

My experience as an exchange student in Tsukuba University

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Travelling abroad has always been a dream of mine, I've also been interested in learning about cultures from other countries. And it wasn't until 2022 when I finally accomplished that goal.

During my last years of secondary school, I decided to study Japanese by myself. Mostly using language learning apps, following Japanese artists, watching anime and reading the news. I felt like language apps weren't enough, I wanted to learn not only the language but about the culture too. I also made the decision to, someday soon, go to Japan to learn by living surrounded by all of it.

My university had agreements with some Japanese universities, I chose Tsukuba University mostly because of their motto: Imagine the future. Since I'm interested in topics like parenting and child development, in other words, I am interested in the future of society. So, after a few months, and some paperwork, I got selected. I could not believe it, after so many years, my dream is coming true. Then, the time for traveling arrived. It was my first time abroad, my first time traveling by myself, and it's a 40 hours trip! Finally made it to Japan. I even slept on the plane, that's why I got a nice sleep at night in Japan, not worrying about time difference. Then, next morning, a small earthquake woke me up.

Back in my home university, I was used to a system for entering courses. I only had to use a website for that, after reading some recommendations and advice from older students. So, the process in Tsukuba was totally new for me. During the first week, students get to "explore the different options not only by reading syllabuses, but by attending to an Introduction session for each course. After that, you have to ask the desired courses' professors for their signatures. When you get all the signatures you needed, you have to ask in the office for the official registration.

It is cool to have that experience, but it's sometimes a little problematic. There are some courses that overlap to others, so you have to choose which one you would like to experience beforehand. I definitely wanted to take Japanese language courses, since I felt like I was in beginner level and was eager to learn more, especially now that I was able to

practice out there what I learned. For that, we have to take a placement test, that tells you the level you're in, and which class is suitable for you.

Of course, all this process, and doing all the paperwork I had to do at the University, the City Hall and the bank (because I was selected to receive the Jasso scholarship), wouldn't have been possible without the help of my tutor. I was lucky to have a very kind and responsible tutor, she was also there every time I had questions regarding student life or living in Japan in general. She also helped me with a task that I thought would be easy and fast (but wasn't): Finding a good bike at a good price.

Even though there are buses, having a bike is way more convenient, especially if you want to stop at some places to explore while going somewhere. Most bike shops had all their bikes sold out, since it was the beginning of the semester. But, after getting my bike I became unstoppable. Most of the time it was me, going to classes, to buy groceries (I personally recommend TRIAL and Lopia), to second-hand stores (2nd Street, Hard off, Wonder rex), to the mall (AEON and IAS), to explore Tsukuba. I even went to Mount Tsukuba with friends by bike.

Regarding student life, before coming to Japan, I read about Tsukuba University's extracurricular activities. I was able to explore different options: K-pop, language exchange, music club. It was interesting to meet people with similar interests as mine; and also getting to know not only about Japanese culture, but other countries' too. It was actually cultural exchange, since I also explained some things about my country. There are plenty of clubs and circles, even though some of them are mostly integrated by Japanese students, just basic language knowledge can be useful.

Actually, in addition to classes, it was also thanks to clubs that I got to meet nice people. I made some friends and we shared adventures and great moments. We even traveled together. I wasn't able to explore the Kansai region, but we went to Yokohama, Hakone and several places in Tokyo. It was really cool to see in person some of the places I saw on pictures and videos before. I couldn't help but fill my phone's storage with lots of photos.