

# Vic OE Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VIC OE AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BA
Major(s)	Japanese, History
Exchange Institution	Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2 <sup>nd</sup> Tri, 2014

## 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	\$40
Accommodation	\$2100 for 6 months
Return Airfare	\$1800
Local Transportation	\$30 to rent bike
Meals	About \$40 a week
Visa	Free
Health & Insurance	\$250 (National health insurance, and accident insurance)
Personal Spending	\$1000 over 6 months
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$30 per month for mobile WiFi, \$3 a month for skype number.
Other fees (specify)	Special subject fees- \$300
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	It was significantly cheaper than I was expecting- rent, public transport and dining out is a lot cheaper than New Zealand.

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

Paid a lot less than what I was expecting for food and rent. It was cheaper to live in Japan than in Wellington! I spent about as much as I was expecting, although there were some insurance payments that came out a bit more expensive than I was expecting.

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

I used a credit card to withdraw sums of money, and deposited it into a Japanese bank account (as the withdraw fees were significantly cheaper than the bank's remittance fees).

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

Cash is king in Japan- don't be surprised if you cannot use you credit card in many places. I paid my rent and

insurance in cash. 7-11 and post office ATMs support the most international credit cards.

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

Can of coke was about \$1.50, coffee can range from \$1.50 to \$5.

**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?

I did not have to pay for a visa. I had to wait for a certificate of eligibility from my host university, and then I sent it to the Japanese Embassy along with extra forms available on their website.

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

Do not be surprised if the necessary documentation to apply for your visa comes days before you are due to leave! It is very rushed just before the departure date!

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?

If you ride a bicycle (which you probably will), you are required to apply for accident insurance. This costs about \$150 for one semester and is organized at the university orientation. Students are also to apply for the Japanese health insurance.

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

I used State Insurance for travelling. In Japan I had the national health insurance.

## 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
<b>VUW Trimester 2/2014</b>					
Comprehensive Japanese	Japanese	JAPA302	10	4	
Japanese Writing	Japanese	JAPA302	10	4	
Japanese Conversation	Japanese	JAPA300 points	10	4	
International politics	English	General credits	10	2	Not offered anymore

Special Seminar	Japanese	??	10	3	Class for local Japanese students (5 exchange students allowed to partake). Group-based project.
Culture Class- Japanese ceramics	Japanese	General JAPA100 credits	10	4	So much fun! It was on a Saturday, which meant a lot of my weekend was taken up (the only reason it is a 4 not 5)

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

When applying for the exchange, you must specify what 'track' you are taking- Japanese language, Business course or World Perspectives course, and this determines what you can take when applying for specific classes. If you manage to work out the course catalogue, there are short descriptions of each class.

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 serious clashes with the courses I wanted to take initially, and then my second-choice class was cancelled indefinitely. As the main point of my trip was for language development, the language classes took priority over my other classes.

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

Don't be surprised if you only end up with less than half of the classes you thought you were going to take.

### Academic Experience

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

I was used to the Japanese style of teaching already, so it wasn't too much of a shock. I felt a lot less stress in Japan, to be honest.

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?

In Japan, students spend most of their high school time studying furiously to get into University. However, when they enter university, they tend to be a lot less studious- as a result, I found the classes to be a lot less time-consuming than Vic classes (ie. Less time spent out of class studying). I did have a Japanese class everyday of the week- and occasionally Saturdays (to make up for classes lost to holidays and cancellations).

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?

There is a minimum number of hours of class students have to take (otherwise the student visa is invalid), and when taking the Japanese language course there are at least 3 mandatory classes you have to attend. I definitely suggest taking a culture course. If doing the language course, taking an English-taught class (world perspectives class) isn't needed, in my opinion. Taking the Special Seminar was a great chance to be in a class with other Japanese students (as the other classes are mostly other exchange students), but it can be a bit full on for those without enough language ability.

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

Don't just study from textbooks- the only way to improve and make use of what you learn in class is to actually get out there and use the language in a real-life situation.

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

Free and fantastic. There are a couple of quite large computer rooms. You get 1000 pages of free printing a year, and the printers are very easy to use. Internet access is a bit confusing at first, but once you work out how to access the wifi, it's very reliable.

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 took the Intensive Japanese Language course, so my main study was the language. I had already lived in Japan for a year, so I had no issue getting around or using the language.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

A dorm for exchange students (International House 1)

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

PROS:

- Great friendships with other exchange students
- Lots of activities within the dorm
- Great support with moving in/university problems.
- Very affordable
- The owners were some of the kindest people I have ever met

CONS:

- Despite being in Japan, being in the dorm meant I spoke English the majority of the time

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

If you are just coming for Japan for the first time, or you have low confidence in your ability to speak Japanese, I would recommend a dorm. If you have lived in Japan before and used to the customs/way of life and don't mind quite a lot of solitude, look at apartments. Dorms are good for most people, I think. It can

be difficult to make friends when living in an apartment.

