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Waseda University – Tokyo

早稲田大学・東京



WASEDA University

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# INTRODUCTION

Having studied at the *Lycée Français de Kuala Lumpur* in Malaysia for most of my life and being of European and Asian descent, the Sciences Po Euro-Asian campus in Le Havre seemed to me to be the perfect place to pursue my tertiary education. Having studied Mandarin for several years and having a passion for Japan since a young age, I decided to learn Japanese at Sciences Po without any hesitation as I believe it was a rare yet perfect opportunity to study a language I have always wanted to speak and I have not regretted that decision since. However, in all honesty, studying in Japan was not my first choice when I was asked where I plan on going for my third year during my admission interview. My decision to study in Tokyo was not an easy one but seemed more logical as the deadline for third year applications came closer. I finally chose to spend my year abroad at Waseda University based on several points.

Firstly, it was a way for me to not only improve my Japanese but also to see how far I have progressed in the language after two years. Moreover, it provided me with an opportunity to live in country I have always wanted to visit as a child and a teenager while living alone and not being able to converse in both French and English, my mother tongues, hence coercing myself to get around in a language I am not completely fluent in. Finally, it is a way for me to learn more about a culture I have learnt so much about yet have not been able to experience it with my own eyes.

Based on all these points mentioned above, I was able to construct a project for my third year abroad. My main objective was to improve my Japanese whilst still having classes in English in order for me to have a solid foundation for when I pursue my Master's degree. Also, I wanted to reconcile several aspects of Japanese society, what I know against what I see, being an outsider, a foreigner against being part of the same society. Achieving this goal is of course not that easy (often having to face obstacles such as the language barrier) but it was necessary in order to make this year worthwhile and interesting. All in all, I was very well aware of what I was going to face yet at the same time, was very eager to make many discoveries whether they are pleasant or not.

# I. Description of the experience

## A. Waseda University – 早稲田大学

Founded in 1882 as Tokyo Senmon Gakko (Tokyo College) by former Japanese Prime Minister Shigenobu Okuma, Waseda University started out with 4 departments: Political Science, Law, English and Physical Science. Today, Waseda University is one of Japan's most sought out private universities and is one of the most prestigious schools in the country often ranking at the top of many lists while proving the nation with alumni ranging from politicians to CEO of high profile Japanese companies.

The university's main campuses (Waseda, Nishi-Waseda and Toyama) are located in Shinjuku-ku, the commercial centre and heart of Tokyo, where it boasts a very international, multicultural student body. The university currently has around 50 000 students in both undergraduate and graduate schools with around 10% of students being international students, making Waseda University one of the most international universities in Japan.

Apart from its impressive number of students, the university also provides state of the art infrastructures and technology with very well equipped buildings with fully functioning lifts, escalators, computers as well as convenience stores found in several buildings.

Its student friendly atmosphere backed by its international surrounding and located in the heart of the country's capital made me believe that Waseda University was the perfect place for me to spend my third year in the most practical and convenient way. Moreover, its worldwide reputation as well as its network makes it easy to create connections from all around the world while being in the same classroom.

## B. University courses

When applying to Waseda University, Sciences Po students are giving two different choices: the *Bekka* programme and the SILS (School of International Liberal Studies) programme.

The *Bekka* programme offers Japanese language classes exclusively at Waseda's Centre for

Japanese Language (CJL). This means that classes are all taught in Japanese and are essentially language classes devoting to writing, speaking, listening, reading and many more. On the other hand, SILS has classes taught in English and Japanese although the emphasis is mainly on the former. For this year abroad, I decided to study in SILS where I could learn more about international relations in English while having Japanese classes at the same time. Let me now talk more in-depth about the two choices with a more detailed approach in regards to SILS classes.

### **i. The *Bekka* programme – 別科**

Meaning “special course” or “different course”, the *Bekka* programme at Waseda is for students who wish to study Japanese intensively and improve greatly their ability to converse and communicate in Japanese. Students opting for the *Bekka* programme have to earn a minimum of 13 credits (14 credits maximum) per semester while choosing their different classes ranging from levels 1 to 8. Classes last 1 hour and 30 minutes and are usually 1 credit – save for comprehensive classes which tend to be 5 or 3 credits, depending on the level – meaning a student following the *Bekka* programme would have a schedule of around 19 hours and 30 minutes.

