

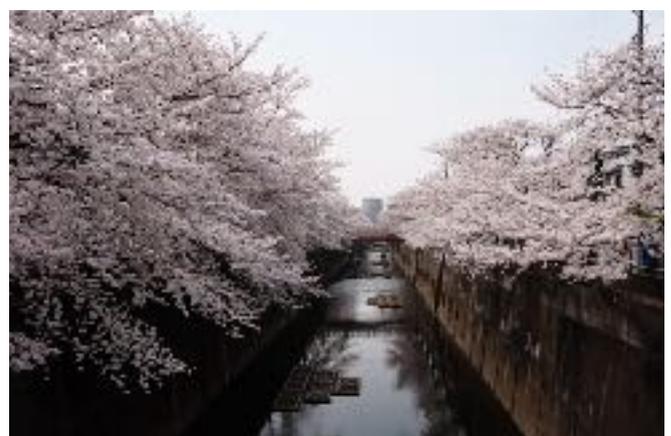
My second study abroad in Japan

I had my first study abroad experience as a high school student in Toyama prefecture in 2011. Back then, because of the Great East Japan Earthquake, I unfortunately had to leave Japan in the middle of the program. When I started at Birkbeck, University of London, and it became possible to do an exchange year in Japan, I had to grab the opportunity. It was a dream come true to be able to do another exchange year in Japan. Coming back really felt as if I returned to my other home after a long time.

The year at Ochanomizu has been full of experiences. In a way living has been very calm, just like in any other place I have lived before. Having lived alone here and there for about eight years, living alone in Japan has not been an issue. During this exchange, I have been looking at Japan from the point of view of an adult. I have learned things about the society that I did not pay attention to as a seventeen-year-old teenager. I have learnt many useful things for living in Japan. As my Japanese language skills have gradually gone up, I have learnt much more about Japanese history, politics and arts. I have even been able to slowly read papers about my other major subject, linguistics.

Outside of university, I have explored the beautiful streets of Tokyo. I have also had the chance to travel back to Toyama to my old host family several times, as well as travelling to cities like Osaka and Kyoto. As well as climbing mountains like Takaosan, I have enjoyed izakaya with my friends, and finally learned how to cook authentic Japanese food from vegetables. I have also spent time with my old Japanese high school friends, and made new ones. The most difficult parts of this year were living in a mouldy dormitory room, and the unbelievable hotness of July. While I felt like my brain was melting, I could not comprehend how people could work and study like everything was normal.

At Ochanomizu University, I attended eight different classes a week. As well as taking Japanese language classes designed for foreign students, I also went to lectures with Japanese students. These lectures about onomatopoeia, Japanese vocabulary and English linguistics were the reason why I now have an idea of what to write as my graduation thesis. I am thankful to have been able to listen to these lectures that are not normally available for foreigners learning a second language.



Before the exchange year, I set myself a goal of advancing my Japanese skills. I feel that the classes I took at Ochanomizu, along with all the hours I spent studying for JLPT-test, helped with achieving this goal. Even if my Japanese did not become perfect, I feel that I made great improvement on all levels of the language in a way that probably would not have been possible if I

had not come to Japan. Outside of the classroom, I also attended a koto-class, finally getting to try to play the instrument I had wanted to try for a long time.

Looking back at this year, it feels like it only lasted for an instant. Just as I suspected, studying at Ochanomizu and the daily life in Japan have been priceless for upping my Japanese skills. Even though I am looking forward to seeing my family after over a year, it is a shame to be leaving Japan. There are still many places in Japan that I have not been to, so I will definitely be back as many times as I can. Therefore, I am looking forward to my next experience in Japan.