



Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku  
Exchange Semester Japan SS2018

# Introduction

For my whole education in the field of Architecture, I always stayed in the area of the Rhine valley in Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein as well as south Germany. During that time, I saw many projects from architects all around the world, but I created a special interest in the Japanese architecture, the culture and the country. Somehow, I wanted to challenge myself when I saw that uni.li has a partner university in Japan and took the decision to apply for the Tokyo University of the Arts (Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku or short Geidai).

Living on the other side of the world on an island with earthquakes, typhoons and in a never-ending city where you lose the feeling of days and have an endless amount of possibilities, that was what I was confronted with.

Before I begin the list of tips for the exchange in Japan I first want to recommend everyone to learn at least the basic skills in Japanese to make yourself the life a bit easier in Japan, in the text I will explain more reasons why it will be helpful in more detail.



## Preparation / Accommodation

After the O.K. from Liechtenstein, the normal application process for the University in Tokyo starts and includes an application for the Certificate of Eligibility which is needed for the student visa in Japan. The certificate takes a long time to receive (approximately 3 Month) and is needed to get an entrance visa at your local embassy. And always calculate enough time at the airport for the immigration process, I needed 2,5h and because I was in a rush, nearly came too late to university.

As an exchange there is the possibility to apply for a cheap room in the dorm (it's around 1h by train from the university), I was looking for a much closer room from many different share house companies (Share House, Oakhouse,...) and ended up 25min by foot away in a share house from Oakhouse with 44 rooms in one building. Shared toilet, shower and kitchen but a single 10m2 room for myself for a price of ~650CHF.

I recommend also everyone to organise mobile internet for Japan, it is urgently needed to plan all the trips by train and metro in the city (Google Maps). It makes everything much easier to navigate through the city and find where to change the line without ending up on the wrong side of Tokyo. There are either mobile SimCards for your smartphone (careful, check your phone for the band!) or you rent a pocket Wifi. For both, there are several providers which normally have more free amount included than the regular phone contracts. I took a mobile SimCard from Genki Mobile (~200CHF for 5 months) and accepted the fact that it only was internet (couldn't take calls or receive them, what I solved with a Skype Phone number).

## University / Student Life



The official semester starts at the beginning of April, classes end at the end of July and the semester ending is at the end of September. I arrived on the 5th of April and had on the same day a short meeting in the international office where I received several papers for registration and information for the semester start. Afterwards, someone brought me to the architecture department and showed me my laboratory. Intro event, as well as the welcome party, was on another day. (Funny side note, I even met someone from my hometown at the intro event as well as when I left the university on the first day I tripped over an old school friend from me, we were both surprised to meet each other on the other side of the world)

In the information papers, you receive on the first day you get a list of courses in Japanese where you can choose from. For course descriptions and English course names, you have to type in the lecture number in an online translation system (everything described in one information papers). As you might realise basically all of the lectures are taught in Japanese, even if there are international exchange students, normally Japanese is also mandatory for most of the courses. If you found now some courses where the course language is also English or not clearly defined you just attend the first lecture in the first week. If you like it, get the signature of the professor and register (in my experience basically all the lectures I took where taught in Japanese, however, some of them are easier to follow like the CAD courses because of English software as well as there are some professors which at least try to translate some of the content, but generally expect Japanese as course language).

There are several Laboratories where you normally get allocated as an exchange student, in my case I even could choose which Lab I want to join and I could also choose the project I am working on. The structure of the Lab itself depends on the professor, normally you meet each week at least once without having a fixed day. For presentation days and other information, you have to ask the professors or the assistant because the flow of information is very bad and getting information is not that easy.

There is also the possibility to visit a Japanese class for free at university which is held twice a week, where you learn the Japanese language. Because I never learned it, I took the introductory class and was glad after a time to understand at least some pieces of what people were talking around me. Furthermore, I learned to read some of the stuff I was confronted with every day.

Once I survived the first week and registered my courses I could relax a bit and enjoy more the student life in Geidai. Without the help of some exchange which stayed already for the second semester, I wouldn't be able to figure out how everything worked.



# Life in Tokyo

Everyday life in Tokyo is pretty relaxed and comparable to other big cities around the world. For sure you have to accept that outside of very touristic spots you might be the only western person and the fact, that Japanese people sometimes look at you or don't take the free seat next to you in the public transport because they are distanced to foreigners. Nevertheless, the offer of restaurants, shops and things to try out is endless if you speak at least a bit of Japanese. Normally you meet everyone outside of your accommodation and with time you get a bit of an eye for restaurants where food is a bit cheaper because the prices are comparable to a level between Austria and Liechtenstein.

In Tokyo, they try to make the life of tourists easier because a lot of things also have an English translation but in many situations, you definitely need a bit of Japanese to communicate because the average English level is basically not existing and everything is normally written in Japanese.

To move around in the city the IC card (Suica, Pasmo) is your lifesaver because even though you can walk a lot you also drive a lot in the confusing public transport system and paying with the IC card is way easier and quicker in the very crowded stations, especially when there is rush hour.

And Japan gives you the possibility to choose if you want to socialise with other people (it needs a bit of ambition because Japanese are normally very reserved and shy) or if you want to be anonymous and vanish in the masses of a big city.



## Resume

After the 5 months in Japan, there are a lot of positive experiences I had but at the beginning, it was definitely not an easy thing, especially without any knowledge of Japanese. That was also the biggest shock for me how bad the level of English is in the population. Also, the lack of information and the unorganised situation I was in at university was a bit of a struggle for me and made me appreciate what we have at uni.li.

Nevertheless, I wouldn't want to miss the experiences and amazing country I was living in. All the traditional habits, the food, the sometimes weird but funny people, the architecture and the different atmospheres you can find in Tokyo are just amazing. Travelling around in a city which never seems to end, getting up on the highest buildings to catch a view on the rooftops and navigating through the jungle of public traffic are definitely things to experience.

There is so much to see in Tokyo itself that I didn't even get out very far, therefore, I will go for sure again to Japan and travel around on the whole island seeing all the other cities and beauties of nature.

I would definitely recommend everyone to take the chance to go to Japan if you are ok with the small difficulties such an environment brings with it. It is worth the stress and confusion in the beginning!