper meals at Waseda, I recommend going for the cafeteria (Okuma Garden House Cafeteria), Building 17 Co-op Store, or various bento places and convenience stores around the campus.
- When using Google Maps for public transport, make sure to sort by lowest fare cost, otherwise, you may get a route with more expensive trains or routes. Also, avoid buses if you can since they are confusing and relatively more expensive than trains.
**Dangerous Areas to Avoid**

Japan is extremely safe and free from crimes. Theft is almost a non-existent issue. However, there is a significant number of unreported crimes so please stay vigilant. From my personal experience, you can pretty much go anywhere during daytime and you will be safe. But, there are key areas to be aware of during night times:

- **Ikebukuro “Charity Fundraisers” Scam** – They’re usually in front of the JR Station entrance during night times so just ignore and walk away when they approach you. They’re not too aggressive but it’s good to be aware of them.

- **Red light districts** – Kabukicho, Shinjuku, Shibuya, Roppongi, Akasaka, and a small part of Takadanobaba just to list the major ones. If you are approached by black men and inviting you to a bar, absolutely do not go, even as a group. They are mostly working for the Yakuza bars. There are many stories out there where foreigners are manipulated by women (working for the establishment) to buy them very expensive drinks, potentially drugging victims to steal credit cards, or swindled by “accidental property destruction” fees for thousands of dollars. The police cannot help much if you are in Yakuza property.

- **Any train**, especially if you’re a woman – There are no security camera on the most trains, making it a hotspot for crimes (more so if it’s crowded). The stereotypes of Japanese men being creepy is very real. I have heard many stories of these creepy men committing sexual harassment and personally seen it happen at least once. Theft on trains may also happen on extremely crowded trains. Always stay alert on trains.
Life at Waseda

Generally, Waseda onboards you well into their school. They will show you mingling opportunities and cultural events – just sign up for their mailing list! Classes at Waseda are quite limited and simple, but sometimes tedious. They are shorter compared to SFU’s at 1.5 hour lectures, so you’ll be enrolling into more courses than at SFU. As a result, you will be doing readings, assignments and projects in each of those classes, making it somewhat tedious, so read the syllabus and plan accordingly. Here are some points to consider while you are at Waseda:

- **Take classes with Japanese professors** (teaching in English) – there will be more local students to interact with. Japanese professors are also more lenient, easy-going and supportive to international students than non-local professors. Most Japanese professors do not post their slides online, so be sure to take notes!

- **Enroll into more classes than you plan on taking, then drop** – enrollment at Waseda is entirely lottery-based, meaning, after a specific enrollment deadline date, you will randomly get in or not. Courses that are most ‘competitive’ are courses without exams, projects, essays, and textbooks so have an expectation not to get in and strategize accordingly. From my experience and talking to friends, about **30% to 50% of the courses enrolled were full** and did not get in depending on the faculty.

- **Take advantage of your student card** – places like ShiruCafé or Hello Visits, which provide free coffee, juice, and sometimes ice cream to students (there’s no catch or strings, just apply for an account). There are also student discounts for museums and other tourism activities.
Reflection After Exchange

Exchange is one of those things that are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for growth and personal development. It was a very heartwarming experience to connect and discover new culture and local people, seeing different perspectives, values and appreciation. Throughout my exchange, there were a lot of fulfilling moments, like connecting with a local student, and stressful situations, like not being able to order food. As a result, my abilities in adaptability, responsibility, diligence and independence were greatly stretched to its limits. I was extremely uncomfortable at times, but there are times where I know I must pull through, and it’s these breakthroughs where most of your learning happen. Like, would you go into a Japanese restaurant alone without knowing Japanese? It takes courage, and I encourage others to do the same – reach outside of your comfort zone and explore.

Must Visits: TeamLab Planets, Sensōji Temple, Ghibli Museum (Req. 3 months advanced), Nippara Limestone Cave, Bunkyo Civic Center (free for skyline view), Shinjuku National Garden, Mori Art Museum, Samurai Museum

Must Eats: Ichiran (ramen, famous chain); Nakiryu (ramen, inexpensive Michelin), Hamazushi (sushi, most affordable sushi conveyer), Santoku (premium bentos, supermarket), Tonta (best tonkatsu, Japanese-only menu), Roast Beef Ono (rare beef bowl, premium ricebowl)