My Exchange Experience at the Institute of Science Tokyo

Participating in the Young Science and Engineering Researchers Program (YSEP) at the Institute of Science Tokyo was a truly rewarding experience, both academically and personally. The preparation phase required careful attention to detail. After securing a placement through the home university screening, the formal application process began. Applying for the Japanese student visa involved gathering essential documents, including the Certificate of Eligibility (COE) original, valid passport, photographs, visa forms, questionnaires, and six months of bank statements. Once submitted, the visa processing took about one week. Before flying, I secured travel insurance covering health and luggage, printed out the COE for airport immigration, prepared cash and daily medicine, and activated roaming internet to stay connected before getting a local plan.

Upon arriving in Japan, there were several important administrative procedures. At the local municipal office, I completed residential registration and enrolled in the National Health Insurance (NHI) system, which complemented the university's disaster and accidental insurance coverage. For living arrangements, exchange students usually stay in university-provided dormitories because private rentals in Japan typically demand long-term lease agreements. Although the dormitory facilities were basic, the rent was very reasonable at around 9,000 THB per month. Managing monthly expenses required budgeting, as the overall cost of living averaged between 50,000 to 70,000 THB. Commuting expenses contributed significantly to the total cost, and eating out generally cost around 250 to 300 THB or more per meal.

Academically, life at Science Tokyo was engaging and productive. The semester started warmly with a welcome party organized by the laboratory, where new members could socialize. In the lab, I contributed to the ASPIRE project, focusing on sign language research. The routine involved attending monthly lab seminars to report research progress, as well as participating in book-reading sessions where students took turns presenting chapters on artificial intelligence. The coursework

consisted of master's-level subjects delivered entirely in English. While some Japanese professors had difficult English accents, other classes were taught by international lecturers, making the academic environment intellectually stimulating and diverse.

Beyond the classroom and laboratory, life in Japan offered numerous cultural experiences. Engaging with the Thai Students' Association in Japan (TSAJ) provided an excellent opportunity to make lifelong friends and network with students from different universities. During free weekends and breaks, I traveled extensively around Tokyo, visiting scenic and cultural destinations such as Hakone, Nikko, and Kamakura. After finishing the exchange program, I went on a road trip covering Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, and Nagano, which allowed me to explore regional culture, historic landmarks, and beautiful nature. In daily life, communication challenges arose since many local shops and residents do not speak English fluently; however, translation apps and AI tools made navigating daily tasks manageable.

In summary, the exchange experience provided invaluable lessons in research, independence, and cross-cultural communication. For future students planning to join the program, the best advice is to start searching for laboratories early and contact prospective professors as soon as possible. Having prior research projects or academic work aligned with the target lab's focus significantly strengthens an application and sets a solid foundation for a successful exchange journey.

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I have posted most of the photos here!