

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	International Relations, Japanese
Exchange Institution	Gakushuin University, Tokyo, Japan
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1 / 2 2015

B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	Provided by university
Accommodation	\$250 / month
Return Airfare	\$2000
Local Transportation	Student transport \$200-\$300 dollars for X months. General use varies heavily (\$3 avg per ride?)
Meals	Cheap food out = \$5-6, Buying groceries roughly same as in NZ.
Visa	Free with Certificate of Eligibility
Health & Insurance	
Personal Spending	Personally didn't buy a lot, though a meal/drinks with friends would be around \$20 on average. Much cheaper to go out do things than in NZ.
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$20/month, though plans vary heavily. Most sims are carrier-locked so a new phone is probably also needed.
Other fees (specify)	Bills at accommodation = \$60-70 a month.
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Generally speaking, aside from transport things in Japan were much cheaper than I had expected. Food and drinks etc were incredibly cheap in comparison, while things like clothes and electronics were pretty much the same or slightly cheaper.

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

Much less, it obviously is dependent on where you are living but my rent/expenses were significantly cheaper than expected.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)? Cash Passport, also opened a bank account in Japan.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

Stay at Azalea House (recommended by uni) for very reasonable prices in a convenient place. Try and

socialize in places on your student commute route so you can use your train pass. If you're eating for one, eating out or making food at home are sometimes very similar prices. PS always budget for more ramen.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

\$1.20

C: Visas & Insurance **Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

Yes, not difficult. Applying requires receiving your Certificate of Eligibility from Japanese immigration, once this arrives the process is fast-tracked and very easy through the Japanese Embassy in Wellington.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

Don't be too scared that the documentation takes ages to arrive from Japan.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

There was a mandatory health insurance for those living in Japan which can be paid all at once or monthly. I can't remember exactly but it might have cost \$500 or so.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

This is a compulsory insurance run by the govt.

D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
VUW Trimester 1/YEAR					
Japanese A(x3)	Japanese	JAPA100-200		3	After my studies (Year 9-200 level Japanese) I found the beginner level to be quite easy
Japanese B(x4)	Japanese	JAPA200-300		4	Intermediate courses were taken by the majority of students- the teachers generally help you work at your own level.
World Affairs	English	INTP101?		3	Nice to have a class in English, was rather interesting.
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					
Japanese A	Japanese	Japa200		4	Carried on with a Kanji class taught at a personal level.
Japanese B(x2)	Japanese	Japa200-300		5	Oe Sensei's news and essay classes were fantastic for growth in language.
Japanese C	Japanese	Japa300-400		4	Took a presentation class at advanced level, very challenging but rewarding.

Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

Very straightforward attending then online registration. A lot of help was provided during orientation.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

No worries at all, just be careful of which courses are full year or one semester.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

The exchange staff are amazing, ask them about any concerns.

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations? Less stressed on the assignment / exam front, more focus on personal growth. Definitely a case of 'get out what you put in'

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

Way smaller classes for the language courses, on personal basis with teacher. Slightly more 'high-school'-esque in structure with set periods and homework.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

I believe 7-8 courses is the recommended load, which can easily vary depending on other commitments. Advanced courses tend to take a lot more work, as do Oe Sensei's classes.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Do the work given, don't be afraid to make mistakes in language as you need to be corrected to learn. Make sure you balance work load with experiencing the amazing country/city/university.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

Internet access was freely available anywhere on campus. Computer labs were also available.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

I prepared with years of previous study, though a beginner level of Japanese could still do fine. The level of load of language choices is up to you, beginner courses can start from a quite basic level.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Azalea House, a single room+kitchenette+bathroom setup. Most exchange students live here.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

No overbearing staff/rules, quite social if you want it to be, though have your own space too. Convenient location and cheap. Certainly not a 'flash' location to live, quite an old building with its problems.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Azalea House

How early can you move into accommodation?