The classes the *Bekka* programme offers are very varied and present different themes and topics such as: Comprehensive classes (the “traditional” language learning classes), Kanji classes, speaking, writing, reading, pronunciation, cultural all with the objective of expanding their Japanese language and culture knowledge while at the same time improving substantially their ability to communicate in Japanese.

### **ii. SILS (School of International Liberal Studies) – 国際教養学部**

Launched in 2004, the SILS department is a relatively recent undergraduate department founded in order to promote Waseda to the global stage by having a very international outlook on teaching and socialising. Around 30% of students and faculty members are non-Japanese, giving SILS a multicultural background and leaving students of a multitude of nationalities being in the same classroom where they can learn more about different cultures and share their own perspective.

As a one-year exchange student, I was part of what Waseda branded as an SP3 (Study Plan 3) student. Students at SILS are grouped in 4 different kinds of study plans from SP1 to SP4. SP1 correspond to students whose mother tongue is Japanese whereas SP2 are students whose mother tongue is a language other than Japanese. SP3 are students who are on exchange for either one semester or one year and SP4 are students who are taking part in a double-degree between their home university and Waseda University.

As an SP3 student, my course selection as well as my time table was relatively flexible. I was obliged to take 14 credits (8 credits of SILS classes and 6 credits of CJL classes) with a maximum of 21 credits (either 6 extra credits in SILS or “university wide” courses and 1 credit of CJL).

Before I talk about the breakdown of my classes for each semester, I will talk about the types of classes at SILS as well as the “university wide” courses.

Classes in SILS are divided into seven clusters. As an SP3 student, I was freely able to take any classes from any cluster provided they are either Intermediate or Advanced Courses. On the other hand, ordinary students are first able to pick courses from any cluster but have to gradually pick a specialty before they graduate. The seven clusters are the following:

- Life, environment, matter and information
- Philosophy, religion and history
- Economy and business
- Governance, peace, human rights and international relations
- Communication
- Expression
- Culture, mind and body, and community

As seen above, the classes offered at SILS are very diverse which enables students to be very well-rounded in terms of their study approach, a student is able to learn about molecular biology and jazz history while also studying about the Islamic world and media economics. Courses are usually taught in a lecture style with classes either comprising around thirty students or up to a hundred in a single room with a “demographic” of around 65% Japanese and 35% international students. Finally, examinations are straight-forward, they are usually comprised of one mid-term and one final exam, a presentation (alone or in groups) or a

research paper to be handed at the end of the semester with an emphasis on attendance and participation (usually 10% of the final grade).

Course selection at Waseda was done online in three intervals where students got to decide whether they wanted to add or drop a course during orientation week. This is necessary if you believe that the course you enrolled in was not up to your expectations or on the contrary, after a good word of mouth, you decide to enrol in a class you were not interested in the first place. Unlike Sciences Po where registration was done on a “first come first served basis”, SILS gives its students 3 registration periods of 2 days to register. On the upside, this leaves students ample time to decide which classes they really want however, this leaves their fate on a string as they might be over-enrolled for a particular class unbeknownst to them.

When I first planned and registered for my courses, what I had in mind was of course my Master’s for the following year. Willing to do my Master’s at PSIA (Paris School of International Affairs), most of my classes were mainly based on International relations, journalism and diplomacy. On the upside, SILS offers a wide range of courses to international students satisfying students of many different interests.

I will now present and talk about my classes for both semesters, firstly by presenting my classes taken at SILS, later followed by those at the CJL.

