

The most exciting and fascinating months of my lifetime

Exchange Semester Experience

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These past months in Japan were some of the most exciting and fascinating months of my lifetime, with so many new and surprising experiences, which taught me something new about this country almost on every one of the 150 days I spent here. In this report I want to tell you about my personal highlights and try to provide few tips and ideas for incoming exchange students from Germany and elsewhere.

Firstly, before coming to the things I did in my free time, I would like to talk about my academic experience at YNU. Due to the flexibility of the JOY program, I was able to take subjects in three different categories: Three JOY program courses, three “standard” engineering courses offered by the faculties at YNU, as well as four Japanese language courses. Since most lectures only took place for 90 minutes each week, it was possible to take many subjects at once without much trouble. The JOY courses I took were very informative about various aspects of international management & economics, the engineering courses taught me new methods in my area of study, and the Japanese language courses greatly improved my previous knowledge of the language, since I had taken three Japanese courses prior to coming here already. In general, I think it was very helpful to have learnt some Japanese beforehand, because I greatly overestimated how many Japanese people would be able to speak English in day-to-day situations.

In my free time, I tried to see as many different places in Japan as possible, by going on several trips around the country, and often going for daytrips to Tokyo on the weekends. The town of Kamakura in the South is always worth a few trips on the weekend, to see the ocean or visit some of the countless beautiful temples of the area.

Another nice trip was to the town of Hakone to the west, which is close to Mt Fuji and offers many things to see and do. Highlights were the Hakone ropeway – which took us over the “burning valley”, a large volcanic hot spring area on the top of the mountain, the big lake with the famous Hakone Shrine, and also the many nice Onsen hot springs in Hakone Yumoto.

Another thing I want to strongly recommend is getting a Japanese cultural exchange partner through one of the volunteer networks, for example the Mitsui V-Net. The person I was matched with was extremely kind and organized a lot of activities for me, for example seeing a traditional Kabuki performance in a theatre,

trying out a traditional kimono with a professional guide, going on a walk in Kamakura with other members of the network, or simply going to lunch together and exchanging thoughts.

I could not be more grateful for this amazing time, and I would like to thank every single person involved in making this trip as great as it was. I hope to be able to go back to Japan one day, to keep using the Japanese I required and seeing even more things this country has to offer, e.g. the cherry blossom season, which I sadly was not able to enjoy during my short time here.

Please try out the soba restaurant called “Ama Noya” close to the YNU campus, it is extremely great.