

Student Evaluation Form

A. Student Information

Degree(s) enrolled in at VUW	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Japanese, Linguistics
Exchange Institution	University of the Ryukyus
VUW Trimester(s) and Year of Exchange	Trimester 1 and 2, 2012

B. Finances

Please provide an estimate on how much you spent on your exchange (in your host country's currency).

Food & personal spending	400,000 yen (NZ \$6,000)
Accommodation	500,000 yen (NZ \$7,500)
Return Airfare	170,000 yen (NZ \$2,500)
Local Travel	We bought a car for 100,000 yen (NZ \$1,500) 4 day trip to Tokyo (flights, accom, sightseeing, etc) 90,000 yen (NZ \$1,300)
Books, misc. levies (e.g. student association)	10,000 yen (NZ \$150) + 5000 yen student association deposit
Visa	\$0 (Agreement between Japan and NZ)
Insurance	140,000 yen (NZ \$2,000)
Other (power and gas)	100,000 yen (NZ 1,500)
	Total = 1510000 yen (NZ \$22,450)

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

They weren't really that different. The weekly cost of living is what we had expected. Although you will never have enough money to do all the tourism and travel that you want to do! Prices are usually quite similar to what we pay in NZ for most things but fruit can be more expensive than we were used to. In Okinawa it cost around \$5 NZ for one apple!! But alcohol is much more cheaper there than in NZ!

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

I used the new AirNZ Onesmart card to control my money and transfer between currencies whilst overseas. The account was really good as you could put your NZ money into your account and log in online and transfer it into an 'online wallet' where it changes to Japanese yen (or a few other currencies you can choose from) at the current exchange rates (their rates are excellent). This means when you go to withdraw money at the ATM's you don't get charged a conversion fee as you are taking it out of your 'yen wallet', whereas just taking money out of NZ credit/Eftpos accounts can be quite expensive as they charge you a fee each time. I think you are required to get a Japanese bank account after you arrive, but I honestly never used this at all as I was getting paid from Studylink in NZ to my NZ account and then just using the Onesmart to transfer between currencies.

An annoying thing about the ATM's in Okinawa is that they don't open on weekends! Their hours are usually 9-6pm Mon-Fri, and they also close on public holidays etc. so you need to make sure you get enough money out for the weekend... especially as they really only accept cash.. they don't have eftpos there.. and only big places such as supermarkets and some restaurants will accept credit.

Please submit your completed Evaluation form, photos and Consent form to the Exchange Office via email (exchangestudents@vuw.ac.nz).

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

Staying at the university dorms or the international house (Kaikan) is quite affordable living if you are by yourself. It can cost as little as \$80 a month. However, the rooms are quite small. Some people advise against the use of air conditioning during summer months to save money. This is a false economy as mould can become a massive problem if you are not keeping your apartment at a controlled temperature and humidity. We know of other people who had to throw out their entire wardrobe / bedding because they decided to save a little money on air conditioning. Even with air con running all summer, electricity bills are usually quite affordable (4-5000 yen per month with aircon on every day)

Were there any extra or unexpected costs which future students should be aware of?

You are required to enroll in the national health insurance scheme, which you have to pay monthly at the town office (over the year it total around \$200 NZ). This means if you ever need to go to hospital then most of the bill is covered under the insurance and you only have a small amount to pay. Connecting gas etc. usually requires quite a large deposit (\$150 NZ), and there are a few other little deposits here and there such as fire insurance for housing which is paid for at the Uni store, but you do get the deposits all back at the end.

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

In NZ dollars, a can of coke was around \$1.50 out and about or about 70 cents at the supermarket. Coffee (Starbucks) was about \$6.00. Real coffee is extremely difficult to get in Japan, the closest thing would be Starbucks as it was the only barista coffee we could find. The Japanese all prefer canned coffee from vending machines or plunger coffee is available in some café places (also hard to find good ones) for about \$1.50.

