CALS International Exchange Program Student Report
Misaki Tanida, Spring 2016 [Tokyo University of Agriculture (Nodai)]

Personal information

Name: Misaki Tanida
Major: Food Science
Name of host university: Tokyo University of Agriculture (Nodai)
Period/Time of Exchange: Spring 2016 (April – August 2016)
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Practical Advice

Visa
I have a Japanese passport and did not need to go through the Visa process.

Packing (What did you not bring that you wish you had? What items do you recommend not bringing?)

I wish I made business cards for all of the people I met in the industry and professors at Nodai. I did not bring my water bottle, but it would have been nice to have.

Since I lived in an apartment by myself since January, I bought utensils, equipment (frying pan etc.) and ingredients. I also bought daily necessities such as detergent, shampoo, conditioner, hand soap etc. in Japan. I am not sure if these amenities are provided at the dorm, but I know that cooking equipment is not so you can probably borrow that from a friend in the dorm when cooking. I should have brought more American souvenirs, but I did not have enough room in my suitcase.

Do not bring folders because paper is larger in Japan. Japanese people use clear files more than folders. Pens are also nicer in Japan so I bought that in Japan as well.

Overall, everything is better quality in Japan. The dollar store has basically everything you need and it is much better quality than American dollar stores. However, other things can be expensive so be aware of that.

Arrival (Immigration, was there an Orientation program, Buddy program?)

Immigration was not an issue for me because I have a Japanese passport. I did not have an Orientation program or a Buddy program.

Academics

The University (Campus, International Office, Facilities, Social activities)

The campus is pretty nice. It is in a nice area because it is far away enough from the urban areas of Tokyo to have some breathing room, but close enough that it is easy to explore the city. All of the buildings are named with numbers unlike Cornell so it is easier to figure out the buildings. Also, all of the classes are held in the main building along with the offices and library. The international office at Nodai is called the Center for International Programs (CIP), which is located on the second floor of the main building. There are multiple places on campus to eat or buy food, but there are also restaurants/ramen right by campus so eating off campus is also an option.
I participated in ISF (International Students Forum). It is an organization that hosts ISS (International Students Summit), which I attended before studying abroad at Nodai. It is comprised of both Japanese and international students, and its aim is to connect these communities. They held multiple fun social events throughout the semester along with weekly meetings. It extended my network at Nodai because people from various majors are part of this organization and I ended up taking classes with some of them.

Courses (How did you enroll in classes, could you pre-enroll, what was the level. What types of exams were given)

To enroll in classes, you go to CIP and hand in a written form. There is no pre-enroll process. I took 10 two-credit courses at Nodai (20 Nodai credits), which is equivalent to 15 Cornell credits. The courses are not hard, especially compared to Cornell and the workload is also much less. Each course is one hour and a half, once a week.

The exams were either written finals at the end of the semester or papers. The one English course I took was graded based on the in-class presentation, participation and a final paper. The other courses I took were in Japanese and the course grade was entirely or almost entirely based on the final. Two courses out of nine had a written assignment due midway through the course and one course had a quiz. Some took attendance while others did not, but overall, the performance on the final dictated the course grade.

There is a finals week where a separate schedule dedicated to finals exists. It is from Monday to Friday so no weekend finals. The finals are 45 minutes each with a 15-minute break between finals. The big chart with rooms and times for finals are posted on a wall in the school. Depending on the course, some finals are held during the last lecture. For my semester abroad, I had 9 finals in 2 weeks and multiple on one day. The worst was having 3 finals in one day. It seems absurd as students from Cornell, but for Nodai, it is normal.

I believe courses taught in English tend to not have a final – usually presentations and papers. My friend who only took English classes had 0 finals so she was done with the semester on the last day of classes.

Life Abroad

Language (Was a pre-course offered at the university? Did you need the foreign language to manage your daily life or could you communicate in English?)

I am fluent in Japanese so I did not have problems. Although Japanese students learn English, they do not learn its practical use so most do not know how to speak English. Only certain people are confident enough in English to converse, but all of the foreign students at Nodai are fluent in English and will be able to communicate with you. Some professors can speak English, but only some.

Tokyo has many tourists, and as a result, more services can accommodate to English speakers. Moreover, since the next Olympics (2020) will be held in Tokyo, Tokyo is adding more foreigner-friendly services. However, not all facilities have adapted yet so you may find yourself confused at times.

Banking

I have a bank account in Japan. There is an ATM on campus.

Housing (Did you host university arrange housing? If not, how did you find it? How much did you pay for housing?)

There is a dorm that foreign students stay at, but I did not stay there. I previously used a Japanese housing company when I was in Japan so I used the same company to find my housing for my time abroad. It was about $1200 per month.

Transportation

The campus is about a 15-minute walk from all near train stations and it is by a main road, which has a bus stop. Walking, buses and trains are the main transportation methods. Some people bike, but you will need to borrow one from someone or somewhere. The train system in Tokyo is complicated because there are so many lines, but you can get anywhere with the train. The bus is usually used to go to Shibuya from the Nodai area.

If you anticipate using the train often, I would get a train pass either Suica or Pasmo, which is a card that you can charge money on and use every time you take the train. If you do not have this card, you have to get a ticket at the machine for every ride, which is a pain.
**Health and Safety** (What advice do you have for future students regarding their health and safety? What resources were available for you?)

Hospitals are much cheaper in Japan, even without insurance. There are also many pharmacies that sell a wide variety of medicine for colds etc.

You will feel very safe in Japan. If you lose your wallet, you will get your wallet back with everything inside. You will see people sleeping on the train often because people generally do not steal. Of course, there are still sketchy parts of the city, but overall, it is safe.

**Overall exchange experience**

*The best thing about my semester abroad was:*  
The independent internship prior to my semester abroad was the best part of my study abroad because I was able to be in the industry and learn first hand.

Besides that, the food‼ Traveling‼ Making new friends from all over the world 😊

*The most challenging things about my semester abroad was:*  
Definitely the 2 weeks of finals. However, I do not think I can complain too much since I did not do much work throughout the semester besides takes notes and attend class.

*How did your semester abroad change your perspective?*  
I learned the extensive process that Japanese companies go through to provide consumers with high quality products and services by being in the industry. It was much more thorough than I expected. The consumers’ standards are very high, which further drives industries to go above and beyond to exceed expectations. This system and mindset is how Japanese industries have proven its strength. However, at the same time, it lacks fluidity. Things have to be a certain way regardless of changes in priorities, which to me, seems to be the impeding factor for Japanese industries (especially food industries) to succeed on a global standard. Through my study abroad experiences, I realized the importance of this delicate balance between rigidity and fluidity.

**Tips for future students**

1. Check if you can get a SIM card‼ My phone could not so I lived off of Wi-Fi the whole time, which was difficult at times.
2. Bring more money for transportation and food. It can get expensive and pile up.
3. It is easy to get lost in neighborhoods because streets do not have names and the roads are convoluted.
4. If you plan on traveling to another city in Japan with the bullet train, there is a foreigner pass‼ Definitely get it because it is worth your money. Bullet trains are expensive, but the pass is an all-you-can-ride for a week or two (I forget exactly).