

My experience as an exchange student in the Tsukuba University

Name: Jessica Rubi Mora Flores

Bachelor: International Relations

Study Objective in Japan: Political and Migration Issues of Japan

Exchange University: University of Tsukuba (筑波大学)

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Fall / Spring)

Name of the program in Mexico: AMES

Program name in Japan: Trans-Pacific Tsukuba

Scholarship used: AMES / JASSO (only 8 months)



Why did you decide to do an exchange in Japan?

From a very young age I have had an interest in Asian culture in general, and it was because of my interest in anime that I began to study more about Japan and its culture. I liked it so much that I decided that I wanted to study in the country and have many experiences that would allow me to learn more about its culture and language. After several years of researching different programs and different universities, I decided to study at the University of Tsukuba because of its great prestige within Japan.

My itinerary on a normal exchange day

<Weekday>

- ✧ 8:30 Wake up, have breakfast and prepare for classes.
- ✧ 10:00 Japanese classes (Almost all classes last only 1 hour 15 minutes).
- ✧ 11:30 Have a small lunch with other exchange students in the cafeteria.
- ✧ 12:15 Take the following Japanese classes (usually Japanese classes are at the same time every day, but I took classes of different levels so I had different Japanese classes on the same day).
- ✧ 3:00 Prepare the food.

- ✧ 4:30 Prepare to go to the practices of the circles and clubs in which I participated (Kyudo, Yosakoi (traditional dance of matsuri)).
- ✧ 8:30 Return home.
- ✧ 9:30 Dinner.
- ✧ 10:00 Do my homework and prepare my backpack for classes the next day.
- ✧ 12:00 Sleep.

<Weekends and holidays>

I usually had plans to go with my friends to visit some place, eat in a restaurant or walk around Tokyo. When we didn't have a lot of money, we would buy food together, prepare it and eat it together while we watched movies, we also played a board game. When there was some seasonal event we would also go to see it, such as the October fireworks in the neighboring city of Tsukuba, Tsuchiura City, it is considered one of the best fireworks events in Japan.

What preparations did you have before coming to Japan?

As I mentioned before, I had to research the different programs of various universities, as well as going through a selection process at my university before applying to the University of Tsukuba. For this process you need to prepare recommendation letters, motivation letter (explaining why you want to go to Japan), renew your passport and US visa, conduct interviews, fill out forms, send documents to Japan, and save money for the first months that you do not receive even the scholarship.

Also, in my university I took several courses on culture and history in Asia since I started my university career, I also started studying the Japanese language almost 4 years before going to Japan (I highly recommend having a prior knowledge of the language before coming). Although many people know English within the university, outside of it there are not many, and the possibility of finding part-time work may be less. Although there are places where people with little knowledge of Japanese are hired.

I also had to create a bank account in my name, and take out international medical insurance at a cost of 490 dollars, price for one year and a 40% discount for being a student.

Expenses before and during my academic exchange in Japan

Before coming

- ✧ 490 dls International health insurance
- ✧ 90 dls in renewal of 6 years of passport (Mexican passport)
- ✧ 70 dls in travel bags
- ✧ 650 dls to use the first two months in Japan (\$ 15 thousand Mexican pesos)

