



My experience at the Kanagawa University in Japan

Winter semester 2023/24

International Business Administration



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Introduction

Hello! If you are reading this, it is because you are considering doing an exchange semester in Japan, are looking for the perfect partner university for you, or you were already accepted and want to know as much as possible before you start this new adventure.

I am happy to share my (very positive) experience with you and mention some of the things I would've liked to know before and at the beginning of my exchange.

Moreover, I will add some pictures at the end of the document, so you have a bit of a visual support to all of what I'm saying.

Organization

I decided to do an exchange semester during the third semester of my bachelor's degree. This means that the organizational part of my journey started already in my first semester of university, or better said, almost in the first month of my university life. This may seem like it's too soon since you have barely gotten used to being a university student and you already have to make additional decisions. Decisions like where do you want to go for your semester abroad, which university you want to choose and which classes you would like to take. I never imagined that I would have to think about all of this with so much time in advance.

Regardless, I recommend going in your third semester for the simple reason that you have way more options of classes that you haven't taken yet. This makes choosing a partner university a little less limited and you can be more flexible.

It is important to consider **what are the circumstances in which you want to live**. For me, a big city with good public transportation was important. Another very important matter to me was food and the places I could see. I wanted to be able to try different things and travel with friends as much as I could afford.

After deciding I wanted to go to Japan, I checked out the universities that were in or near Tokyo. The Kanagawa University offered enough classes in English so that I was able to choose a minimum of 6 classes, the minimum of classes required for the visa, which would get acknowledged by at the Frankfurt UAS.

Comparing all the destinies, universities, and classes is a **very long and tiring process**. I remember sitting at my desk for several hours a couple days in a row with sore eyes until I was finally able to make my decision. So, make sure you don't leave it for the last minute, and also not for the last semester, since this limits your options even more.

Also, **don't be afraid to go to the international office** to ask questions and get help as many times as you need it. I was constantly at the Sprechstunde and Frau Conrads/Frau Bluhm were always very nice and helpful. You can even ask which other students want to go to the same country so you can morally support each other.

One other **tip I can give you** is to keep everything as organized as you can. In my experience with the Kanagawa university, after uploading all the documents to the Mobility Online website and being accepted as a candidate, you have to go through the whole application process and paperwork **AGAIN** but now directly with the KU. It doesn't matter how many folder files inside other folder files you have on your desktop, trust me having everything labeled will save your life when you have to hand in/upload documents a couple of times.

Name	Status	Änderungsdatum	Typ	Größe
1.- Passfoto	✓	10/11/2022 01:28 p. m.	Dateiordner	
2.- Immatrulationsbescheinigung	✓	10/11/2022 01:12 p. m.	Dateiordner	
3.- Transcript of Records	✓	12/03/2023 09:57 p. m.	Dateiordner	
4.- Cv in english	✓	31/07/2023 12:35 p. m.	Dateiordner	
5.- Motivation letter	✓	09/12/2022 11:49 p. m.	Dateiordner	
6.- DAAD Sprachnachweis	✓	12/12/2022 12:07 p. m.	Dateiordner	
7.- Letter of Recommendation	✓	27/04/2023 04:15 p. m.	Dateiordner	
8.-Kursliste	✓	21/02/2023 10:03 a. m.	Dateiordner	
9.- Reisenpass Kopie	✓	15/01/2023 08:37 p. m.	Dateiordner	
10.- Unterschriebene Datenschutzeinbarung	✓	06/01/2023 02:12 p. m.	Dateiordner	
11.- Unterschriebenes Bewerbungsformular	✓	11/01/2023 01:22 p. m.	Dateiordner	
12.- Promo Stipendium	✓	05/04/2023 05:16 p. m.	Dateiordner	
13.- Bescheinigung Auslandssemester	✓	02/03/2023 03:38 p. m.	Dateiordner	
14.- Documentos Japon	✓	28/09/2023 07:07 a. m.	Dateiordner	
Application Form	✓	11/05/2023 10:22 a. m.	Dateiordner	

Highlights of my experience

1. Student dormitory

My experience would have definitely not been the same if I hadn't chosen to live in the Kuritaya Akademeia. This was one of the things I enjoyed the most. Yes, the rooms may be small (7m²) but in my opinion it's enough if you feel like having some time for yourself. The dorm is full of spaces where you can freely hang out/study with friends. Common spaces include a party room downstairs with a couch and a tv, a sport room that also has a ping-pong table, a soundproof music room, a movie room with a projector and puff chairs, lots of corners called "pots" where you can chill/study, many kitchens you can choose from and an Onsen (Japanese hot springs) for girls and another one for boys.

