

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)	Japanese, Applied Linguistics
Exchange Institution	Kansai University, Osaka , Japan
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2014 Trimester 1 & 2

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	0
Accommodation	332/month @ 10 months = 3,320
Return Airfare	2000
Local Transportation	Student commuter pass (dorm-university unlimited) 15/month @ 10 months = 150
Meals	Personal groceries/cooking 40-50/week @ 40 weeks =1600-2000 Eating out 20-40/week @ 40 weeks= 800-1600)
Visa	0
Health & Insurance	Allianz Travel & Health Insurance (NZ) 1500 Japan National Health Insurance 250
Personal Spending	3000-6000
Communications (phone, etc.)	30-60/week @ 40 weeks 1200-2400
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Buying little things that you can't fit in suitcase/ don't realise you need until getting there; towels, shelves, trays for food in room. Bowls/Plates. Go to the 100yen store where possible and then it isn't such a dent in the wallet.

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

Japan was actually cheaper than I anticipated in terms of going out eating and drinking- you can have a decent dinner for anywhere from 6 to 10 dollars, and grab a beer for another 4, so this was quite a contrast to NZ student life where we all embody the token "poor student." On the contrast fruit and veges are expensive, which was annoying ... but health is important so budget it in!

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

I used a *cash passport*. The way it works is that you load money onto your cash passport account from your personal bank account, which you then transfer into your host country's currency. This is all done online. This is ideal as you can transfer a lot while the exchange rate is high, and can also leave it on the card to avoid getting out too much cash out at once. It also allows you to be really independent as you do the necessary processes online, and then get the cash out at an ATM. You will also receive a back-up card in case you lose one, and there are 24/7 call services to cancel a card should it get lost or stolen, so it provides good security too.

I also had a credit card for emergencies, which was helpful as the transfer on cash passport does take 2-3 working days- and sometimes when I was disorganized and needed money urgently the credit card came very handy.

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

Invest in either a bike, or get the student commuter pass/ *teiki*. This will make the Uni commute waaaaay cheaper. If you do get a bike, ask a Japanese friend to show you to a second hand shop, where you will be able to pick one up for around \$100 or less.

If you want to travel *Peach* is the cheapest airline, and after you fly with them once they will send monthly emails with super super cheap flights (I'm talking like \$30 to Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Tokyo... err' where!) Also if you can handle an uncomfortable sleep for the sake of cheaper transport, take the night-bus to Tokyo. You'll get there for like \$40 opposed to over \$100 by *shinkansen*.

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

Water, juice and Soda drinks at a vending machine or *conbini* are around \$1, 1.50 and a coffee at a café around \$3

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?

You will need to apply for a Visa at the Embassy of Japan (Level 18, Magestic Centre on Willis Street) It's free and requires filling out a form provided at embassy. You will need to have visa photos, so get these done at any photo shop in advance. (Around \$25) Make sure the staff understand you need *Visa photos for Japan*, and not regular passport photos- as the measurement requirements are very specific and unfortunately my experience involved the staff making a mistake and having to cut into precious time getting a second lot printed.

I can't remember how long it took, but I remember by confirmation for exchange from Kansai University not coming until quite late, and I think I had to wait for that. (which didn't arrive until about a month before my flight) It would be wise to go in and enquire in advance, and then at least you are prepared with forms and photos once the letter of confirmation arrives.

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

As noted above.

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?

It was mandatory to sign up for Japan National Health Insurance. This is paid in monthly installments, and totals to about \$250-300

In the case that you do go to the hospital the insurance won't cover your entire health bill, but instead subsidizes it by 70%, meaning you will only need to pay 30%

If you do choose to get health insurance from a New Zealand company as well, you can claim back the remaining 30% from them.

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

I used Allianz at STA Travel which covered me for both travel and health insurance. In hindsight however perhaps it would have been better to purchase only travel insurance, as the Japan National Insurance covered me for health. I don't think this will cover you if you do any travel in other parts of Asia however, so this is something you will need to weigh up depending on your travel plans.