During my stay

- ✧ 33 thousand yen per month in rent and expenses for electricity and shower.
- ✧ 20 thousand yen in food and drink expenses per month (between restaurants and supermarket).
- ✧ 15 thousand yen between travels, souvenirs and others, per month.
- ✧ 15 thousand yen in total for suitable winter clothing.
- ✧ 5-7,000 yen to buy a second-hand bike. In Tsukuba it is necessary to have a bicycle to have easy transportation to any part of the city, even within the campus the distance between the classrooms and dining rooms are very large, it can take around 30 minutes to cross from one end of the university center to the other. foot. (Plus 6 thousand yen in light repair and new tire)
- ✧ 15 thousand yen to pay for the insurance requested by the university.
- ✧ 4 thousand yen in Japanese books (you can get books already used by other students in the past semester, up to 70% cheaper than a new one).
- ✧ 5 thousand yen to buy some furniture, racks, rice cooker (100% elementary too) and dishes to cook.
- ✧ For trips to the south or north of Japan, a trip of up to 3-4 days can cost in total between 30,000 yen to 40,000 yen. Including transportation, Tsukuba-Tokyo, Tokyo-Kyoto, Osaka etc, meals, accommodation, internal transportation, souvenirs (omiyages), kimono rental, yukata etc.
- ✧ For these trips I strongly recommend the night buses that leave from Shinjuku Station in Tokyo; It is the cheapest way to travel within Japan. Prices can be from 1400 yen (one way only) to 5000 yen which would be the most expensive (almost the same price as plane depending on the season). The link to access the booking page for these buses in English: <https://www.kosokubus.com/en/>. The page is called "Kosoku Bus".
- ✧ I also recommend looking for buses in Japanese, as there are usually companies that only make reservations in Japanese, and many of them are up to twice as cheap as normal companies.

JASSO Scholarship

For those who are beneficiaries of the JASSO scholarship, 80 thousand yen per month is provided to a Japanese bank account (this account is made when arriving in Japan, and the University of Tsukuba is the one in charge of doing the procedure for the students).

Personally, and taking a look at the expenses involved in studying in Japan, 80 thousand yen per month, is enough only to cover the primary expenses such as rent and food in the case of the rooms of 36 thousand yen and 44 thousand yen per month. Leaving very little money left for other expenses, such as outings, travel, other things of basic necessity.

Traveling in and out of Japan is usually very expensive, so as a personal recommendation, if you want to live or can only live in Japan with the JASSO scholarship or another scholarship less than 80 thousand yen per month, I strongly recommend living in the CHEAPEST dorm in University. At the time of doing the exchange procedures, the University of Tsukuba allows you to choose the dormitory in which you want to live. If you are still assigned a more expensive one than you wanted, you can change rooms when you arrive in Tsukuba, in the dormitory office.

Another option that I recommend is looking for a part-time job, so that you can live more comfortably and also have more possibilities to travel.

Part-time job

If you want to work in Japan, whether or not you have a scholarship, you have to keep several important points in mind:

- ✧ When you arrive in Japan, in immigration they ask you directly if you have plans to work in Japan, if so, they put a stamp on your "Residence Card / Resident Card / Zairyuu caado" that will allow you to work up to 28 hours per week. If they don't ask you, you can tell them that you want to work and they will put the stamp on your passport. Without this stamp you cannot work, and when looking for work it is the first thing contractors check.
- ✧ In the event that you have not been able to receive the immigration stamp from the airport, you will have to go to the immigration office that is in Mito, the closest city, or to Tokyo, to obtain said stamp.
- ✧ Another important point is that, if you are looking for work, you have to take into account that the payment system is monthly, all the salary for the month is paid in a single payment, and it is usually at the end of each month. There are some places where they have a certain day of the month to make the payment. So you have to keep in mind that your salary can go up to a month later or depending on when you enter or the company, it can seem like two months. If your need for money is urgent, I recommend looking for a job as soon as possible, since you also have to do an interview.

Travel abroad

In the student visa it is explicit that this only allows one entry to the country. Even so, there is nothing to worry about, since you can go abroad without problems; when doing the check-in of your bags, try to ask for the “Re-entry Form” at immigration before boarding the plane. Without this document, you will not be able to enter Japan again, so it is important to take good care of it during your trip abroad. If you are going to leave the country, you have to notify the university or your advisor, the dates on which you will travel, where you will go and if you go with someone, they will ask for that person's information as well.

What were my experiences and good points of my exchange?