	1st Semester	Credits	Hours
SILS	History of English	2	1h30
	International Trade Management	2	1h30
	The European Union and International Relations	2	1h30
	Introduction to Clinical Psychology	2	1h30
	The Pacific Rim and the Twenty First Century World	4	3h
	Introduction to Journalism and World Politics	2	1h30
CJL	Comprehensive Japanese 3	5	7h30
	My Waseda Experience 3-4	1	1h30
Total		20	19h30

	2nd Semester		
SILS	Ethnography Documentary Film: Theory and Practice	4	3h
	International Journalism and East Asian Diplomacy	4	3h
	Pacific Perspectives on Empire, War and Globalisation	4	3h
CJL	Comprehensive Japanese 4	5	7h30
	Talking and Writing about my Favourite Things	1	1h30
Total		18	18h

## **SILS Classes**

### **HISTORY OF ENGLISH – Hiizu MORIYAMA (森山秀)**

Originally, I did not intend to take this class. However, as the course I wanted at first was fully booked, I decided to take this class as a way to get full credits. Moreover, I have always been interested in languages and their origins so I gave this class a chance.

At first, I found the pace to be quite slow. The teacher taught his class at his own time but made it interesting and was quite articulate. Throughout his class, you could tell that he was passionate about what he was teaching and demonstrated great knowledge in the fields of etymology and archaic expressions. The class explores the origins of the English language as we go from the Indo-European background of the language up to its Modern state while passing its Middle English and Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon phases. The course also takes a look at a variety of important texts such as *Beowulf* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The professor was also very “chill” in his way of teaching: he never took attendance and only provided a mid-term and a final exam as evaluations of his class. Even though it was definitely not the class I found the most interesting, I feel like I learnt a lot from attending it.

### **INTERNATIONAL TRADE MANAGEMENT – Tatsuo NOBU (信達郎)**

This class is mainly a business class and emphasises the different roles and steps that are undertaken when trade is done on an international scale. The class explores several trade theories as well as the documents that are essential when trading. When I first registered for this class I was over-enrolled and therefore believed that this class was extremely popular. I got to enter this class on the final day of registration and was extremely pleased to enter this class as I really wanted an economics/business module. However, I was very disappointed by the result and believed I should have read several *rappports de séjour* thoroughly. The professor’s teaching method is extremely poor and class participation is almost non-existent. Sometimes, classes only last an hour and the teacher tends to ramble on. There is only one examination (a final exam) for this class yet I do not think I have learnt anything from this class after 15 weeks. Due to the teacher’s teaching method, I do not recommend this class.

## **The European Union and International Relations – Paul BACON**

The focus of this class is quite self-explanatory. Throughout the semester, through presentations and class discussion, we learn about the different institutions of the European Union, the problems of its foreign policy, the question of enlargement and other relevant topics. I found this class to be quite entertaining and interesting as the professor can be very witty at times yet self-deprecating due to the lack of participation in the class. Although I did not particularly enjoy the class as much as I had hoped, I feel like I learnt something from the class and felt that more input from the students would have garnered interest in the classroom. Evaluation for this class was quite simple with one mid-term exam and one final research paper.

## **INTRODUCTION TO CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY – Dariusz SKOWRONSKI**

Having been interested in psychology throughout my secondary education and never been able to get any formal knowledge on the subject matter, I took this class to gain some basic insight as it was an introductory class. The course is pretty straightforward, interesting and easy to understand. The professor, of Polish origin, is very active and helpful yet can be seen as quite eccentric during the class as he tries to entertain the class as well as lighten the atmosphere when dealing with “heavy” topics such as depression, suicide and Japan’s many social problems. The grading of this class consisted of attendance, a final exam as well as a research paper submitted at the end of the class dealing with any psychology-related topic. I really enjoyed this class as I had not only become more knowledgeable in psychology and Japan’s on-going social crises but also was glad to write a report on a subject that interested me and therefore got more insight from it.

