

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name**

Luka Kodikaite

Year and semester for exchange

2022 Autumn

Exchange university

University of Tokyo

Degree programme

Sustainable Urban Planning and Design

Invaluable academic and life experience at the University of Tokyo

Before departure

I applied for exchange studies to gain the opportunity to live and study in a country where I could see myself working or further studying in the future. Therefore, I only applied to a few options. Japan was my top choice as it is a fascinating and distant country that has intrigued me throughout my life. Moreover, as a student of urban planning and design, I am interested in Japan's remarkable achievements in this field. I chose the University of Tokyo because it is the highest-ranked university in Japan. I expected that there would be high academic expectations and a rigorous curriculum, but with a commensurate reward.

When I arrived in Japan, it still had strict entry requirements, and tourism was closed. As a result, I had to do a lot of preparations, such as obtaining the necessary vaccinations, installing COVID exposure apps, and other apps to facilitate entry to the country. However, I do not think these will be necessary for future students since the situation has likely changed. The only thing remaining to do will be the student visa application, which I found to be a smooth process through the embassy of Japan in Sweden.

Before I was admitted for the exchange by the host university, I had to find a research laboratory and a professor to supervise me during my exchange. It took time to understand the different types of research laboratories and staff, and then to find their contact details. Fortunately, I did not have any issues with this as the first professor I contacted agreed to be my supervisor. Therefore, during my exchange I was kindly hosted by Prof. Naoto Nakajima at the Urban Design Lab.

Although I did not take any language courses before leaving for Japan due to time constraints, I highly recommend learning at least some basic Japanese, including how to read hiragana and katakana. This is because it can be challenging to communicate in English there.

Upon arrival

I arrived in Japan two weeks before the start of my studies. There were no social introduction activities, only a formal introduction meeting. I think social activities were lacking because Japan was still under COVID restrictions, which included social gatherings.

The University of Tokyo has many student clubs for every type of sport or hobby, but I think most of them are only for Japanese speakers. The list of the clubs is constantly changing, so it will be provided during the introductory period.

Financials

I was granted a scholarship from the Collection Foundation for International Student Exchange, which barely covered my flight costs since they were very expensive due to Japan still being closed to tourists.

I was not approved for the JASSO scholarship, but I was not given a reason why. I also received CSN with extra loan for exchange studies during my time there. Rent costs in Tokyo are about the same as in Stockholm (for a student corridor room), and public transportation prices depend on the distance between your home and university. However, food, both in shops and restaurants, is much cheaper, as well as clothing and entertainment.

There were no extra fees that I had to pay at the university, besides the cost of textbooks for Japanese language courses. However, there were additional fees for the university dormitory accommodations.

I do not have many tips for saving money as a student, but I recommend getting an international card, such as 'Revolut,' to be able to make transactions in Japanese yen. You can also make a commuter pass between your university and home stations, and it is convenient to select a route through other locations you visit often so you can use the commuter pass when going there as well.

Accommodation

I was fortunate enough to receive student accommodation by the university, although I did have to put in some time and effort to apply for it. Nevertheless, the process was still considerably quicker than searching for a place to live independently. However, these accommodations are limited in number, so it is important to meet the application deadlines in order to secure a spot.

My accommodation was located an hour away from the campus, but very close to the bustling Shibuya district, which houses an undergraduate campus of the University of Tokyo. Despite commuting to the graduate campus three days a week, I enjoyed living in this area because it was in the heart of the city and surrounded by many convenient and fascinating places. The specific accommodation I lived in was called 'The University of Tokyo International Lodge Komaba Main', and you can find all the relevant information about it, including current fees and photos, on the university's website. However, it's worth noting that the fees have recently changed, and the room types may vary.

My student room was quite small, with a tiny bathroom, and I shared a kitchen with around 20-25 people. However, I hardly used the kitchen because food in Tokyo is very affordable compared to Stockholm. While the accommodation was not the most luxurious, it was certainly adequate and more convenient than renting elsewhere.