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 Language 4a	Japanese		10	3	
Japanese Language 4a	Japanese		10	3	
Japanese Language 4b	Japanese		10	3	
Japanese Language 4b	Japanese		10	3	
Japanese Philosophy	English		10	3	Good. Can tend to be a lot of sweeping statements at times but overall a valuable course to get a broad understanding, and can always back up with own reading.

Japanese History	English		10	3	Taught by Bennet Sensei, a University of Canterbury graduate. He's extremely passionate and knowledgeable in Japanese History and Martial Arts, which made for a really interesting class. He helps to break down history to an understandable and interesting level.
Japanese Culture. Learning Kansai 2	Japanese		10	5	Class with good ideas yet not well executed. Spent a lot of time being made to do independent research on google. Little teacher instruction or resources. Range of Japanese proficiency levels which can be intimidating for new students. (me!)
TESOL	English		10	2	Course taught by Tajiri Sensei-amazing teacher. If you are interested in TESOL I recommend. (check it <i>is</i> Tajiri's course before enrolling though..)
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					
Japanese Language 5a	Japanese			3	
Japanese Language 5a	Japanese			3	
Japanese Language 5b	Japanese			3	Terrible teacher. Some students complained. I won't elaborate in this section but a really poor class.
Japanese	Japanese			3	As above.

Language 5b					
Japanese History- Bushido: The way of the warrior.	English		10	3	Again Bennet Sensei- great class.
Japanese Literature- The tale of Genji	English		10	3	This class had so much potential to be interesting and stimulating... but the teacher was in his final year before quitting and you could tell he was just burnt out and over it. This was frustrating as the energy in the class was really low, and a teacher should not really behave this way. He was quite lazy about classes.
Sociolinguistics	Japanese			4	Really cool. We looked at youth language, gender language etc. and the teacher made good resources and helped us to understand it. Nice to study Japanese that's interesting and relevant, not just grammar! Did get off topic towards end but started off well.
Sociolinguistics	English			2	Really interesting. We had so many nationalities in the class that we could discuss and compare many languages and their social functions etc.

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Before school started the faculty in charge held a talk for all the new exchange students where they

explained the course prospectus, outlining what the courses would cover and what the minimum requirements would be for maintaining our student visa status. They also explained the deadlines on dropping, changing courses and so on. There were also Japanese volunteers to help us navigate the forms. This was a good way of helping us understand the courses, and also learn who was in charge so we knew who to go to with any issues that might arise.

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?

I had no issues with my enrolment. Of course clashing was a potential issue, and this is inevitable with any University. You can audit classes too so it's a good idea to enroll in the number you need for credit, and then attend any other classes you have an interest in as an audit class, so that you don't load yourself up with assignments. Just be sure to speak with the teacher so you are both on the same page.

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

As noted above.

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spent at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

I expected it to be quite intensive but it was quite the opposite. Students commit a lot more time to part-time work than study, and University is really used as a platform for socializing. Definitely a different environment. More comments on learning/classroom experience in next question.

The *kokusaibu* or Division of International Affairs have a tendency which I disliked- where they use exchange students as practice buddies for the Japanese students to use their English on, yet didn't return the favor by providing speaking opportunities for exchange students to practice Japanese. (It's easy to take for granted that exchange students are in Japan and therefore always using Japanese, but this is not necessarily the case. Even *in* the country it can be very hard to speak the target language.)

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?

It wasn't as hard as Victoria. There was usually only one end of term essay, and perhaps a mid-term test or presentation. This was a nice compromise while on exchange as you want to have time to go and explore your host country, but it is hard to keep up a good study ethic without the usual pressure. I was actually really disappointed in some (not all) of the Japanese classes, as the teaching approach was very traditional in the sense that it was often a mundane lesson of reading over grammar and vocabulary straight from the textbook. There are some teachers who I have to credit for using creative approaches and making it more

fun and interesting, but unfortunately this was not the majority.

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?

For VUW to cross-credit you will need to take 8 courses, 4 of which will be your language courses and the other 4 culture papers. Don't take any more, you can still audit the class and learn all the content without doing assessment! You learn more outside of the classroom so focus on making friends and going out with them, that's where all of your language input and practice opportunities come in.