## **THE PACIFIC RIM AND THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY WORLD – Gregory DVORAK**

Before taking this class, I had no knowledge of the Pacific islands save for the clichés found in media. Therefore I decided to enlighten myself by attending the first course and surprise myself. I was very pleased with my final choice. Professor Dvorak is extremely passionate and knowledgeable about the Pacific, an area he grew up in and studied extensively, even up until now. The classes deal about the Pacific islands today and how they live the struggles they faced during their colonised past and the atomic testing of our post-war era. The lessons were very entertaining and never boring: they usually followed a

pattern but each class was never the same – we started with a presentation of the topic followed by images, videos, clips taken from films and discussions on the readings. After my first semester at Waseda, this class has to be my favourite so far and I really recommend it to anyone wishing to learn more about the Pacific islands' history and culture.

### **INTRODUCTION TO WORLD POLITICS AND JOURNALISM – Satoru SUZUKI (鈴木悟)**

The main objective of this class is to learn more about TV and press journalism as well as the fundamental elements one has to apply to when writing news articles. The instructor, Professor Suzuki, used to be a foreign correspondent for NHK in Washington D.C. where he got to interview former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. During each session, we would usually do a recap of the important news events of the past week, followed by a presentation of the class topic and a group and class discussion accompanied by videos and news segments of a particular event. As for evaluation, reaction essays as well as attendance and a final paper on a particular striking news story were part of the grading.

**In the next part, I will talk about the second semester. However, as I have just started it, my opinion might change during the course of the year.**

### **ETHNOGRAPHY FILM DOCUMENTARY: THEORY AND PRACTICE – Rosemarie BERNARD**

The main study of this class is to introduce the different methods and techniques of anthropological field research as well as ethnography film documentary making with a focus on Tokyo. The end goal of this class is to create an anthropological-ethnographic film project by applying methods such as interviews and recording with the theory that is taught in class

### **INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM AND EAST ASIAN DIPLOMACY – Toshimitsu SHIGEMURA (重村智計)**

Similar to Professor Suzuki's class in the first semester, this course emphasises on the difficulties challenged and the necessary methods one has to face and obtain in order to be a journalist. However, this class focuses more on the aspect of Japanese writing and a comparative study of Japanese and Western print media. Although the class is predominantly Japanese and the essays given have to be written in Japanese, students with

an intermediate level of Japanese should not be discouraged from taking this class as the instructor emphasises on the quality and effort one puts into the work.

### **PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON EMPIRE, WAR AND GLOBALISATION – Gregory DVORAK**

As the “Pacific” classes Professor Dvorak teach at SILS are divided into two – one in spring and the other in autumn – I decided to take the first part of his class in order to complete and reinforce my knowledge on the Pacific islands (the first part of his class is in Spring Semester and the second is in the Fall semester). Although some parts are bound to overlap, the classes are not interchangeable and are meant to complement one another. Whilst the first class I mentioned emphasises on the present and the problems the Pacific islands face today, this class traces back its roots and how the islands were before colonisation and the ensuing World Wars.

### **CJL classes**

**COMPREHENSIVE JAPANESE 3 – Rei YAMAMOTO (山本玲), Yoshikazu OKUDA (奥田芳和) and Momoko FUJITA (藤田百子)**

**COMPREHENSIVE JAPANESE 4 – Yumi WAKAMATSU (若松由美), Hitomi MISHINA (三科ひとみ) and Keiko ARAYA (荒谷啓子)**

As mentioned earlier, as an SP3 student, the minimum requirement in order to pass a semester is to obtain 14 credits with 6 of them being CJL classes, in other words, Japanese language courses. The most common way to obtain these credits is usually by enrolling to a comprehensive class which hands out 5 credits – which is why I took this class. Moreover, the comprehensive classes offered at Waseda are similar to the ones at Sciences Po or at any other language centre. Classes usually follow a strict schedule and are based on a textbook which is used throughout the semester. The classes offer a mixture of speaking, writing, listening, reading, vocabulary and grammar exercises and tests are held weekly in order for the students to learn their vocabulary and grammatical points on a regular basis. I started this class at level 3 after taking the J-CAT test in September and after reading the syllabus which suited my level – intermediate. For the Spring semester, I decided to pick the next level (higher intermediate) as I thought I was not ready to skip a level even after spending half a year in Japan. Although the gap between levels 3 and 4 is quite large, it is manageable through regular studying.