Definitely my best experiences I have had in my life I lived in Japan. One of the things that I liked the most was participating in many university circles and clubs. Mainly I entered a Kyudo (Japanese archery) circle in which I was able to practice archery, an activity that I consider very traditional. Thanks to this circle I was able to see the culture closer, since they had a different style of archery than what I was doing in university classes.

In the university they taught Kyudo with a rougher style, which is more of a “battle”, on the other hand, in the Kyudo circle, they practiced a softer and more aesthetic style, the movements had to be more careful and were based more on time and the correct way to do the movements before releasing the arrow. It didn't matter much if you missed your target.

Another circle that I really enjoyed was Yosakoi Soran's. Yosakoi is a traditional dance performed at large events, especially at Japanese summer festivals (Matsuri).



** Yosakoi Soran circle "Kirikirimai", photo from the day of my debut at Kashima Jingu temple, various groups from Yosakoi from different parts of Ibaraki prefecture also participated in this event. The dances were dedicated to the god of Yosakoi.*



** After an archery competition*

I strongly recommend to participate in as many circles and clubs as you can, as you will be able to learn a lot about Japanese culture and make Japanese friends.

Many foreigners hardly enter these circles because they do not have much confidence in their Japanese, or because they do not speak Japanese at all, and they think that because of that they will not be able to enjoy and make friends. In many circles there are students who like to go out and share with foreigners, and most of them know how to speak English, most of the members of these circles are friendly and care that you understand everything and feel integrated into the group.



** My Kirikirimai debut in Kashima Jingu*



**Kasuga Kyudo Circle. At the farewell ceremony of the previous leaders and senpais.*



** Kiririmai's presentation at the Tsukuba coming of age (Seijinshiki) ceremony*

There are also two clubs that I personally want to recommend to you:

Omochi Language Club-おもち:

In this club you can talk to other foreigners from anywhere in the world. Usually the first round of conversation is done in English so that everyone gets to know each other and starts talking about their country, language, culture, etc., after taking a short break, the conversation session in Japanese begins. Because many people from all countries do not have much experience in the language, which is divided into three groups: beginners, intermediate and advancing. At each table there are around 4, 5 foreigners and at least 1 or 2 Japanese to share, and have a cultural exchange.

At the end there is always a dinner in a restaurant near the place to continue the conversation for those people who want to stay longer. This club is a great option if you want to make friends with Japanese who are interested in other cultures and also with other foreign students from many parts of the world.

It has the advantage that mostly English is spoken. In addition, this club carries out activities at important events such as Welcome Party, Halloween Party, Christmas Party, etc. These events usually cost between 300 yen to 500 yen to enter, and you can eat all the food and drinks at the event.

Link to the Facebook page where they publish new events and announcements:
<<https://www.facebook.com/Omochi.Tsukuba>>



** Food at the Christmas party*



** Taiko Performance, at the welcome party*



** Sake tasting, at the welcome party, 2019*

Campur Tsukuba:

This is a club that is also held once a week (on Wednesdays) and each week there is a small exhibition about a certain country, which are generally South Asian countries. First, an explanation is made about the history, culture, language and food of the country, there is usually a tasting of typical dishes and at the end there are quizzes about the exhibition, and the winner is awarded a prize. There are also traditional games of the country, in which everyone can participate and have fun. Link to the Facebook page where they post new events and announcements:

< <https://www.facebook.com/tsukuba.campur.5> >



** Tsukuba Idol Dance Performance
at Campur Final Event, 2020*



** Hot Cakes Design Contest*

Troubles I had during my exchange. Who did I consult?

I think the part that was most problematic for Latin American students was getting used to the changing “cost of daily living” in Japan. In Latin America the cost of living is not very expensive if we compare it with Japan, on the contrary, it is very cheap. At first it is difficult to adapt to the change of money and the "correct" use of money. But as time goes by, and trying to take care of money as much as possible, you end up getting used to the high Japanese cost of living.

