

# 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, Linguistics
Exchange Institution	Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan 立命館大学、京都、日本
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	\$60 - \$70 (Majority of the teaching materials were provided)
Accommodation	\$560 per month (Apartment price, student dorms are considerably cheaper) Living in an apartment provided by Ritsumeikan meant I had other bills to cover as well. Power \$50 - \$60 per month Water \$30 - \$40 per month Gas \$10 - \$15 per month Internet (Pocket Wifi) \$50 per month
Return Airfare	\$1500 (I booked rather late, if you book earlier there are cheaper options)
Local Transportation	Around \$2 to ride the bus (very convenient as they go everywhere).Taxi services are everywhere but they can become very expensive. The bus is much cheaper.
Meals	\$40- \$50 a week (I used the university cafeteria most of the time it was very good)
Visa	\$0
Health & Insurance	I cannot remember exactly but it is compulsory to enter into the universities insurance programs (at a discounted rate). This is done at the arriving students orientation
Personal Spending	\$80 per week (Food, clothing, entertainment and group outings)
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$0 (I did not have a phone plan while I was in Japan only data from my pocket Wifi)
Other fees (specify)	There are initial costs when you arrive in regards to setting up your living area. I had to furnish my apartment when I arrived so mine was a little more expensive than other students. Bedding/Mattress: \$100 Groceries: \$40 Kitchen Equipment: \$50 Furniture/Other items: \$100 (Maybe more depending on what you need/want)
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	The biggest surprise I encountered was the need to furnish my room. On the accommodation handout for my apartment I was placed in it said "furnished room". However, upon arrival the only things in my room were a desk (no chair) a bed frame (no mattress), a sink, a shower, a gas cooker, and a fridge. Everything else I had to go to the department store/ 100yen store and buy myself so it was expensive to begin with.

Everything else was the same as what was stated in the pre-departure handout.

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

I definitely spent a lot more money than I thought I was going to. The set expenses (rent, power, water etc) were the same every month but my personal spending increased significantly compared to New Zealand. The main reason for this was that my room had very limited cooking space and only one small gas cooker so it was difficult to cook any form of substantial meal (small dishes were fine). I would often eat lunch and dinner at the university as it was around \$4-5 for a full meal (It's very good food too). There were a lot of events on and people going out and about so my entertainment costs crept up quite a lot as well. However, I don't regret spending a little more as it made the experience so much better.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)? I had two bank accounts, A Japanese account and my debit account which I could access in Japan. I was a recipient of the JASSO scholarship and PMSA scholarship. One of the requirements is that you must have a Japanese bank account for it to be paid into, so the international center at the university helped me to open that. In Japan very few banks accept international cards (7/11 ATMs and green Yucho Bank ATMs) so it is best to withdraw larger amounts to avoid any problems as well as fees.

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

Definitely be aware of what you are spending. It is very easy to lose track of what you are spending because a lot of food is very cheap in Japan (every little bit adds up). Japan is very cash based so having cash on you is recommended.

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

Coke: Around \$1.50

Coffee: \$2

**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 have to apply for a student Visa from the Japanese Embassy in Wellington. It took around a week and half and I did not have to pay for it. You have to fill out an application form as well as submit a "Certificate of Enrollment" from your host university.

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

You receive the "Certificate of Enrollment" from Ritsumeikan very close to your departure time so you have to make sure that you have everything ready to be sent as soon as you receive it to ensure you get it back in time.

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?

Ritsumeikan University has its own mandatory insurance policies that are run by the university CO-OP. I cannot remember what the cost was but I know it was no more than \$50. You are informed of this in an

information session during your orientation

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

I entered into the Universities compulsory insurance plan and I also had travel insurance for both my flights to and from Japan.

### 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 1/YEAR</b>					
Intermediate Comprehensive Japanese	Japanese	I cannot remember, your faculty and coordinators will be able to provide that information to you.		4	This course was great. This was solely focused on grammar and vocabulary. It was taught fully in Japanese
Listening and Speaking	Japanese			4	This course focused solely on developing listening comprehension and speaking ability. It was extremely beneficial but at times was heavily listening based.
Writing class	Japanese			3.5	This class focused around Kanji practice as well as formal writing in Japanese. It was intensive and beneficial but at times very monotonous.
Japanese Politics	English			3.5	This course was very interesting. It was taught

					by a Japanese professor to international and Japanese students in English, about Japanese politics. However because it was a class shared with non-fluent English speakers the level of content was often very simple.
Japanese Economics	English			3	I did not intend to take this class I was placed in it through a lottery system the university ran. It was interesting but not part of my study plan.