### **MY WASEDA EXPERIENCE 3-4 – Keiko MORIMOTO (森元桂子)**

During the final registration of my first semester, I had failed to enter a CJL class I registered for as I was overenrolled. Therefore, I had to pick a class which suited my level. The choice was not easy and I picked this one as it was the only one which fitted my schedule as well as my Japanese capabilities. I was initially reluctant as I felt that a level 3-4 class would be too much to handle. Over the semester, the purpose of the class was for exchange students to talk and discuss about their semester or their university life at Waseda and what they expect from it, what interests them, what intrigues them. Overall, the focus of the class was Waseda and the lives its students have. On a whole, I was not very interested in the class as I felt that its theme was too repetitive for a semester. Also, most students who enrolled for this class were of a higher level and therefore conversations were not as easy and interactions can be quite awkward between students of different level. However, the teacher and the atmosphere are very calming which bring a positive ambience in the class.

### **TALKING AND WRITING ABOUT MY FAVOURITE THINGS 3-4 – Noriko NAGAMINE (長嶺倫子)**

This class was originally not my first choice as a 1 credit class for my spring semester however, I took this class as the one I chose before was quite disappointing and this one fit perfectly in my schedule. The premise of this class is simple: students talk about their favourite things, write about them and share it to the class. This might appear as very redundant but new themes are introduced weekly (food, music, people, places for example) in order to freshen up the class and make things more interesting. The teacher is very kind and the class size is perfect and not too crowded which makes the atmosphere very comforting.

## **C. Activities**

With Japanese universities being large in size and Waseda not being an exception, socialising and making friends can be difficult for students as they enter university and are immersed into a new world. Although classes and seminars are areas where one can get to

around and know other people, it is not that easy when classes are very large and talking is not permitted during classes .

This is where extra-curricular activities come in. Clubs or “circles” (サークル – less intensive clubs) are where most students encounter their friends or the people they usually hang out with outside of classes. Activities are numerous and extremely diverse ranging from arts to sports, research to travelling, it is very difficult to not find a club suitable to your liking. Recruitments are usually done at the beginning of the school year either at the Waseda Fair in April or at the Waseda Festival in November where clubs promote actively and have booths placed all around the main campus in order to look for new faces to replace the seniors that have graduated.

Circles play a large part in a student’s life as it is where they hang out and get to know their friends as well as themselves. Events are regularly held among the members of a same circle in order to foster club spirit and enjoy themselves through *nomikai* (飲み会 – drinking party) followed by a karaoke or another round at an *izakaya* (居酒屋 – Japanese style bar).

During the Fall semester, I was part of a ping pong circle. Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts, I did not manage to attend as often as I had hoped to and therefore did not continue attending the sessions.

## II. Comparative dimension

### A. Culture shock and being a 外国人 (*gaikokujin* – foreigner)

#### in Japan

With an extremely homogenous population (almost 99% of the population are ethnic Japanese), foreigners are not a common aspect in Japan, although much more in Tokyo.

This might not come as a surprise but experiencing Japan as a foreigner, one is bound to feel “othered”, differentiated and face many surprises – be it positive or negative. As one might know, Japanese society is dictated by many customs and lifestyle – it is hard for one to *become* Japanese as one is usually *born* Japanese. Integration is necessary for one to fit in the Japanese social mould and therefore, foreigners are usually left aside and are not expected to follow several norms. However, as hard as it might seem in overcoming

some obstacles – and many are those who give up trying – through patience and openness, one is able to breeze pass the hurdles of Japanese society. Japanese etiquette, politeness and understanding the many Japanese formalities are key in living in Japan.

An important part of living in Japan is also the respect of harmony – the concept of 和 (Wa), also a symbol signifying Japan. This implies that the people should put their personal interests aside and prioritise those of the community. This idea manifests itself through many aspects of daily life such as the country's unusually low crime rate, its workplace ethics as well as public behaviour (talking on the train, not eating/smoking on the streets, not expressing oneself too directly and many more).

