Introduction

My name is Clarrie Yap. My major is linguistics. I chose to go to Kyoto, Ritsumeikan University, for exchange because of several reasons. Firstly, in linguistics I am always exposed to different languages of the world. We analyze the structures and formations of all sorts of language. On the other hand, I am very interested in learning languages myself. I speak Cantonese and English fluently. I learned Japanese in high school for several years and French as well. But due to the lack of practice, most of my skills have slowly disappeared. This exchange opportunity will give me a chance to learn Japanese as well as practice it with actual native speakers of Japanese. Furthermore, after I graduate I am planning to pursue the career of teaching. Through this experience, I hope to learn as many teaching practices as possible which will serve as a basis for my future career.

Before Departure

The most important aspect to be aware of is the weather at Kyoto. This will aid in your packing. Don’t worry if you forget something, because usually the basic necessities are available there for you to purchase unless it is something really personal. Also, it is important to exchange some local currency before you leave. Bank drafts take a long time to process in Japan. Just make sure you have enough money to last for two weeks. As for travel visa, you can obtain that as soon as you receive the letter from the University of Japan. Bring the letter as well as your passport to the Japanese embassy in downtown. It will take a couple days to process; make sure you do it a week before departing. Furthermore, the university will mail you a package with forms which needed to be faxed back to them on the required dates. Make sure you don’t forget those! Such forms are for living accommodations, elective courses, and arrival times and move in dates so forth. It is crucial to attend the pre-departure session because lots of information will be shared there and if you have any questions, there will be people there to answer your questions. One more thing, remember to pay your tuition fee to Simon Fraser University.

Arrival at Ritsumeikan University

In the package you will receive from the university, they will provide you with several ways to reach the university. Make sure you have the address of the university handy (for those who don’t speak Japanese fluently) so you can show the taxi driver where to go. It’s best if you arrive at the Osaka airport and take the Hankyu (electric train) to Kyoto from there. If you arrive at the Tokyo airport it is much more confusing. Orientations will start in the first week of school, for the entire week. It is important to attend these sessions because you will receive forms to register for classes and obtain the foreigner card, which is a required piece of identification during your stay in Kyoto. It serves as a passport. Furthermore, during these sessions you will be taught how to open a bank account in Kyoto, which will be convenient for those who want to transfer money from their bank accounts to Japan. Another important part is whether you want to bike to school or bus to school. If you choose to bike, then you can either rent one from the
dormitory or buy one which you can sell back to the store as secondhand. On the other hand, if you choose to bus, then it will be ideal for you to purchase a bus pass. The bus pass can be bought per month or in 3 or 6 months intervals. It is much cheaper to buy that then pay individually. On the bus, please refrain from talking on your cellular phones. It is very rude.

**Ritsumeikan University & Courses**

Every international student has to take a minimum of seven courses. The campus is beautiful. The classes for international students are located in two buildings only. Finding classrooms is not difficult. Most of the classes do not require a textbook; most of the readings will be provided by the professor. Remember to keep the outline and all relevant material for those who want to transfer the credits.

-Ritsumeikan University Campus

**Accommodations & Living**

In the pre-arrival package you received earlier, you should have chosen one type of accommodation. I chose to live in the international house two (I-house II). When I arrived there I met the housekeeper and she showed me around the dorm and the different facilities available there. The dormitory was great; I would recommend all exchange students going there to live in the dormitory. The atmosphere was warm and the people there were so nice. They are always willing to help you. Also it is a good way to practice your Japanese. The dormitory that I stayed in was all single rooms. Each room had a toilet, a sink, an air conditioner and a mini refrigerator. Showers, kitchen and laundry were public. The supermarket was 30 minutes away from the dorm by foot or 15 minutes by bike. It’s very convenient. I advise you not to buy too many things at a time because it might be a drag to carry it back to the dorm.

Every Sunday there is a sale at the market, it is ideal time. Furthermore, plastic bags require an extra charge so it would be best if you carried a backpack of some sort. As for food, there are many restaurants nearby the school as well as the dorm. You must try the cafeteria food, it is so good. Also if you like donuts you must try the Mister Donuts store. It’s so delicious. The convenience store on campus offers a large range of food selection, it’s best to go earlier because after lunch most of it will be gone. There is a wide range of food
selection in downtown which is about 30 minutes away by bus. Make sure you check the bus schedule for the last bus or else you will have to take the taxi. Buses in Kyoto end around 10:30pm and shopping malls close around 6:00pm everyday.

-picture of dinner out with friends

**Information about Kyoto**

Kyoto is famous for many temples and shrines. During your stay there you must visit the Gold temple. The first Saturday of each month there is a flea market held at the Kitano Tenmangu Shrine. There are many things to explore there. For people who want to buy a kimono, it is best to buy one there because they are awfully cheap, but it may take some time to find the perfect one. There are also many sorts of food for sale there too such as the yakisoba or okonomiyaki. Both of these, I recommend.

The weather in Kyoto is very hot during the summer; it rains a lot in the fall. It rarely snows in Kyoto, so you don’t have to worry about that. If you have time, you should visit Nara, Kobe and Osaka. Nara is famous for the Buddha temple. Inside the temple you will see a ten story high Buddha statue, it is incredible. Also there are many deer walking around the city, you can take pictures and feed them as well. As for Kobe, it is famous for the night view and its harbor. During Christmas time there will be an illuminating festival in Kobe where the city will be decorated in light which leads to a big flee market at the end. You must go if you are exchanging during the fall semester. Finally, Osaka is a great place to shop for electronics and clothes. It is a very busy city and there is a street that is called Shinsaibashi which is full of stores for you to shop (must go). It is much cheaper to take the Hankyu (electric train) to Osaka then the bullet train but it is a bit longer.
Personal Reflection

During the course of my exchange, I have learnt many things but the most important one of all is to be independent. This was my first experience away from my family and I think that this was a memorable experience. The main challenge that I faced was the language barrier, after a month or so of learning I managed to understand many basic words of communications, but speaking was still a very difficult task. At the end of this exchange I managed to speak a bit of Japanese and understand about 80% of what Japanese people spoke. I regret not continuing my studies of Japanese after high school, because my journey would have been more enjoyable if I could have spoken fluent Japanese. I could learn more about Japanese cultures and traditions. Just remember, never give up even the most difficult problems can be solved.