C. Visas & Insurance

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

NZ and Japan have an agreement regarding travel between our countries so it makes it really easy to get your visa, unless you don't comply with the general visa rules regarding things such as criminal convictions etc.

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

I shopped around at a few different places offering travel insurance and the cheapest was House of Travel. I never had to claim anything so I can't comment on that process, but the cover was great and it was really easy to purchase together with my flights.

C. Academics

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 (if applicable)	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
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Nihongo I A	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	3	Grammar
Nihongo I B	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	3	Grammar
Nihongo I C	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	2	Listening
Nihongo I D	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	4	Conversation
Nihongo I E	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	2	Kanji
Nihongo II A	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	4	Grammar
Nihongo II B	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	4	Grammar
Nihongo II C	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	2	Listening
Nihongo II D	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	2	Conversation
Nihongo II E	Japanese	Japa 200 level	12	2	Kanji

How did you find the teachers at your exchange university?

The teachers were super nice and really friendly. They were always willing to help you out whenever you needed it and aimed to make sure you were understanding everything. They always listened to the students and slowed down/speed up the content according to how we were doing. Also, they always encouraged class participation and made us feel comfortable to try things and especially when we got things wrong.

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria?

Studying at the Ryukyus was completely different from Vic. The classes were very small like Victoria's tutorial sizes, so we only had about 10 people in our class. They course does not have lectures and tutorials like at home, instead we had 10 classes each week, and each one was an hour and a half long. Each class focuses on a different topic, such as Kanji, Grammar, Listening and Speaking, so it splits them up rather than doing them all in the same class.

And of course at home, usually you have other classes as well as Japanese (eg, for me Linguistics and Asian studies) but in the intensive course you are just solely doing Jap, so sometimes it gets a bit boring not being able to take a break and focus on something different. Although, it makes the workload much lighter not having assignments from other papers taking up time. In my experience the workload at Vic was much more intense than it was in Okinawa.

How did your academic experiences differ from what you expected?

Before I got to Okinawa I thought that studying in Japan would be really difficult!! I was worried about whether it would be too hard for me to pass the courses and how strict the teachers would be due to their culture and hard work in regard to education. The grades are much higher over there: an A is 90-100, a B is 80-89, a C is 70-79, D is 60-69 and F is 0-59, so I was really freaking out about that. But it was the complete opposite... the teachers were really nice and friendly (although they do expect you to do homework on time etc.) but nothing more than the usual. I thought that the workload over there was far lighter than what I was used to at Vic, and the teachers were far more lenient. I was really

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surprised at that, I thought I would have a much busier year and spend most my time studying but it wasn't like that at all.

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

Don't worry about anything until you get there, as you have to sit a placement test when you arrive so they can gauge what level you're at and what classes to put you in. So when you have to pre-select the courses before you head on exchange just put down some basics of what you think you might like but it will most likely all change when you sit the test.

D. Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Because my fiancé came to Japan with me, we couldn't rent one of the single person rooms at the Uni dorms and we weren't allowed to stay in the couple rooms as we were not yet married! So we had to rent a private apartment on our own (just across the road from the dorms).

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

Much more space than the dorm rooms!!!! Of course, staying in an apartment is much more expensive than the dorms (I think the dorms are only around \$50-100 NZ per month versus \$600 for an apartment) and you need loads of help to fill in tons and tons of paperwork etc! Also, the dorms come somewhat furnished whereas we had to buy everything ourselves. Another con is that in an apartment you are not living with all the other international students, as the majority live in the dorms, so you may feel a little far away/left out from the fun. But there are loads of events/parties over there so you are welcome to spend lots of time there, you just have less downtime together than those who live there.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would definitely recommend the dorms for everybody due to the price and the atmosphere, unless you are in a situation similar to mine where you can't stay there, and then an apartment has many charms of its own. Just be warned the dorms are very very small rooms! So an apartment is much better for those who can afford it and want more space/a quieter lifestyle.