One of the best parts is that there are lovely cleaning ladies that come every day. You are only responsible for cleaning your own 7m² room (and of course your personal belongings, your laundry and your dishes).

I think it is very **important to mention** that, at least in the case of this dormitory, the rules sound way harsher on paper than they actually are. Yes, there is **curfew** at 12am but you can easily stay outside longer and come back home later if you fill out a small form that is always outside the managers office next to the entry. Even if you forget to fill it out or you spontaneously decide to keep the party going, a friend that is in the dorm at that time can fill it out and hand it over to the guard for you! I was also a bit nervous about not being able to be as free and independent as in Germany but to be honest it was pretty good and not an impediment at all.

Rent is 50.000 Yen a month, which is about 320€ depending on the exchange rate.

2. Business Administration Campus in Minato Mirai (MMC)

This campus was built only a little over two years ago and it shows! It is so modern and it has a very nice location in one of the richest parts of Yokohama. It is a bit far from the dormitory compared to the Yokohama Campus (YC) that is 6 min away by foot, but the way to Minato Mirai is beautiful and I felt very lucky walking to university every morning. Also, there is always someone from the dorm going at the same time as you, so the way feels shorter.

The campus has a very nice cafeteria with screens at which you can order. It also has a beautiful view of Mt. Fuji and a charming terrace if you don't feel like eating inside on a warm day. Prices in the cafeteria are cheap and food was always good. Try the Karaage bowl at MMC. Me and my friends were all convinced that it was the best one in the whole city.



3. Yokohama

I really liked Yokohama. It is very pretty, clean, and safe. It is actually one of the most expensive cities to live in when it comes to rent. But you don't have to worry about that if you live in the dorm.

The city has nice night life, although not many night clubs. Don't worry, that won't stop you from going out if you want to since Tokyo, specifically Shinjuku (the nightclub area) is just a 30 min subway ride from Yokohama Station and its only 3€.

For me, Yokohama had the perfect balance for daily life. It's close enough to Tokyo so you can drive there whenever you want and explore every corner of the city but at the same time you can avoid the chaos (Tokyo is insanely crowded) on regular days, when all you want is to go to university and hang out with friends.

Make sure you check out the port in Yokohama and explore all the Izakaya (Japanese bars) the city has to offer.

4. Japanese Food

I fell in love with Japanese food. Their cuisine goes beyond sushi and ramen, although these two are some of my favorite foods. Eating out can even be cheaper than cooking yourself. And even though Japanese food could have some more vegetables to make it more balanced, it is very delicious. Some restaurant recommendations are Kappa sushi/ Hama sushi for sushi on a budget, Memba Hamatora for ramen (around Yokohama Station) and Merengue in front of MMC for super fluffy pancakes for breakfast (before 10am they are cheaper). If you go to Kyoto, don't miss out on trying Wagyu Beef, it's absolutely delicious. My restaurant recommendation is Yakiniku Hiro (there are several).

And great news for your wallet: in Japan tipping is not a thing! Be prepared to pay for your food and only that.

5. Everyone is so nice and attentive.

The stereotype is not a joke, people are extremely friendly over there. Despite the language barrier they are always willing to go the extra mile to help you and you can expect workers to smile at you all the time. They will even repeatedly thank you for your purchase until you have left the store. One can think this gets annoying after a while but since I was only 6 months there I just enjoyed being treated nicely.

6. International vibe/making friends.

This one is not specifically related to Japan or the KU, but to an exchange semester in general: The relationship you get to build with the people that you meet abroad is simply different. Lots of people your age from all over the world, just as nervous as you, looking forward to meeting people, exploring the country, and having the time of their lives. Specially if you live in the dorm, you can really build very tight friendships you'll hopefully keep forever.

7. Japan during Autumn

My exchange semester was from September to February. September was extremely hot and humid. This was nice for exploring the beaches around Yokohama like Kamakura or the Island Enoshima. If I had known better, I would've also visited the South, for example Okinawa, to make the most of the beachy swimming season. But one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen was Kyoto during the Momiji Season, which is the word for the maple leaves tinted red in the fall. I didn't stay long enough to see Japan covered in Sakura (cherry blossoms) but Autumn was extremely beautiful.

