

Studying abroad this semester has been nothing but a life-changing experience, both academically and personally. Firstly, the application process to Waseda University was very straightforward. There was no language placement test needed as I was required to take Japanese classes at the university. I would also like to note that the process of gathering and verifying all the documents took most of my time and I would definitely suggest future exchange students to be diligent and thorough when applying. Most of my pre-departure preparation involved studying the basic characters of Japanese such as hiragana and katakana, and learning basic Japanese phrases to use in everyday interactions. This would be especially important when conversing with the locals or when asking for directions and help. The Visa application took approximately 3 weeks to process. I submitted the required documents and paid a fee. I recommend students to apply early to avoid any stress and to manage time properly. As for medical and life insurance, I first purchased travel insurance from Muang Thai Insurance before my flight to Japan. When I arrived, I applied for the National Health Insurance and Pension at the local city hall, which is a required process for any foreigner staying in Japan for more than three months. The process went by smoothly but I did have a hard time commuting with the staff as they only spoke Japanese. I eventually ended up using Google Translate to effectively communicate with the city office staff.

Course registration at Waseda was extremely straightforward. Their schedules and website interface was easy to manage and I applied for my courses with no major issues. Although I would like to note that the course registration is a lottery system in which you are not guaranteed the classes you registered for. I was personally not able to get all the classes I wanted but I found a few substitutes that made up for the loss. As for housing, Waseda University provides an option of student dorms for exchange students to live in throughout their stay. However, as mentioned before, the application for these dorms are also lottery based and I was unfortunately unable to receive a place at their dorms. Nonetheless, after a long search, I was able to find a dorm/sharehouse located approximately 20 minutes by train to the university. The dorm I stayed at was affordable and had clean facilities including a shared kitchen, shared bathroom area, study rooms, living room, and a gym. Monthly living costs were also quite manageable. Aside from rent, I would estimate my living expenses to be around ¥80,000 to ¥90,000 which accounted for both food and transportation. Buying groceries, cooking at home, and student train discounts allowed me to stay within my budget.

Waseda University offers many clubs or as they call “circles” for all students to join. These circles range from sports, arts, book clubs, publishing, international clubs, and traditional cultural practices. Exchange students have the option to work part-time jobs but they will need permission from the Japanese immigration. I personally did not want to get a part-time job but to instead focus on circles. I joined a few circles that mainly revolved around international exchange clubs where I made friends with many Japanese classmates and other fellow exchange students.

Thankfully I did not face many challenges during my exchange program. I would say the only challenge I came across was being unable to properly communicate with both my Japanese

classmates and locals alike. However, almost all the people I met had great enthusiasm when trying to make conversation with me and we were able to ultimately overcome this language barrier through determination and a little help from Google Translate. Academic wise, the classes I found myself struggling the most in were the Japanese language classes. The pace of the classes were quite fast in my opinion and while I did not struggle too heavily I did find myself feeling slightly behind compared to my other foreigner classmates who had previous experience with the Japanese language.

Overall, I am deeply satisfied with this exchange program experience. Both Waseda University and Thammasat University were very supportive and helpful whenever I had any inquiries or was experiencing any confusion. My advice for future exchange students would be to always remain open to new experiences. Exchange programs are a time to discover more about yourself and to make unforgettable memories. Take this time to make new friends, step out of your comfort zone if you haven't already, and to most importantly, have fun!