I was able to move in the night I arrived with a key waiting in my letterbox.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

No catering options, a kitchenette is available in your room. Personal responsibility.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

A detailed map was provided before departure from the airport to the accommodation, after the first time it was no problem. Commuting in Japan is an experience in itself but is definitely the 'norm'.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

Follow the advice of the university.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

This was a huge priority of mine, I quickly joined a circle of Japanese-only speakers. This was quite overwhelming at first but they were very supportive and have grown to be life-long friends of mine.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

I had been once before so it wasn't too bad. I am an inherently social person so I made friends and stuck with them.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

Japan has a large emphasis on social hierarchy, even between year levels at university. This is quite a personal decision to take part or passively opt out of, which would depend on who you are socializing with. My friends were quite liberal and accepted social difference here, but always use polite language to teachers/strangers/until you know it's comfortable to do so otherwise.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Japan's history leaks from most aspects of the country, it's quite an amazing experience and feels like another world entirely.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

This varies a lot; Tokyo tends to be quite 'global' compared to the rest of Japan. University staff were incredible; students too were mostly no worries. You can occasionally find a sense of 'distancing' from foreigners in some places, incredibly dependent on the person.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered? Most buildings had elevators/escalators. University had a general supportive feel. As an exchange student you are already in the 'not-Japanese' group, there was no other blatant discrimination I noticed- again, Tokyo is quite global in comparison.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students? Not active discrimination, occasional sense of xenophobia. Only advice is to ignore it and move on, there is a large ex-pat community in Japan who are overly bitter about this and should be ignored at all costs. Find people who are supportive of you, there will be millions of them.

G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities

would you recommend to future exchange students?

A huge range of clubs and circles were available to join. Sports can also be taken as a course in some circumstances. Highly recommend finding a club or circle that suits your hobbies, they make up an integral part of the Japanese university experience.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Toyko is insanely massive, keep active online or asking people for recommendations- I promise you wont run out of things to do. Izakayas with friends are awesome.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

Part time jobs were allowed to be taken by students, though this is mostly an individual process.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Unsure on this.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Some decent savings (or the attitude to find work while in Japan)
2	An open mind- Japan is an entirely different world, make your own opinions while there.
3	Internet-capable device – getting around is 1000x easier with one, along with general help.
4	Clothes to suit both extremes- Japan is a volatile place with its weather.
5	Japanese language ability- though not entirely necessary, going over with some decent knowledge already learnt opened a significant number of doors.

5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

1	Don't fret not understanding things at first- Japanese is a hard and fast language and it will take a solid few months to properly adjust. Stay positive.
2	Make sure to not only focus on school work, Tokyo is filled with experiences that will trump anything you can learn at school. In saying that, improving Japanese ability is crucial too.
3	Join a club/circle! I met most of my friends in my circle and it provided me with opportunities you can't get outside of one. Also was super useful for learning modern Japanese.
4	Eating out isn't too expensive, eat your heart out- it's delicious.
5	Other exchange students and the exchange staff are incredibly helpful, be sure to ask about your worries / queries. They are there to support you.

Top 5 Things to do

What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

1	Experience a proper Japanese Izakaya, preferably with Japanese people.
2	Travel in your holidays, you get some pretty extensive time off. Overnight busses are your best friends. I recommend Shikoku as a less known destination.
3	Climb Mt Fuji- if you're up to it, this was a tough but amazing experience. Getting to the top is unreal.
4	Go to Kyoto. This doesn't need much explanation, it's the hub of traditional Japan. Very very cool.
5	Go out and explore Tokyo- it's way too easy to sit around in your room/accommodation. Don't do it too much.

H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

During my time at Gakushuin University I met a massive amount of people who were happy to help me out when I needed it and just spend time as my friends otherwise. With thanks to these people, I managed to spend time and make not just an experience out of my exchange, but a new home with a new family- one that I certainly won't ever forget. From the teachers to the students, Gakushuin University provided me with a place at which I could grow comfortably into the Japanese lifestyle from, with the knowledge I needed to do so. My Japanese ability and confidence in general have skyrocketed since my time on exchange, and for that I am nothing but thankful.

Travelling to a new culture in a completely different part of the world is a pretty scary jump to make, but looking back I can safely say there is nothing more I would have rather done with my life. Spending a year in Japan has changed and grown me as a person, leaving me with lifelong friends and a second place on the Earth that I can call home.