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

Independent study. As I've already alluded to the courses aren't that good, and so you need to set your own goals and work towards them on your own. I imagine many people will be wanting to pass the Japanese Level Proficiency Test, so find your level, buy a book and study this. And as said before, make friends and practice speaking, watch Japanese Youtube videos, anime, whatever you like- it is all study.

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

The computer room was great, but it was separate from the library which was a little annoying as I was used to Victoria where you can easily move back and forth from desk to computer without having to go out in the rain... There are also not enough computers which I was surprised by considering the number of students. I suppose that is inevitable at any University though. Avoid mid-day, that's when it's busiest. There is access to wi-fi anywhere on campus, so that's a good alternative. The library is fine, but every floor is a quiet floor- I really missed the flexibility of having spaces to talk at Vic, as well as group desks, rooms etc. There are plenty of cafeterias though so this can be a good space to study if you like noise, or discuss group projects.

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?

In terms of preparation I just had my foundation of language study from High School & VUW. By all means this was helpful, but it still felt as though I couldn't understand a single word at the beginning. The biggest adjustment was shifting from polite to plain speech, as what we learn in the books is not what's used in every-day life.

There wasn't any intensive language courses or anything like that, but rather semester long language courses. There are 6 levels, and you are placed according to your performance in a test held in the first week. The classes were designed to prepare for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) which I personally found frustrating because the content is taught closely following the JLPT book, and consequently very rarely is it useful language. There are a lot of quizzes but limited speaking opportunities.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed at the Kansai University International Dormitory located in Minami-Senri, Suita.

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

Pros:

- Residents were both exchange students and Japanese students. – Opportunity to make friends.
- Residential Assistants (RA) there to help with any areas of difficulty.
- Close to University
- Cheap (rent, power, internet \$300NZ/month)
- Bathrooms, kitchen and common area cleaned daily.
- No curfew

Cons:

- Other residents leaving unwashed dishes. Dirty benches.
- Small room
- Opposite sex not allowed in room

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

The dorm is probably the best option. You can go and find a house alone, but it will be exactly that-alone. "Flatting" is not really a thing in Japan, instead its one-man households. (Could be lonely?) It depends on your personality and preference however. But if you're staying a year you could always stay in the dorm first semester and then find an apartment for second semester. I imagine that would be less stressful than searching from home and having to deal with landlords and contracts in your very first week...

How early can you move into accommodation?

They will give you a date. I believe there is a 2-3 day leeway where you can come early, but it's quite strict. My move-in day was 26 March.

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

Kitchen facilities to cook yourself.

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

Uni is two train stations away. Someone will show you in the first week and it is easy to remember.
Very easy, no issue.

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

Already mentioned.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

Japanese residents at the dorm are really friendly, and many of them have been on exchange before themselves so they can empathize with your experience. Try to spend time with them.

At the *kokusaibu*/ Division of International Affairs there is a space where exchange students can study/chill/have lunch etc, and a lot of Japanese students who are interested in foreigners and travel often come along. This can be a good opportunity to make friends, but you may find a lot of people trying to speak English to you, which can be counter-productive to your language goals.

Circles/Clubs. In the first week there will be an expo where all the circles and clubs promote themselves and encourage sign-ups. Find something you're interested in and join. Won't be easy though- Japanese will be very surprised to have a foreigner in their midst, and are likely to shy away cos they fear they might have to speak English. It's up to you to make the effort, which can be scary! Give it a go and see how you feel. Once they see that you are using Japanese they might lighten up, but then again depending on your level you might find you can't communicate as well as you would like. Practice makes perfect though. If you can find people patient and friendly enough to help you along with your Japanese it could end up being a great opportunity, but again it just depends who you meet.

Tip: circles= social, fun, low commitment

clubs= competitive, serious, high commitment.

