

My Study Abroad Experience

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For me first arriving to Japan, this was my second time in the country. However, that was six years ago and I felt like Japan had changed, so it was slightly difficult moving in. The weather was hot, and there was so much to do, but I was also very excited. Within the first few weeks, I went out and did things I always wanted to do. As it was October, Halloween is my favourite event and there were lots of events that month. My Japanese wasn't very good however at that time, but it made me realize how much I wanted to improve to be able to talk to people at these events and understand more.

When classes started, I decided to ease my way back into Japanese. Moving in is a lot on your mind and body I thought, and because my summer holiday at SOAS had been so long, my Japanese level wasn't very good. I decided to take classes around N3 so I could try and regain my memories of Japanese in a comfortable and relaxed way. The teachers were very understanding and were very kind to me. They made me feel comfortable in forgetting Japanese and gradually studying helped me gain back my confidence.

I started to talk more at events and I have made friends through it. Speaking in Japanese all day is difficult, but it has been amazing practice and thanks to the teachers and the friends I have made, I feel more confident about Japanese. My reading and writing levels however should be improved upon and I hope during the spring holiday I can take more time to practice and study. When I come back for the next semester, my hope is to try taking more difficult classes. I want to be N2 level when I return to England, but I know I can only achieve this through my own efforts.

I am also grateful for the other students I have met in my time here so far. It is bittersweet however, as a few of the people I have gotten to know have now returned to their own countries. It has made me think about how many different people you meet on this year abroad and that in the future, if I decide to travel, I will be able to meet and stay with the friends I make here. In return, if the other students come to London, I will want to house them and show them around. It is also interesting comparing countries and culture and learning about countries I didn't know a lot about has been good. I hope with the new exchange students arriving, I can also form these kinds of bonds with new people.

Soon, I hope to start looking for a job to further expand my Japanese learning and meet new people. I am thinking of being an English conversation partner and offering to check over peoples reports and work. I also hope to start taking up my hobbies I had back in England here in Japan. For example, I love making clothes, and a friend took me to Nippori Fabric Town and my love of making clothes has been inspired. I also recently went to Mt Takao and I enjoyed the hiking and experiencing Japanese nature. I hope to spend time searching for places like that to go to and also visit beautiful parks and other nature filled spots.

In terms of my objectives on my year abroad, this year is for gathering information on the small thesis I will write when I return. In terms of that, I have thought about the topics I could write about and have been going to events for the sake of the topics. I have an interest in LGBT issues in Japan and have tried to visit lectures and seminars at Ochanomizu that discuss these themes, as well as talk to LGBT Japanese people about their experiences. For another topic idea, about fan relationships to the things they like, I have been participating in many events involving actors. It has

been interesting talking to fans and seeing how these relationships are formed and experienced. The fan culture in Japan is quite different to how it is in England so I have gained a large interest in it after going to an event myself. I hope when I return, I will have gathered a lot of research to create my small thesis.

Overall, there has been many things I have had to learn but I am happy and enjoying my time here. I have friends from SOAS I have seen, as well as the other exchange students here and then the Japanese friends I am making myself. I am a responsible person in England, perhaps as I am a little older than usual university students, so the daily life isn't so different. Each day brings something new to try and learn however and I'm enjoying all the new experiences. I hope during spring holiday I can save up money for travelling in the summer holiday and I also hope to study in preparation for the next semester.

