

# Vic OE Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Asian Studies and Japanese
Exchange Institution	Akita International University (AIU)
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1 & 2, 2013

## 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	40-60NZ\$ (per textbook, new)
Accommodation	2000NZ\$ (2 semester)
Return Airfare	? (had one ticket with stopover in Germany)
Local Transportation	2NZ\$ Bus (to station or shopping mall), 3NZ\$ train to town
Meals	1200NZ\$ (1 semster, 3 meals/day)
Visa	/
Health & Insurance	750NZ\$(10month)
Personal Spending	? (didn't keep record, but most money was spend on food and souvenirs)
Communications (phone, etc.)	250NZ\$ (phone + contract; didn't use it much)
Other fees (specify)	/
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	I really like Japanese food, but sometimes you get a craving for NZ/European products. But they are very expensive here in Japan because they are imported.

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend? I think daily expenses were the same as in NZ and nothing really surprised me. But food prices are quite high, especially if you are too lazy to go to the bigger supermarkets. And those people who don't like to cook and avoid cafeteria food will spend a lot on meals. Be careful!

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)? It's always handy to have a credit card as backup, but Japan is a cash society, so a local bank account is more convenient if you want to avoid the credit card charge every time you get money.

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

AIU is out of town, so the next ATM that takes international credit cards is 20min away by bus. A local bank

account makes life easier! Also some part-time job opportunities only pay if you have a local bank account. It's easy to get one and cancel it again when your stay is over.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country? I don't drink coffee or coke, but vending machines offer such drinks between 100-150Yen. And at cafes it should be similar to NZ prices.

**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 had to apply for a visa. It was really easy and took only a few days. And if you have a German passport you don't need to pay a fee. (I don't know about NZ passport, sorry.)

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country? It's always best to apply as early as possible.

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 is a mandatory insurance for exchange students in Japan. It's about 350NZ\$ per semester.

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

You have to sign up for insurance in Japan, which covers most, but not everything. If you want 100% cover for everything you need your own, which is rather inconvenient because you pay double. I took the insurance offered by STA travel, where I booked my flights.

## 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>					
Japanese (201)	Japanese	Japanese 100-level course	30	3	Lots of homework
SADO: Tea Ceremony	English	Elective	10	2	Few assignments, easy content
Introduction	English	Elective	15	4	Longer essays, and

to Japanese Literature		(200-level)			creative writing assignments, but no exam
Japanese practice	Meetings in English, work in Japanese	Elective (100-level)	5	2	Chose your own materials and workload
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					
Japanese (305)	Japanese	200-level Japanese course	30	3	Make sure to learn your vocabulary and kanji to keep up
Introduction to Global Studies	English	elective	15	1	I could do the quizzes without studying, no final exam
Introduction to Linguistics	English	LING 100	13	3	lots of difficult vocabulary and concepts, but to pass tests it's a matter of memorizing
Japanese practice	Japanese	elective	5	3	Many presentations that take time to prepare
Kanji consolidation	Japanese	elective	5	2	Kanji test every week, simply memorize

### Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available? There was online enrolment during orientation. It's fairly easy and straight forward. We had an academic advisor, so we could discuss course choice and other problems with them. "Add/drop" is only in person and involves waiting in line for a quite some time. So, it's better to think carefully about course choice to avoid this. However, it's also a simple process.

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?

Some courses are limited entry and or have priorities (e.g. graduating students, international students). If there are too many applicants there is a draw. In this case, it's up to luck. I was a bit unlucky because many courses share the same timeslot, so I wasn't able to take my first choices during trimester two. But there is nothing you can do about it. Just be open-minded and take it as a chance for something new.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses? Take an elective that isn't offered at VUW. It's a great chance to experience something new and unique. I highly recommend the Japanese culture courses.

### **Academic Experience**

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations? AIU is a small university, so classes are much smaller. One of my classes only had seven students (and it was an introductory level course). University in Japan is usually a time to relax for students after studying hard for entrance exams, so it is normal to see people sleeping in class or taking it easy. Even at AIU, which has a high academic standard, this atmosphere comes through sometimes.

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? Half the faculty is from all around the world, so you will encounter many different teaching styles, and English dialects and proficiency level. The workload is much lighter. Essays are shorter and there are less reading materials.

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? Around 12-15 AIU credits are all right. The university offers many extra-curricular activities (cultural exchanges, community outreach etc). It would be a shame to miss them because you signed up for too many courses. I really recommend the Japanese culture courses. The teachers are really engaged and make the course content interesting and fun.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university? If you go to class, do your homework and review regularly, there shouldn't be any problem to pass quizzes and tests. I found them often rather easy. Do talk to your teachers about your concerns. They are very helpful and care for their student's success.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university? The library is a great place to study and keep warm. It's new and open 24/7. Computers are a bit slow, but wifi is available in most places on campus. There are also fully equipped study rooms available and music rooms.