Respecting the many rules of Japan is essential if one does not want to be perceived as rude and obstructive in the eyes of the Japanese. It might not appear as an easy task but obeying this code of conduct is rewarded positively and very much appreciated by the Japanese people.

Another important part of the culture shock I have experienced is definitely the divide in modernity and tradition. As the aforementioned part mostly talks about the customs and norms one faces throughout their daily life in Tokyo, one must also note the exceptional contemporary, up-to-date lifestyle it boasts.

From extremely punctual railway services to the usage of ID cards to pay your train ride or your groceries, from its extensive 3G network to the incredible convenience of its コンビニ (*konbini* – convenience store) – Tokyo has a lot to offer in terms of a high tech way of life. I remember the first time I walked into a *konbini*, I was completely astonished by how advanced they were and how convenience stores elsewhere in the world paled in comparison. The *konbini* in Japan take stores to a whole new level, by possessing ATM machines, printing/copy/fax/scanning machines, toilets, the ability to purchase concert tickets and pay your bills/taxes.

Finally, Japan's apparent modernity is seen through its youth. Although decreasing in overall population, the Japanese youth are more open-minded and are more culturally accepting when it comes to foreigners. Although the occasional stares are still present, many young Japanese are genuinely interested in foreign customs and many are those studying foreign languages in order to live or spend a year abroad in another country.

## B. The Japanese university system

As mentioned earlier, Waseda University is one of Japan's leading universities and one of the most prestigious private universities along with Keio University.

As one might know, 入学試験 (*nyuugakushiken* – Japanese entry exams) taken during high school are very tough times for Japanese high school students as it demands regular, rigorous and extensive studying in order for students to attend the schools they want to study as in Japan, the university usually dictates where one might later work in life through another challenging aspect of Japanese university life, the 就職活動 (*shuushokukatsudou* – Job hunting) that usually take place in April and September.

However, in between these two strenuous parts of the Japanese student life is their university life – sometimes referred to as the “Spring break of life” by some Japanese.

Now, why is that? As high school students work extremely hard (and that is an understatement) to pass their university entrance exams and enter the university they want to, Japanese universities are usually a time when students get to know themselves better and rest from the hardships they faced before entering this period of their lives. In a way, they are rewarded for having passed such a tough stage in their life that now; they can take a break before joining the work force.

As for the case of Waseda, although as prestigious as it seems, is no exception to the rule. Even if it is world renowned and possesses an extremely international atmosphere and exposure, many of its courses can fail to live up to its expectations.

This first surprised me as I was not completely aware of how *tough* the high school entrance examinations were but when teachers urged students not to fall asleep in class or when many students do not go to class or few are those who actively participate in class, I learnt the truth.

Also, workloads and teaching styles are different in both Sciences Po and Waseda. While Sciences Po usually has lecture and seminar classes with a strict policy on attendance and academic studies, Waseda demands less work from its students and its classes blends lectures and seminars for its international students. Moreover, as classes are not as intense as Sciences Po, Waseda emphasises club and circle participation for its students in order to boost friendly relations and one's personal self before they have to return to hard work

once they leave the university for their job hunting season.

Overall, through a comparative dimension, living in Japan has taught me a whole new concept on the notion of “foreigner”. From its “lax” university system to its many daily paradoxes of traditional customs and absurd innovative creativity, I have managed to see Japan through many angles. Also I have managed to compare aspects that are socially accepted and frowned upon in Japan with what I consider myself as acceptable or not.

### **III. Intake from my experience**

#### **A. Personal level**

Without a doubt, this year abroad in Japan has taught me a lot about myself and the different cultures we live in; it has certainly taken me out of my comfort zone as I used to live in places where my parents came from and where I can speak the language without any difficulties. Spending a year at Waseda and in Tokyo, I definitely have no regrets and can consider this as an incredible, once in a life time experience and opportunity that ranks high in my personal endeavours.

Firstly, this experience has brought me closer to Japan and has taught me more about the culture and language I have learnt for over two years. Living in a country and conversing with the inhabitants is something that cannot be taught in textbooks and in a way, I feel more confident, being aware that I can interact and conduct daily conversations in Japanese while knowing how to behave myself in public and respecting the many customs Japan has.