#### VUW Trimester 2/YEAR

Upper intermediate comprehensive Japanese	Japanese			4.5	The same as the previous course but the next level up. This was the best course in Japanese language I have ever taken. Extremely beneficial
Listening and speaking (Upper intermediate)	Japanese			4	The same as the previous course but the next level up.
Writing class (Upper intermediate)	Japanese			4	The same as the previous course but the next level up. We focused more on Kanji in this course
International Peace Studies	English			4.5	I thoroughly enjoyed this course. It was taught by the now retired Yamane Kazuyo, a renowned researcher of International Peace studies. It looked at the worlds history of conflict,

					pollution, and resolution. Very good course
Japanese Culture	English			3.5	This was a very good course that provided insight into Japanese culture from an "outsiders" point of view. It was very readings heavy but was interesting nonetheless

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Before I left New Zealand I had pre-enrolled in the courses that I wanted to take from the course list of the University. However when I arrived I found that a lot of the courses were not being offered that trimester so I had to change my study plan. A lot of the courses had very limited positions (e.g. 70 students applying for 15 spots) so the university ran a lottery system. It was problematic as there was a short window of time you were given to gain authorization from your home university about courses that you had to change.

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?

It was rather 50/50 for me personally. I missed out on courses that I wanted/needed to take, but I also got into to certain courses that I needed. I knew people who got into every course they needed as well as people who missed out on all of them. Just be prepared to change your original course plan to what is available when you arrive.

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

Apply for what you think looks interesting, but be aware that nothing is finalized until the day your classes start.

### Academic Experience

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

It went beyond my expectations. At VUW I was only getting 3-4 hours a week of tutelage (outside of personal study) In Japanese. At Ritsumeikan I was there for the sole purpose of learning Japanese so I had over 16 hours of Japanese in class per week (minimum) in a class a quarter of the size so it was extremely beneficial.

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?

The teaching style was fantastic (100% in Japanese). Our teachers spoke no English, and only used English

words or phrases when there was something particularly difficult. The workload was fine, before tests etc it went up significantly but that is to be expected.

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?

You can definitely fit 1-2 English courses into your program on top of the Japanese classes you take at Ritsumeikan. They are only a 1 and a half hour class once a week so it's very stress free

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

DO THE HOMEWORK/HANDOUTS. Everything the teachers give you is there to help you learn. There was homework after every class (sometimes 5 minutes, sometimes an hour) but it is so helpful.

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

The computer systems were very outdated. The library was a great study place but again very outdated (A new library was built during the year and open 2 weeks after I came home unfortunately). The internet access was campus wide and very good.

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?

Study as much as you can before you leave. Look up survival guides in that language. These guides give English – Japanese translations for words and phrases that you will need when you arrive. My university offered the IJL (Intensive Japanese Language) track which ranged from F (no Japanese understanding) up to A (Senior/advanced) level and was extremely good at placing you in a class that matched your ability.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

In my own apartment provided by the university (No longer offered as a new student dorm has been opened)

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

Pros: Your own living space, less/no rules compared to dorms, independence

Cons: More expensive, you have your own bills and responsibilities, initial set up costs,

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

The only options available now are the student dorms (3 in total)

How early can you move into accommodation?

Around 2 weeks before the start of the semester. A few days before the student orientation begins

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

All self-catered. There was a ban on bringing in personal cooking devices (e.g. gas cookers) so there was only 1 provided in the room which made preparing food difficult. This often led to eating outside or at the university cafeteria. I did however buy a rice cooker which was a lifesaver.

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

All accommodation is run through the university

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

The dorms are a great international environment. There are 3 open now and they are all very similar (Taishogun is new as of 2015). My friends loved the international dorms as it is where you will spend majority of your time and you will meet new people all the time.

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

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

It was very easy to make new international friends. Everyone was extremely welcoming and it was a good environment. It was quite difficult to make Japanese friends. This was mainly due to language ability, as well as very different cultural understandings of how friends interact and behave. Not saying it was impossible it just took some time to meet new non-international friends.

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

It was very easy. Everyone at the university was extremely welcoming and helpful in regards to adjusting to the new surroundings. The university had a "buddy program" which matched you with a Japanese student who would help you with whatever you needed.

