

Exchange Years In Japan

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My exchange year at Kobe University has come to an end, and I am feeling more than sad about leaving Japan. Overall, I can say that it was one of the best years of my life, and I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity from the University of Innsbruck to study abroad. I began my study abroad journey in the autumn of 2022, applying for only one exchange semester at Kobe University in Japan. The first semester passed so quickly, and alongside my studies at Kobe University, I had the chance to delve deeper into Japanese culture.

The initial semester was amazing, but as it came to an end, I felt that extending my stay in Japan would allow me to gain even richer experiences. I reached out to my coordinator at the International Outgoing Office at the University of Innsbruck, explaining my situation and inquiring about the possibility of extending my stay in Japan. Surprisingly, the process to extend my stay was straightforward; I merely had to submit a few formal requirements.

Due to the different academic year in Japan, Kobe University had a one-month spring break. These few free weeks provided a perfect opportunity to travel to other Asian countries.

Plane tickets from Japan to other Asian countries are considerably cheaper than traveling all the way from Europe. This motivated me to seize the chance, and I traveled to Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Hong Kong. Exploring other Asian countries not only allowed me to deepen my understanding of Asian cultures but also enabled me to discern their unique differences. Upon returning to Japan after a month of travel, I realized I had gained a much richer insight into Japanese culture and its distinct society.

The second semester commenced, and Kobe University afforded me the chance to undertake a research project. I chose the topic "Microaggression with a Special Focus on Exchange Students in Japan." This topic was particularly intriguing to me, as an exchange student who had also encountered the social phenomenon of Microaggression. Japan's population is predominantly homogenous, with only 2 percent of foreigners residing there. Consequently, individuals from other countries with differing appearances, values, and languages tend to stand out and may encounter certain challenges. This is where the concept of microaggression comes into play. Microaggression refers to verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights, whether deliberate or unintentional, that can convey negative

attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups, such as exchange students. I believe this is a crucial consideration for anyone contemplating studying in Japan, as dealing with microaggression isn't always straightforward and can impact an individual in various ways. Personally, I hadn't experienced microaggression in my life until my time in Japan. It took some time for me to comprehend why, for instance, people would stare at me while I walked through the streets of Kobe. However, I quickly learned to cope with these situations. Developing a deeper understanding of Japanese society also aided me in handling instances of microaggression. I view Microaggression not as a negative aspect of my exchange semester, but rather as an intriguing experience.

Extending my stay was undoubtedly the best decision for me. In the first semester, I still felt like a tourist, but during the second semester, I truly felt like I was living in Japan.

Establishing a regular daily routine, becoming socially well-integrated, and improving my language skills all contributed to this feeling.

Now that my time abroad has concluded, I consider it the highlight of my three years pursuing a bachelor's degree in sociology. I wholeheartedly recommend to everyone: don't be hesitant, just go for it.

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