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? Japanese courses from complete beginner to advanced are available. I really recommend them, because the teachers are really good. I enjoyed my lessons. But AIU is an English university, so most staff is fluent. And there is always someone around to translate.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in? I stayed in the on-campus three-bedroom apartments, called "Sakura Village".

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

It's brand new with a big kitchen! It has private rooms! And it is much warmer in winter. But, it's also the most expensive.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

It really depends on a person's priorities. All other on-campus dorms are room-share. This can be stressful and usually you cannot change the room unless it's for very serious reasons. If you value privacy, Sakura is the place to go. Do not sign up for University Village; it's old and cold.

How early can you move into accommodation?

You can only move in the day before orientation and stay only a few days after the end of trimester.

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

Except for first-year Komachi dorm, all dorms have private kitchen facilities. The cafeteria provides meal-plans, but I do NOT recommend it, because you will lose money if you don't eat three-meals a day. I recommend a pre-paid card and/or cooking by 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? If you consider off-campus housing, remember that AIU is out of town and getting to and from campus relies on bus services and trains. It's quite a hassle and can become expensive.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation? Study abroad students have guaranteed on-campus housing, but make sure to apply by the deadline to get into your 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? It's quite easy, because everyone can speak English and many are keen to talk to international students. Also, the university is small. So, it has a nice community feeling to it. Just join a club or have lunch at the cafeteria. If you put on a smile and start a conversation you will surely make some friends.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university? It was fairly easy for me, since I have been in Japan before and studied the culture. During orientation there will be useful sessions on cultural adjustment that can help students a lot.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend

students to prepare for these differences? Japanese people use a lot of indirect language and are very polite. It's difficult to understand their true feelings. But if you are honest and open-minded, you will be able to understand them.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate? Punctuality: public transport is always on time. Safety: hardly anything gets ever stolen. Helpfulness: if you genuinely ask for help, people will put a lot of effort into helping you

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students? I was treated with respect. And people were friendly. But be prepared to get stared at in public bath or even on the streets. Akita is a rural area and people haven't seen many foreigners. But they don't mean any ill-will.

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 places are wheel-chair accessible and there are dormitory rooms for people with special needs. AIU is a very international and diverse campus. I haven't encountered any situation where minority groups or people with different orientation were disadvantaged or discriminated.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students? I haven't encountered such situations.

### **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 many sports and cultural clubs. It's easy to organize your own clubs. I recommend them because it's easy to make friends.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays? Go on the organized bus-trips. You will see some of the famous places in Akita prefecture. Sign up for community outreach activities to get together with the locals (e.g. rice planting, English assistant teacher, sports festival etc)

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus? There are many opportunities to work as assistant English teachers or just chat with student from local schools (kindergarten to high school). Off-campus work is only available for those fluent in Japanese. And you need to get a work permit!

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students? I don't know about internships, but volunteer work is similar to the paid opportunities (mainly English assistant or over Christmas being Santa for little kids).

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

1	Rain boots! (if you come during rain season)
2	Generally pack for the seasons. Summers are hot, winters extremely cold and in between its really wet
3	Bring a laptop if you can, it's more convenient than the IT labs here.
4	Don't forget an adaptor!
5	Bring some cash, to cover the first few days.

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

1	Japanese students can be very shy, so make an effort and talk to them or it can happen that you will only be among international students.
2	Join a club. It's fun and you can meet with Japanese students.
3	If possible go during trimester two to be part of AIU festival! It's the most amazing event of the year!!!!
4	Bring some small presents from NZ, if you take part in home-stay events or just to show appreciation to people you made friends with or who helped you a lot
5	Be smart and try to get the second-hand textbooks. Just like at VUW, new books are expensive

## Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Eat at "Dotonbori", an all-you-can-eat/drink okonomiyaki-restaurant. It's very popular among students.
2	Go on the "Oga-bustrip" offered by AIU
3	Visit a sake brewery, Akita is famous for its old family owned breweries
4	Get your hands dirty and go rice planting with the local farmers
5	Go see the Kanto-Festival during summer

## H: Personal Experience

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

My Japan exchange was a wonderful experience. It has helped me learn more about myself and grow as a person. Going to a small rural university gave me the opportunity to see a different side of the country I'm studying and the many activities helped me connect with the community.

One of the highlights of my stay was being part of Yatose Club, a traditional festival dance of Akita

Prefecture. Together with its Japanese and international members we had many fun performances (including at a shopping mall and a home for people with mental disability). We also had the chance to visit a Yatosé festival and dance with hundreds of other people in the streets of Akita city.

A really magical moment was at the AIU festival. The whole university was involved in the preparation and running of the two day event with performances, food and activities. And during the closing ceremony we saw a shooting star. At that moment you could really sense this community feeling. I'm glad I could be part of it.

I met many amazing people and learned a lot during my exchange. I will always carry these memories and experiences with me wherever I go. I'd definitely do it again!