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

One that I noticed a lot of people had trouble with was loudness. Japanese don't tend to be very loud (especially on public transport) and there were often times where a group of international students would forget this and behave in a manner that would be quite normal at home but not in Japan. Apart from that I feel it just came down to common sense on how to act and what was considered acceptable behavior.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I absolutely loved how polite everyone was. Whenever Japanese people heard a group of us speaking in Japanese or that we were students at Ritsumeikan they were always so appreciative that we were attempting to learn about their language and culture.

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

We were treated with the most amazing respect and courtesy. Whenever we had problems or questions they were always willing to help. My favourite memory was getting lost on my first trip to Kyoto Station. An

older lady came up and asked if I needed help and when I said I was lost she walked with me all the way to the front of Kyoto Station and pointed out where I needed to go. It's a memory I probably will never forget.

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?

As far as I know Japanese are very private when it comes to things like the LGBT community. There were a lot of LGBT students in my program (including me) that felt very comfortable in Japan. We summed it up that it's not that Japanese people are against LGBT and the community it's more that they have no exposure to it and don't really have an understanding of what it all means. In short I don't think there should be any problems for anyone. In general Japanese people are very nice.

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

Not exactly. Much like the above information about LGBT, a lot of it stems from general misunderstandings and comments or remarks that might sound offensive to a westerner but not to Japanese (if that makes sense). For example I was on a trip to Osaka with friend who is black. On the train we overheard (In Japanese) two older Japanese women talking about how you don't really see people that black in Japan. We could understand what they meant which was in no way offensive, it's just a simple misunderstanding and general inquisitiveness that might seem very strange to a westerner.

## **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 are clubs and circles for almost everything (e.g. sports, art, drama, trips) that are open to almost everyone foreign or Japanese. There is an annual clubs day where every club promotes their activities throughout the campus.

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

Go out and see your surroundings and what your city has to offer. I lived in Kyoto where there are 1500 temples and shrines so there was always something to do on the weekend. Also trains run everywhere in Japan. We quite often went on trips to other cities over the weekend which was extremely enjoyable

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

Part time jobs are everywhere in Japan but language proficiency is a must. There are other options available for students (e.g. English teaching) that you can do to make a little bit of money.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There weren't that many that I was aware of. There is however a club devoted to volunteering and helping

out in the community. A few of my friends joined this and had a very good time

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

1	<b>Small things to remind you of home (photos, trinkets etc)</b>
2	Small things to give to friends that are unique to NZ (keyrings, little stuffed toys etc)
3	Enough clothes (I'm 195cm tall, they don't have my size!!!)
4	A positive attitude and a drive to meet new people and experience new things :D
5	A good camera!!! (Phone or actual camera!! You're going to need it!!)

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

1	<b>Just remember it's alright to be scared and nervous it's a huge step moving away but you will be fine! Everyone there is in the same boat and you'll make so many new friends</b>
2	Get out of your room and do as much as you can. Your exchange will fly by and you want to remember what you did rather than what you didn't do
3	Don't forget to study!! Going out is good but you must remember to keep up with your course work!!
4	Find out as much as you can about new people and where they came from. These will be the people you can travel to see in the future.
5	Have the time of your life. This is a great opportunity and it's an experience you will never forget.

### 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>Visit the abundance of temples and shrines in Japan</b>
2	Every area of Japan is famous for food. (Try as many as you can!)
3	Go to Okinawa during the summer time. It is beyond amazing and the beach is perfect (You can get a tan!)
4	Travel to the big cities to get a feel for old, new, and future Japan (Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Hiroshima)
5	Go to Disneyland in Tokyo and Universal Studios in Osaka, THEY ARE FANTASTIC!

### H: Personal Experience

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

My exchange experience was absolutely phenomenal. It feels strange trying to express it in writing because the emotions you feel are so indescribable. I met so many fantastic people from around the world and have made life-long friends because of it. My Japanese proficiency and understanding improved so much and I was able to live and learn another culture and experience first-hand what I had been learning in the

classroom. Thinking back about what I did during my year in Kyoto it's amazing what I was able to do: Live in the cultural heart of Japan, eat the most amazing food, go to the most beautiful places, and participate in festivals alongside Japanese people!!! If I could do it again I would in a heartbeat I'm so happy with what I was able to do with the assistance of the Vic Abroad program!