What was not so good.

1. Transportation in Japan is expensive.

It may not seem like it at first sight, since a single drive ticket is cheaper than in Germany, but sadly there are no monthly tickets one can purchase. You must pay individually for every ride either with a physical Suica/Pasmo card (transportation cards) or with a digital one on your phone (only works for Apple). That can add up quickly and can become quite expensive.

Also, the Shinkansen (fast trains) are more expensive than I expected. When you are a tourist, you can get a JR Rail Pass to make it cheaper to travel around. Since we have a 6-month visa and a resident card, we can't get this pass or any tax-free discount.

The cheapest way to travel is the night bus, although its not the most comfortable way to travel, especially if you're a tall person like me. But if you travel with friends and you all suffer together, it can turn out to be a funny experience.

2. Everything is small.

I am very tall (1.85m) and I find myself being uncomfortable sometimes because of things being small. The three examples that struck out to me the most were:

- The bus: Seats are so small and tight that I sometimes just prefer to stand that to crush my legs.
- Desks at university: This was a general thing although it was worse at Yokohama Campus since the buildings are older.
- The university gym: The machines at the gym were smaller than regular ones in Germany. Nevertheless, the **monthly fee to use the gym is only 4€** so I couldn't really complain.

I think things being smaller is just part of the Japanese experience and this is definitely not something that should keep you from choosing Japan as a destiny for your exchange semester.

3. Fruits and vegetables are expensive.

Food in Japan can really be very cheap. A portion of fresh Udon/ Soba noodles to cook at home can cost 0,20€ and a package of Enoki Mushrooms can be 0,65€ but when it comes to fruits and certain vegetables it can be quite expensive. I was used to a very balanced diet, so I struggled a little bit in the beginning, but I found a small supermarket near the dorm (Gyomu Super Rokkakubashi) where vegetables and some seasonal fruits came at a reasonable price.

It is important to mention that **if you are currently on a vegan/vegetarian lifestyle, Japan is probably not the best destination for you.** Most of the German students at KU were vegan but decided to quit for the duration of the exchange since it would have been nearly impossible to join other people at restaurants or try authentic Japanese food.

I have seen on TikTok that they are actually some only-vegan restaurants in Tokyo and it's possible to find vegan ramen, gyoza etc... but it will definitely make it harder for you.

My Courses

For your Student Visa you must take at least 6 classes but in order to complete all 30 ETCS in Germany you need at least 7 classes. Here are the ones I took:

Kanagawa University	Frankfurt UAS
International Organizations (MMC)	Entrepreneurship (WPM)
Information Business Society (YC)	Change Management I (WPM)
Decision Making (YC)	Change Management I (WPM)
International Society (MMC)	Cultural Diversity
Comparative International Management (Online)	International Management I (WPM)
International Marketing (MMC)	International Marketing (WPM)
International Relations (MMC)	Transport, Geography and International trade

From these I can recommend International Marketing, International Society and Decision Making the most.

Opposite to what I had thought, classes at the KU weren't as difficult as expected. The biggest difference with the Frankfurt UAS, apart from the mandatory assistance (you have to scan your card at the beginning of every class), is that for some classes you have assignments along the semester. This was in my opinion not necessarily a bad thing, since that meant that the final examination was either easier or of lower value. Even though I had a total of 8 classes (7 classes and language support class) and some assignments during the semester, I still had a lot of free time to explore Tokyo, travel, and have fun.

The Language barrier

As surprising as it might seem for such an important and developed country, Japanese people barely speak English. Even people my age or workers at hotels struggle to understand basic English sentences. When in Japan, your translating app is your best friend. This took some time to get used to because you need to learn to speak with only the basic and important English words to communicate your message. Also moving your hands helps a lot and Japanese do this all the time to help you understand what they mean. Fortunately, this wasn't an issue during class since the professors of the English classes were more than capable of leading a class English. A common event was that professors would repeat the same information sometimes in both English and Japanese to make sure Japanese students who were taking English classes were able to follow the class.

Making Japanese friends or communication with other students is a bit harder because of this language impediment but my friends and me happened to find some amazing Japanese students who were looking forward to practicing their English (including some of our buddies) and we became the best of friends. They were also always willing to help us when we needed it.

I managed my classes pretty well thanks to the help of the university, my Japanese friends, and other exchange students. I learnt some useful phrases that helped me get by, but I definitely regret not having prepared myself a little more when it comes to the language. Knowing Hiragana and Katakana as well as you can, won't enable you to read everything around you but it will definitely help you to e.g., read the menu at the restaurants, and will make you feel a little less lost.