How early can you move into accommodation?

About a month before the university term begins.

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

The dorm was not catered. There were 3 kitchens that had cooking implements and were stocked with some basic ingredients. The fridge is shared, but you can sometimes buy your own fridge off of previous students.

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

There was no on-campus accommodation at Ritsumeikan. Kyoto is incredibly easy to get around, so the commute is not a issue.

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

It is very unlikely to get into your first choice.

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

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

Join clubs or group activities. In my Japanese language course, I was with exchange students in every class and then I would return home to my exchange student dorm, so there was very little chances of meeting local students if I never actively went out and joined other groups.

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

I had already lived in Japan for a year after high school so I had no issues. It was like coming home.

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

Not an issue for me- but BE ON TIME. It is incredibly rude in Japan to be late, and can insult the person who you are holding up with your lateness.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

It is a very courteous culture. Japanese go out of their way to be the best hosts- but do not take this for granted.

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

Ritsumeikan has a lot of international students, so I was just treated as another student. Japanese sometimes have a reputation for not being very open to other cultures, but it is very unlikely that anyone would speak outright about this to me. I was generally treated very kindly, ie- people asking me on the street if I was lost/needed help with anything.

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 am unsure about physical disabilities, but Ritsumeikan's health centre has an on-site psychiatrist who speaks English if students are having problems. Ritsumeikan has an LGBT group, and there are many international student members- they also hold events like pride parades and seminars. The international support office can offer advice for other professionals.

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

No, I personally did not. To avoid the majority of discrimination, I suggest that students 'get into the rhythm' of the Japanese way of life- not being too loud, and being aware of how you appear in public- especially as many locals can base their whole view on 'foreigners' from one bad experience!

### **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?

There is a whole book of different clubs and activities to join! Email the group to say you are interested. Sports clubs can be very full on, with high expectations and will probably not take in international students (ie. 2 hour practices EVERYDAY)- look for the more 'recreational' sports clubs. I suggest joining Cosmedia- it's a great way to meet Japanese students who want to meet international students. I also suggest putting yourself out there and joining a club you don't think many other international students will get involved with. Also the gym is brand new and free to use (after a training session)

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

Thankfully, Japan is the kingdom of short-stay holidays (ie. Day trips or weekend stays). The public transport in Japan is fantastic, so it is very easy to get all over the country. Also take a couple of weekends to explore Kyoto itself- thousands of temples. Don't just stay at home!

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

Students are able to work limited hours (extended during holidays), provided they have applied for a part time work permit (available when going through Japanese customs at the airport, or can be applied for later). There are opportunities to tutor English (either to other students, or to other locals), but there are also other typical jobs such as waitressing or retail work.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There are some volunteer groups, and sometimes emails will come around asking for volunteers for various tasks.

### **5 things to take to your host country or region**

**1** Converter plugs for electronic goods- be careful of laptop chargers and hair straighteners. Japan's voltage is VERY different to ours, and I heard stories of people's laptop chargers smoking and hair

	driers giving out.
2	A good wallet- Japan is a cash-based society. Having one that can hold coins is a big plus!
3	iPod- sometimes you have to go on long train rides to see the wonderful country
4	A phone or tablet that has wifi capability. Japan doesn't have many options for cellphones- most companies only offer 2-year contracts. I suggest just getting a pocket wifi and skype phone number, and using that in conjunction with your phone/tablet.
5	Lolly cake. I just like it, and it is only available in NZ. Haha.

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

1	<b>Don't expect to get your first choices for either classes or accommodation.</b>
2	Don't just focus on your text book.
3	Get involved with groups and clubs outside of the exchange student group
4	Make the most of weekends, evenings and holidays.
5	Eat out of the dorm as much as you can- it is surprisingly cheap and there are SO many places to go.

### Top 5 Things to do

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

1	<b>Go biking around the city looking at sights.</b>
2	Visit the major cities- Osaka, Tokyo etc.
3	Take part in seasonal events and special festivals (eg. Hanami, summer festivals). There are SO many.
4	Visit a public bath.
5	Go hiking.

### H: Personal Experience

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

For me, going to Japan again was like coming home. However, unlike my high school exchange I had I lot more freedom to see and do what I wanted. In the short 6 months, I saw so much culture, tradition, technology, and met some of the most interesting people (both locals and other exchange students). I had the chance to be in a Japanese festival, be on TV, share in the local customs and share my views of the world with others. This exchange has really made me more passionate for both the language and country- I am already itching to get back.