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

That is a very big question. It was hard, intimidating, and caused a lot of anxiety... yet on the other hand it was fascinating, fun, enlightening. It was constantly a toss between the two extremes and it wasn't until the second half, after 5/6 months, where I started to feel like I could relax a bit. Even then there were still ups and downs. Once I accepted that this was going to be an emotional year and being 'stable' wasn't really realistic, I learnt just to be patient and push through the lows cos there is always another high coming.

There are plateaus too which I guess is the closest to a 'rest period' you get!

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

The unwritten rules around politeness in Japan can be hard to adjust to, especially as they are based in hierarchy, where on the contrast New Zealand is very equal. A lot of it is in the language, and it can be hard knowing when to use polite or plain speech, or *keigo*. (honorifics) For the most part you're not expected to know *keigo*, but you will hear it and it's hard to follow. Polite speech is necessary, e.g when speaking to a teacher or any elder, but it's very hard to switch as you are always using plain speech with friends and there is little opportunity to practice polite forms. Another thing was that people who Japanese might perceive as 'higher' (e.g *kouhai* or someone a year above) I perceive as being equal- so from a cultural perspective you can slip up by not recognizing different hierarchies, which then results in your language being inappropriate.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Hospitality. Attention to detail. Politeness. The way that everyone will be sure that those around them eat or drink first before serving themselves. (Interestingly this was a real shock coming back home where people don't do it...) Going out of their way to help someone. e.g when you ask for directions they will take you all the way there rather than just telling you where to go. Drinking culture. The convenience of everything. Food.

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

Some were amazing, some weren't. There are those that will stare and fuss over you for being foreign, and then there will be chilled out people who will want to get to know you. Some people will genuinely want to make friends, some will want to use you to practice their English. It's not easy to just slip in to Japanese life, you will stand out. This can be hard but is something you will learn about and be able to handle over time.

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?

I didn't see anyone disabled at Kansai University, and I think attitudes in Japan aren't that welcoming/ accepting of 'different.' This is a generalization though and I'm not really equipped with knowledge to comment.

Gay/lesbian/bisexual or transgendered... this is a hard question. Japan is fairly behind with this movement and I would anticipate there to be a fair amount of discrimination. Having said that though there was a student at the dorm last semester who was gay, and had a girl's hair style. I worried about him at the beginning, but he shared with me that he had little issues. He felt that when Japanese people asked him why his hair was long they were genuinely interested, while back in England that sort of question would be intended as a dig. He did of course get stared at but we all do. Also I can't speak for the University but the

people at the dorm were all accepting and there wasn't any bullying. Actually now that I think of it in the first semester there was a guy from Thailand who wore a skirt for a number of months as part of a movement, and most people were kinda intrigued and then eventually just shrugged it off. The dorm was a good environment for this- but I can't speak for all of Japan.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

This might be a little hard to understand without experiencing it, as it sounds like a paradox... but I struggled with being admired for being *gaijin* (foreigner). People joke about being treated like a celebrity in Japan, but it really does happen. The novelty wore off pretty quick, and I actually really hated that form of attention. It felt like people weren't recognizing me as human, as it was like when they talked to me they were kinda, I dunno, stand-off ish- we weren't connecting properly. They also ask a lot of generic questions about your country (in case of New Zealand for example: oh there are lots of sheep there ay? What's New Zealand food like? New Zealand! All Blacks right?! etc etc..." It is very frustrating and exhausting to be continually identified by your country and not for *you*. The staring is also uncomfortable. This was a challenge I found most exchange students encountered. Once I made good friends however I was able focus on deepening these friendships I already had, and move away from numerous initial encounters where the 'ah, gaijin!' -type charade occurred. For every two or three people that unintentionally carry out this alienating behavior there will be one that treats you equally and will become a good friend, so try to stay friendly. This is hard as you might start to feel very isolated and resentful. I think over time you tend to build up a certain level of tolerance for it as well.

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?

Have mentioned circles/clubs above. Evvvverything is available. Tennis, badminton, basketball, soccer, futsal, archery, judo, kendo, kempo, aikido, karate, volleyball, sailing, horse-riding, rugby... there are also non-sport related circles e.g ESS- English speaking society, there was even a circle who got together once a week to eat sweets. There are so many more that I can't even remember, but you'll definitely find something to match your interests.