University and studies

The university offers education in various subject areas, and it is a large institution. The campus is very beautiful. Due to the availability of courses in English, I mostly took classes that were catered specifically towards international students. The lectures and coursework were noticeably different from what I experienced at KTH. However, with most of the lectures delivered through Zoom due to COVID, it is uncertain how things will change.

On a typical day of studies, I would start by attending a Japanese language class at 8:30 in the morning. Following that, I would either attend an in-person lecture or head to my assigned desk at the research laboratory to watch an online lecture. After lunch, I would listen to another online lecture or participate in an online laboratory meeting.

To ensure I had sufficient time to complete assignments, I arranged my schedule such that I had Tuesdays and Thursdays free of lectures. This allowed me to work from my accommodation and avoid going to campus. However, I usually ended up going to the laboratory to work from my desk as my accommodation was quite small.

One of the most challenging courses I took was the Japanese language course that had three on-campus classes per week. It was particularly difficult, and a lot of exchange students ended up dropping out mid-way.

Courses

A list of course that I took:

3799-904-2 Japanese Beginning-1 (6 credits)

3717-031 Regional Planning (1 credit)

3717-032 Urban Development Policy and Planning (1 credit)

(3717-031 Regional Planning and 3717-032 Urban Development Policy and Planning have to be taken together)

3714-099 Architecture and Cities in Japan 2 (2 credits)

3717-018 Studio Work in Urban Development 3 (2 credits)

3717-019 Studio Work in Urban Development 4 (2 credits)

(Studios 3 and 4 have to be taken together)

Understanding the number of credits required to transfer from the University of Tokyo to KTH was challenging as each university in Japan calculated credits differently. Additionally, the different types of activities for each course made it difficult to determine how many hours were needed to complete a credit. I found it even more challenging as the other KTH students who were also studying at the University of Tokyo at the same time had different credit requirements.

The Studio course was particularly demanding as it consisted of group work and had no lectures. Conversely, courses like Regional Planning, Urban Development Policy and Planning only had one online lecture per week and did not include any homework assignments aside from the final examination paper. The Architecture and Cities in Japan course was an omnibus course with a different guest lecturer every week and did not include any homework assignments apart from the final assignment. As I mentioned earlier, the Japanese language course was demanding and required a lot of assignments and self-study. If learning the Japanese language is not a particular interest, it is worth considering before taking the course.

Overall, I enjoyed all the courses I took. They were specifically tailored to exchange students and introduced the Japanese system and practices. Even if one has studied regional planning in Sweden, for example, taking the course in Japan would not feel like repetition, as it would provide an interesting perspective on the Japanese approach.

City and country

However, due to the language barrier and the complex bureaucratic processes, moving to and living in Japan required extensive preparation, research, and constant effort to keep up with different residency procedures. This is something that one should consider before going, particularly if they are easily overwhelmed as it can take a toll on mental energy. Personally, I was able to manage because of my excitement and interest in Japan, but it is not a destination for everyone due to this complexity.

Leisure and social activities

In my free time, I mostly explored various sights in Tokyo. Unfortunately, I didn't have much spare time, so I couldn't participate in sports and other extracurricular activities. Nonetheless, I did manage to visit a few museums and galleries, even though there are an abundance of cultural activities available in

Tokyo. My social circle mainly consisted of local and international students from my research laboratory and a couple of other exchange students. In my experience, the exchange student party culture wasn't very active, but I know it existed for those who were looking for it.

Sustainability

Because of the distance, I had to take a flight to Japan. Nevertheless, Tokyo and Japan boast probably the best public transportation system in the world, and traveling by train was extremely comfortable and easy. Japan enforces a strict waste recycling system, and everyone is required to participate in sorting their trash.

However, as is widely known, many products in Japan are excessively packaged in plastic. As for university activities, I'm not entirely sure about their sustainability practices. There may have been a way to purchase used textbooks and other materials, but due to the language barrier, I may have missed out on some information since not everything was provided in English.

Other recommendations and observations

Everything will be best experienced on your own!



My research laboratory



University of Tokyo
Hongo campus famous
ginkgo road in November



Shibuya