I believe I have made significant progress in the language and aspire to be more fluent in the future, hopefully by continuing to learn it.

Also, this year abroad has made me realise more about who I am. Coming from a dual background, it was hard for me to always choose and tell where I come from. However, Japan’s homogeneity and its cultural distinctiveness has made me feel more at ease with my background and in a way, even if my upbringing stems from two very different countries, I have managed to compare them equally to the Japanese culture.

## **B. Academic and professional levels**

Having taken a wide variety of classes at Waseda (Language history, international relations, business, film making, journalism and Japanese language classes) as well as taking into account the different classes I attended at Sciences Po, my year abroad has only cemented my interest and my will to pursue a career in international relations, however, with a cultural and historical approach to it. Although I do not see myself living and working in Japan, I would gladly like to work with Japan and Japanese institutions.

Finally, after several months back in Asia after my two years in Le Havre, I was glad to return to a place I can so-call “home” and has definitely established my utmost desire of working and living on the Asian continent – whether it is East Asia or South East Asia.

## **CONCLUSION**

Truth be told, I was very nervous before coming to Tokyo: I was not sure whether or not this was the right choice and having no contact or family there, I knew that this year abroad would surely be a life changing experience.

Although the first month was difficult and life in Tokyo is very different compared to Le Havre or Kuala Lumpur, I have definitely enjoyed every single moment of it.

From being more at ease in Japanese to making new friends and solidifying other friendships, I definitely feel that I have accomplished something during my sojourn in Tokyo.

However, with only a few more months left and my flight ticket already booked, I only have a sole regret, that I have not travelled enough around Japan.

Lastly, I am very glad with the outcome of this year abroad and hope that this has inspired you and helped you with your third year decisions.

# Annex

## Administrative procedures

Before entering Japan, many administrative steps are required.

Firstly, one must obtain a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE). This is done after submitting all Waseda documents to the Sciences Po administration in Paris who in turn, send all the paperwork to Waseda. Once the Certificate of Eligibility is obtained from Waseda, along with a student Visa application form and a proof of enrolment, one is ready to go to the Japanese Embassy where the Visa will be issued. Japanese Visa issuing depends on the countries but usually, they are very quick and can go from 2 to 3 days.

The next step is done in Japan. Once arrived at the immigration, you are to show your Visa and hand out your CoE. In exchange the immigration officer creates a card and gives it to you. This is your 在留カード (*zairyu kado* – residence card). This card serves as your ID card in Japan and is to be carried at all times.

Finally, the next step involves registration. Once settled, you are given 14 days to register yourself at the 区役所 (*kuyakusho* – municipal ward office) depending on where you stay (i.e. if you live in Shibuya, you are to register at the Shibuya-ku municipal ward office; or if you live in Shinjuku, registration is done at the Shinjuku-ku municipal ward office). This is very important as it provides a stamp on your residence card indicating that you are now a resident of Tokyo. Moreover, if you live in a Waseda affiliated dorm, registration for the national health insurance is done at the same time. However, if you live on your own or in a home-stay, it is recommended to do this as it gives a 70% discount off medical charges.

## Housing

Around the summer holidays (June-July), Waseda sends an email inquiring if students wish to stay in a dorm, an option I accepted. However, there are different kinds of ways to find accommodation in Tokyo.

### 1) The Waseda affiliated dorms

Students who respond to the questionnaire are given the opportunity to stay in a dorm that is managed by Waseda University. There are three possible dorms for international students.