I also had a problem with paying my rent, somehow, apparently I “skipped” a month's rent in the first few months; that imbalance dragged on until it could no longer be delayed, and since I had already thrown away all my proof of rent payment, I could not prove that I had actually paid that month. So that I recommend that you keep all proof of payment of rent and insurance in a safe place and do not lose or throw them away for any reason, you may need them at some point.

As I mentioned earlier, I also suffered a severe accident on my bicycle where I was thrown and hit my head on the concrete and had to be taken by ambulance to the Tsukuba University Hospital. Despite the fact that they only performed wound washing with gauze, and a CT scan of my head, their original amount was 24 thousand yen (220 dollars), and thanks to the insurance from Japan, I only had to pay 7 thousand yen (100 dollars). So I

recommend that you be very careful not to have any road accidents, because Japanese medical expenses are very high, and Japanese insurance does not cover all the costs.

For any questions, queries, problems, you need to have contact with the Global Commons office, since they are the ones in charge of the Trans-Pacific Program and carry out the procedure and exchange process for Latin American students. Some of the emails where you can communicate are:

- latinamerica-pj@un.tsukuba.ac.jp Global Commos Office
- eiguchi.laura.ga@un.tsukuba.ac.jp Laura Eiguchi (Internacional Associate)

My recommendations within the city of Tsukuba

- ✧ Probably the best restaurant in Tsukuba for me is “**Tontokoton / とんとこ豚**”, it is a Tonkatsu food restaurant, fried pork or seafood. This restaurant is reasonably priced and features a Student Menu on weekdays, where dishes are mostly only 1000 yen.

It is served in Teishoku food, that is a set with various complements, such as rice, miso soup, salad and cabbage. The portions are quite large, and you can eat everything without problems. The store is open from 11 am-2pm and from 5:30 pm to 9:30 pm, and they accept reservations.



** Some of the richest dishes with a lot of variety*

- ◇ The second one is not specifically from Tsukuba, but you have several franchises in various parts of the country: “Shabu Shabu- Shabu yo / しゃぶしゃぶ・しゃぶ葉” restaurant. It is a Japanese variant of hot pot (Chinese fondue). The style of the dish is related to sukiyaki, as both use finely cut meat and vegetables, and are often served with dipping sauces. However, they differ radically in taste: shabu-shabu is tastier and less sweet than sukiyaki. For two hours you can enjoy this dish with vegetables to taste and unlimited meat. The cost of this place is a bit steep, and depending on the type and variety of meat you want to eat, you can also include a buffet of drinks and desserts for 300 yen more. In total it can cost between 1700-2500 yen.



- ◇ Third, I recommend “Zeyo / ゼヨ”, a curry-udon restaurant that has national recognition and has been featured in various reports and in newspapers. Curry-udon, that's how it sounds, eating udon with a curry “soup / paste” with a pork chop and chives on top. My reason for recommending this place is both for the flavor of the curry and the smooth texture of the pork chop. In addition, there is a promotion for students where you can order a croquette with sauce and mayonnaise and rice for just 10 yen more, and up to 30 yen more for a crab cream croquette.

Transportation to Tsukuba from the airport

When a new semester begins and new exchange students arrive, the University of Tsukuba reserves bus tickets so that all students, one or two days after arriving at the airport, go straight to the dormitories all together. Students are to meet at the point indicated upon arrival. In the case of not entering the meeting point at Narita airport, there are many information points where you can ask in both Japanese and English.

In any case, the person in charge of the exchange students or the designated tutors will be present waiting to give support and guidance to the buses. The point to keep in mind is that there is a limited number of tickets per day, and the last bus leaves around 5:30 pm or 7pm, arriving in Tsukuba in about an hour and a half. However, it must be taken into account that it is not possible to arrive very late to the university dormitories, since the administration is possibly only open until a certain time. As it is a day when several foreigners arrive, they generally extend the extension hours to attend to the students and take them to their rooms.