Some things to know/remember.

Japanese are very different to Europeans, and it is important to respect their culture by sticking to their manners:

- It is very **rude to be loud** (better do not talk at all) in public transportation and trains.
- **Physical contact** is not very well received. Even among young friends, Japanese people mostly bow when they say hello or goodbye instead of hugging. Make sure to ask you Japanese contacts if you can hug them before you do.
- **Smoking is prohibited on the streets and in some bars.** There are specific areas where you can smoke. Some of them, like in university or some bars, are literally closed cabins where smokers do their thing and then come out and continue with their activities. They do this partly to protect children from finding the cigarette butts.
- **Legal age** for drinking and clubbing is 20.
- Staying seated at your table at restaurants and continue to talk after finishing your meals is not a thing. **Japanese eat (often alone) and then immediately stand up and go.** In most restaurants you even pay beforehand so its quicker when you want to leave.
- **If you want to stay longer at the table and chat with friends**, you must make a reservation at special bars (Izakaya) and restaurant and then pay a fee (usually between 5-25€) for “nomihodai/tabehodai” a.k.a “all you can eat/all you can drink”, and you usually get the table for 1,5 or 2 hours. This is very fun.
- **Slurping is not rude in Japan.** At the beginning it might seem strange to hear people slurping their food all around you since we were raised differently, but you get used to and it was definitely fun to freely do it myself.
- **Practice using chopsticks!!** Sometimes you can ask for a fork in bigger restaurants, but most commonly you only find chopsticks everywhere.

What I learnt during my stay abroad

Since Japan is very different to what I had imagined, I definitely improved my adaptability. I learnt that there is not only one correct way of doing/ looking at things. Not because something seems unnecessary or unpractical means you know better, or your

method is “better”. I noticed the importance of languages and communication and got to appreciate the beauty of experiencing and respecting different cultures. Apart from how it helped my academic goals I think this semester abroad did so much for my personal life.

I can say that my expectations were not only fulfilled but completely exceeded. Japan is not for everyone, but it definitely was for me. I would not move to Japan forever, but these 6 months were some of the bests of my life. Japan is a beautiful country and it has endless things to see, try and experience.

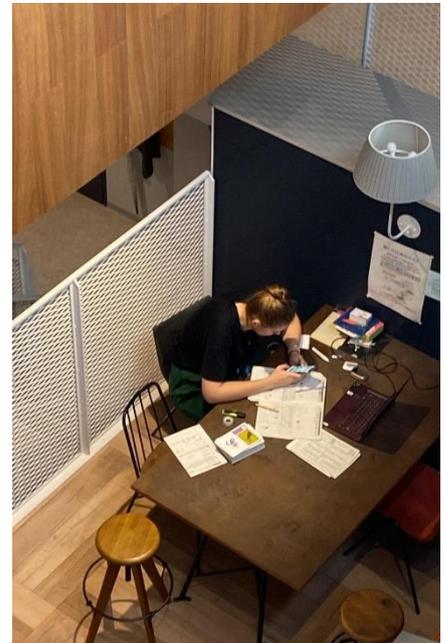
Pictures



Feeding the famous Deer in Nara. Worth taking a day trip there when you go to Kyoto.



The Minati Mirai Campus (MMC) picture by me



Me studying in one of the “pots” of the Dorm



Who doesn't like a Tempura bowl with Soba noodles on the side?



Told you fresh noodles were cheap. This is in the fridge of a supermarket. 25 YPJ each (0,15€)



Fluffy pancakes at “Merengue” in front of MMC



A huge bowl of Ramen (approx. 6€)



The Ramen Museum in Shin-Yokohama. Very recommended. You can get lunch there! (Ramen of course)



Celebrating my birthday with my friends at the dorm. My cake is made of Onigiri because I don't like cake and I love onigiri.



The iconic entry of “Hamachan”, our favorite Izakaya (Japanese restaurant/bar)
It's a Tatami place, which means you take your shoes off and sit on the floor.



Yokohama <3



Me in Kyoto at night in Autumn in front of a Pagoda.



Outside of Yokohama Station at sunset >>>>



Restaurants in Japan can be very interactive. Here I am making "Okonomiyaki" in Yokohama (tastes better when you make it yourself)



I had a great time; hope you will have too!
😊