

## **HANNAH SNELL-SIDDLE**

Host University: Keio University, Japan

2010 Semester One

Bachelor of Arts – Japanese

こんにちは、 Hi my name is Hannah Snell-Siddle and I have been on an exchange in Japan for the spring semester 2010, the equivalent of semester one in New Zealand. I was very fortunate to have been selected to study at Keio University, a prestigious University located



in Tokyo. I had an amazing time in Japan and would like to share my experience about life as an exchange student. I will give an overview of the preparation that was done before leaving New Zealand, tasks on arrival, my accommodation in Japan, my experience at Keio

University and Japanese life. I have gained a lot from my exchange and have finally experienced Japanese life first hand and I hope this report is useful for fellow students who are preparing for an exchange to Japan.



### **Preparation for exchange**

There was quite a lot of preparation prior to the exchange that is usually facilitated through the exchange office at your home university. This involved enrolling at the Japanese University, choosing papers that would be able to be credited back to my home university and organising my visa as well as my accommodation. A list of available dormitories was made available on the Keio University website and I was fortunate enough to be accepted into my first choice which was Willing Setagaya. The preparation stage was probably the hardest part of the exchange but once this organisation was completed it was a relatively smooth process from there.

## Arrival in Japan



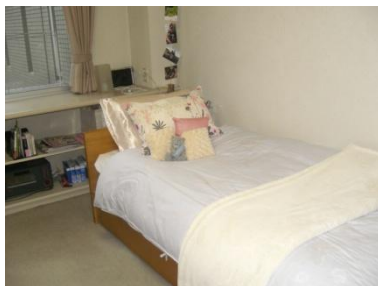
Once I arrived in Japan there were a few important tasks that needed to be completed. In order to be able to reside in Japan, foreigners need to obtain an Alien Registration and this can be done at the ward/city office of the city you are living in. You also need to obtain a “Certificate of Registered Matters” from the office as this is needed when you open a bank account. Opening a bank account is important as the rent for the dormitory is paid by automatic bank debit; the bank that I used

was called Sumitomo Mitsui Corporation. Once I had been issued with my student Identification card from the University I was able to buy a commuter train pass at a discounted rate. It meant that I was able to get unlimited fares from the University to my dormitory. The card could also be topped up via ticket machine if I was going to another area. There are two main cards that you can get - Suica and PasmO. I also bought a mobile phone while I was in Japan. If you are thinking of buying a phone I would recommend a Softbank phone. If you sign up for a contract, the phone is free - however the contract does last for two years.



## Accommodation

Prior to arriving in Japan I had chosen a dorm and had been accepted into it. My dormitory was called Willing Setagaya, which is very close to Shibuya. The cost of my dormitory was ¥65,200 per month and this monthly cost included internet, water and power. The room had a



single bed, small kitchen and a bathroom. Sheets and Blankets are included but no kitchen equipment is provided.

Despite this, Willing Setagaya has an excellent system for incoming students. Previous students



leave their unwanted belongings there and at the beginning of each semester all the goods are displayed in the lounge and students can choose many different items. This saved me a lot of money as I didn't have

to buy such things as kettle, microwave, pots and pans, and toaster etc. It took about one hour to get to Keio University and this involved taking two trains. The dorm also had two Japanese Keio students who acted as residential assistants and they were always happy to help out students who were having any problems.

## Keio University



Keio University has a few campuses but the two that exchange students study at are Mita and Hiyoshi campus. Mita was very close to Tokyo Tower so I was able to see this every day. At Keio University there are two programmes that you can enrol in, the Japanese Language Programme which has all papers in Japanese or the Keio International Programme (KIP). I studied under the KIP programme as it meant that I



could take cultural papers in English as required for my degree at the University of Otago, as well as Japanese Language papers. Keio requires students to enrol in a minimum of seven papers per semester. One culture paper that I took that I found extremely interesting was one entitled 'Geisha'. It was taught by a 'real life' geisha in Japan and we were fortunate enough to be able to attend a banquet, where a performance was carried out for our class and we were served dinner by Geisha.

Keio University has many clubs that you can participate in, including sport, dance, cooking or musical instrument clubs. I joined an organisation called KOSMIC (Keio Organisation of Student Members of International Centre) who organised many social events. These events were an excellent opportunity to meet Japanese and other international students. One programme that they organised was the conversation partner programme, where I was paired up with a Keio student and met my partner once a week to have a chat. I would recommend this as it helped me to improve my Japanese conversational skills.



## Japanese life

When I first arrived in Japan it was in spring so it meant it was cherry blossom viewing time. This time of the year is really enjoyed by Japanese people and they celebrate this time by gathering together and having picnics under the cherry blossom trees, either during the day or night. Two popular spots in Tokyo are Ueno Park and Chidorigafuchi Park.



One park that I would recommend a walk through on a Sunday is Yoyogi Park in Harajuku. Sunday is when people gather in the park and perform different acts, from miming, salsa dancing, cosplay, to people playing musical instruments. If you want to get out

of Tokyo for the day, I would recommend going to Kamakura. Kamakura was the capital of Japan from 1185-1333 and is home to many Buddhist temples and some Shinto Shrines. The Kamakura Daibutsu (Great Buddha) is located in at the Kotoku-in temple and is Japan's second largest Buddha and considered to be Kamakura's most famous site.



Japan has many national holidays and while I was in Japan Golden Week occurred and therefore we had a week off from University. I took this opportunity to go to Kyoto. I was lucky that a Japanese student who had stayed with me in New Zealand invited me to stay with her in Kyoto and then visit her family. I took the night bus from Tokyo to Kyoto which took about 7 hours.

Although it took many hours I would recommend this as it is a lot cheaper than the shinkansen (bullet train). I used the following website to book my bus, <http://travel.rakuten.co.jp>. Kyoto is famous for its geisha district so I decided that I would like

to experience what it would feel like to be transformed into one. It was a lot of fun, they started by caking thick white make up on my face and then dressing me tightly into a kimono I had handpicked to wear, and then professional photos were taken.



I loved the food in Japan! It was so delicious and fresh. One of my favourite places to eat was at a Kaiten Zushi restaurant. This is a type of restaurant where the sushi goes around on a conveyor belt and you can choose different plates. The plates ranged in prices but the cheapest was ¥120 and this included two pieces of sushi. Okonomiyaki (Japanese savoury pancake) was another favourite and there were many places where you could make your own on the hot plates. However in order to save money I would often cook for myself in my dormitory.



I hope this report has been useful and interesting and has given you insight into my experience in Japan; I will leave you with an estimate of my budget of costs.

**Monthly Budget: (the exchange rate was 64 when I was in Japan)**

Accommodation: ¥65,200

Food: ¥25,000 (This included supermarket goods as well as eating out)

Transport: ¥6580

Mobile phone: ¥400

Clothing: ¥8000

Recreation: ¥10,000