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

There are two types of dorms; the mixed international house and then the single sex dorm rooms. The international house has bigger rooms and each room has their own bathroom and kitchen (although very small) but it is much better than the single sex dorms which have shared communal bathrooms and kitchens. This makes the dorms slightly cheaper than the house, but there is no way

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to guarantee what type you will get. The allocation is a randomized draw, so definitely make sure you apply for the international house, just realize that you may not necessarily get it, even if you do apply early on.

F. Culture

What were some of the hardest cultural differences you faced while abroad?

The diet is quite different – which depending on the person may take up to a month to get used to from a digestive point of view. They don't often have wholegrains or wholemeal products – the bread and rice is always plain white and there is also a limited amount of nuts / cereal etc. The limited pasta you can get is also very basic.

Further to the point there aren't often oven facilities available. The university doesn't even have one in the commercial kitchen that the students have access to. Get used to grilling things in a small 10x6x15cm fish grill or cooking on a portable gas stove top!!

How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

Be open minded and go to more than the local San-A or Union super markets to find ingredients that you are looking for. There are some hidden specialty food shops that may take time to find (as Japan doesn't exactly believe in searching for these things via the web, you often won't find these companies on the internet). You can also eat a MOS burger which is fantastic and hands down beats the usual fast food imports from America.

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

The only discrimination was that of Okinawans thinking that we were American. They see a white person and automatically think American. This is because of the presence of the American army who have bases all over Okinawa and their part in WW2, so many Japanese, especially the older generations do not have a very nice opinion of Americans and many want them to leave Okinawa and go home. You will see lots of this while you are there, and many protests from the Okinawans about certain weapons/aircraft that they do not want the Americans having on their island. Many Americans do not bother learning Japanese while they live in Okinawa, and this offends them quite a bit, so when they think you are American they can be quite rude until they realize you are trying to learn their language and are not American etc.!

G. Other opportunities

Did you take part in an internship or any volunteer activities while on exchange? If so, please explain.

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I didn't undertake any work as such while I was on exchange, but there are many things that you will be asked to do to help out while you are there. They include things like:

- Doing a presentation and running a booth about NZ and Vic Uni to prospective exchange students from Okinawa
- Participating in research (for PhD's etc.) by filling out forms/surveys or undertaking small experiments
- Meeting with students (mainly high school) who want to practice English or are heading overseas soon and want to ask questions about your country
- Setting up rooms for competitions/events or performing at events

Are there are great clubs or associations etc. you recommend other students get involved with while on exchange at you host uni?

There are literally hundreds of clubs (or circles as they call them) at Ryudai, so you are sure to find something you like (or make one yourself!). They are a really great way to meet new people and get to spend time together out of class. Try learning a traditional Okinawan instrument such as the sanshin. It helps you get more of an insight into the culture, gives you a lot more hands on time to practice your Japanese out in the real world outside of class, and perform at many of the international student events.

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

Visit the Okinawa beaches in summer!

Check out the old world heritage castle ruins all over Okinawa

Make a trip to the mainland, Tokyo, Osaka, Hokkaido etc.

Try all the local foods eg, Mos burger, Taco rice, Okonomiyaki, Takoyaki, and of course Sake

Visit the Izakayas for all you can drink!!

H. Personal Response

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

It wasn't what I expected – but this is neither a good or bad thing! Just remember to get out and see as much as you can. After a few weeks we got settled into 'living' as it can be easy (enough) to forget that you are in a foreign country – you sort of take it for granted. There is heaps to see and do and lots of down time to get out and experience it. Try not to say no to anything and you'll remember the experience as the best time of your life (perhaps also the most expensive!!).

The other thing is the language. I thought that my knowledge and skill with Japanese might not be enough while there, and that I wouldn't get good enough by the time I left. The thing is, no matter what level you are at now, and no matter how much you think you won't be able to improve, things will

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be fitted to suit you at the university and you will come out at the end with a huge breadth of knowledge on pronunciation, use of grammar, local lingo and cultural history.

Thank you for your responses, please leave any additional suggestions you may have for future participants below

My advice is just do it!

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