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

Get on a train and go somewhere. Text a friend and meet for dinner. Go out drinking. You have so much time on exchange so try to socialize. Spend time alone too. Travel alone, it's great for building confidence and fuelling your sense of adventure. Osaka is close to a lot of hot spots; Kyoto, Kobe, Nara.

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

Kokusaibu/Division of International Affairs occasionally sent out emails notifying job opportunities. Usually it's English teaching.

I had a friend who worked at American Apparel. His level of Japanese was quite high though.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There were volunteer opportunities to play with kids and use basic English at the University's kindergarten. Most volunteer opportunities were English based/held at schools etc.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Camera...obviously ;)
2	<i>Omiyage</i> - some NZ treats to give to your friends and/or offer to host family if you get the chance to stay with one.
3	An attitude of being prepared to fail... You are gonna make so many mistakes with the language it's not funny so mentally get your game up so that you can laugh it off and learn from it when you get there. Also be ready to <i>ask</i> when you don't understand. Don't just nod and say <i>そうですね</i> - you won't learn that way.
4	Japanese/English dictionary app on smart phone. Or a book dictionary.
5	Computer I guess

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

1	No.3 as above.
2	Note down new vocab and revise it. (app on phone, small note pad→ make flash cards later) You will learn so much every day for the first few months and even if only half of that sinks in it will still be more than what you learn at home. Try to take initiative with study.
3	If you have a smart phone use LINE (app like viber or whats up) (even if you can only connect with wi-fi) This is where everyone connects so it's helpful for making friends!
4	Take initiative and invite Japanese friends to lunch / dinner etc. Often they'll be too shy.
5	Don't be hard on yourself. (easier said than done huh) It's hard but you will make progress!

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Climb Mt Fuji. Go with a tour that takes you overnight to watch the sun rise in the morning. (also safer than climbing alone)
2	Go on a homestay. University will send an email with info where you can stay with a family for a weekend.
3	See the countryside. Japan is a crazy mix of old and new, and in Osaka you will just see new. Get on a train/plane and go to somewhere rural!

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|---|---|
| 4 | 飲み放題 (<i>Nomihoudai</i> -All you can drink deal at Izakaya- \$20) We used to go to <i>GB's</i> and <i>Dear Bro's</i> at Kandaimae; some of the best most memorable nights I've had in Japan. |
| 5 | Check out the <i>matsuri's</i> /festivals. Try the food.... list goes on I'm sure the reader has plenty they want to do. |

H: Personal Experience

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

Trying to take a whole year's worth of experiences and putting them into one paragraph is not an easy feat, especially with a year abroad where everything is at a higher intensity than usual. You will have to excuse me for any clichés that come out, but I guess the fact that so many people repeat the same thing is just confirmation that everybody goes through much the same thing, despite varying personal factors and across all countries and cultural environments. My biggest challenge, and biggest reward when I was able to overcome it, was the struggle of expressing myself with my limited Japanese. It becomes very clear to you how much language is a tool of communicating your personality, ideas, jokes, all in *all-your identity*. When I couldn't speak much more than "whats your favourite food?" or "have you ever been to...?" etc (if you've studied a language before you'll be familiar with this textbook type stuff) It is near impossible to really get across *who you are*. The anxiety of using a foreign language can make you very shy, and furthermore without the language skills to put thoughts into sentences, you can end up kinda mute. In the beginning I think I appeared to some as very serious and quiet. (Not me at all) It was really hard. BUT I made friends who were patient and helped me with my language, and the more I was able to speak, the more of me I was able to express. By the end of my exchange I really felt like I had come out of my shell, and actually I think I felt *more myself* than I had back home before exchange, which is funny to think because that was when I was in my comfort zone of NZ/English – where things are easier. An exchange will push you so far out of your comfort zone, but it really is an opportunity for a 'rebirth' in a way, and that personal growth is the thing that I am most grateful to my exchange for.