– 西早稲田留学生寮 (Nishi-Waseda International Student Dorm)

– 早稲田奉仕園 (Waseda Hoshien)

– 早大寮 (Sodairyo)

When I got the reply, I was assigned at Nishi-Waseda International Student Dorm. Even if all dorms are located in the same area (10 minutes away from the main Waseda Campus, 5 minutes away from the Tokyo Metro Tozai and Fukutoshin Lines and 15 minutes away from the Takadanobaba Station JR Line), the differences are in the size of the rooms and the price. As I lived in Nishi-Waseda, I had a single room with a toilet and a bathroom included as well as a fridge and a freezer. The room is also equipped with a desk, a cabinet and a bed. The kitchen is shared with all the tenants of the floor, as well as the laundry machines. Dorms are very international as many different nationalities live under the same roof. Although it can be very culturally diverse, it is hard to speak in Japanese as there are not many Japanese students apart from the dorm manager and the room assistants. Money-wise, a single room at Nishi-Waseda is about 63,000 yen per month which can be quite pricey but it makes sense as we are located in Shinjuku, the centre of Tokyo, within walking distance of the campus therefore avoiding many unnecessary transportation fees.

### 2) Private apartments

Private apartments can be very expensive within Tokyo, and therefore is not a very recommendable choice. Moreover, it should be noted that it is extremely difficult for foreigners and booking in advance is a good idea as it is better than ending up homeless and still looking for a place to stay.

### 3) Host families and ホームステイ (*home stay*)

Host families are the best way if one wishes to improve his/her Japanese as families are contractually obliged to converse in Japanese unless a misunderstanding occurs. Host families usually provide with meals and accommodation but often are those who also impose a curfew and many live far from the university. The cultural gap can be very strenuous however, it helps provide more cultural exposure.

#### 4) Guest houses/Share houses

This last choice is very popular among students and young working adults. As the name suggests, the guest house follows a concept where people who do not know each other live under the same roof but in separate bedrooms. Kitchens, toilets and bathrooms are all shared within the members of the house. Although this is a great way to foster new friendships, it can also backfire as members are not sure to always get along.

### **Navigating and communicating within Tokyo and Japan**

Tokyo boasts a very wide 3G network coverage as well as unsurprisingly, a large train and metro network.

Moving from place to place can be very tiresome but also very expensive going from one line to another can be very costly. Therefore, when travelling, it is always about time versus money: save time by paying more or pay less but face a longer journey. To make travelling within Tokyo, a PASMO or Suica card is a necessity. Not only does it make it easier to travel from place to place by swiping the card over the turnstile but it gives out small discounts when travelling and it can also be used in convenience stores as a placeholder for cash and cards!

Regarding telephones, I kept my phone but bought a Japanese SIM card which offers exclusively 3G services. This means that I did not have a phone number but paid 920 yen for 1 GB of data per month. Although I could not make calls and networks were not stable at all times, WiFi networks are very common in Tokyo and many apps such as Messenger and LINE are more prevalent with the youth.

### **Budget and expenses**

In terms of cost of living, Tokyo ranks as one of the highest worldwide. Therefore, budgetary planning is essential in living comfortably in this city. This is more apparent when comparing with other cities in Japan such as Kyoto. Prices may appear absurd for certain commodities: fruit, vegetables and grocery shopping in general. However, eating outside can seem as cheaper, with a possibility of eating decently for around 800 yen (less than 6 euros at time of writing).

Here is an estimate of monthly expenses:

- rent: 63,000 yen
- food (groceries and dining out): 35,000 – 50,000 yen
- transportation (PASMO charge): 2,000 – 10,000 → usually depends how often you use transportation/if you prefer walking
- medical insurance: 1,260 yen
- personal expenditures and leisure: 9,000 – 25,000 yen

Obviously, this is just a rough monthly budget and it varies from person to person. However, depending on your taste, few adjustments can be made: if you prefer to eat outside, you might spend less and be able to spend more on leisure for example.

Although Tokyo's cost of living is high, especially with its current tax rate of 8%, this should not hinder those who really wish to spend their year abroad there.

## Travelling

As part of my third year, I wish I could develop more time to travelling around Japan. Although I have made trips to Kamakura and Yokohama in the beginning of the year and to Kyoto and Osaka during the Winter break, I wished I had spent more time on sightseeing as I only have a year here. During my Spring break, I went back home to Kuala Lumpur and tickets were not very expensive at that time. However, when travelling around Japan, it is also good to plan a budget as transportation can be very costly and be wary of the temperature and weather conditions.

