

Mengxiao (Mina) Hu (University of Auckland) on exchange

at Tokyo University 2009 - 2010

I am a second year student of the University of Auckland. I was luckily chosen to come to the University of Tokyo to study for 9 months as an exchange student. The programme is called AIKOM. The programme is well organised. Overseas students are assigned to stay at a student dormitory in Mitaka-shi of Tokyo. The accommodation is relatively affordable at a basic monthly rent of 11500 Japanese yen. The charge for electricity, water and gas depends on personal usage. The dormitory room is a little bit narrow, but sufficient enough for students to stay. The University of Tokyo provides a pick-up service for students who arrive in Tokyo on the designated date. Students will be guided to the dormitory. With the help of tutors, students then sign a contract and initialise the accommodation. Students can choose to have the staff in Tokyo order bedding for them ahead of their arrival, or buy their own bedding later themselves. I chose the former. My first day in Tokyo was very smooth.

I had studied Japanese at Auckland University for three semesters, so when I first reached Tokyo, I was able to speak survival Japanese and hold simple daily conversations. I haven't had much trouble with speaking. Because of my experience of immigrating to New Zealand, it was relatively easy for me to adapt to a new language environment.

The University of Tokyo held many events, such as an orientation party, to provide overseas students with opportunities to get to know more local Japanese students of the University of Tokyo. Having new Japanese friends is a good way to adapt to the new environment. The University of Tokyo assigns a personal tutor who is a native Japanese student, to each overseas student. The personal tutor will take care of and help the overseas student with many aspects of life.

What I have learnt in Japanese language classes in Tokyo has not been much different to the lectures I took at my home university. However, being in the language environment, reading it from menus and signs, hearing people speaking it around you, and having it all over the media, really speeds up one's learning.

Tokyo has a high cost of living. For students, transport as a necessary cost of study life may be more expensive than that in their own countries. However, usually students can buy a commuter pass with a student discount. It is only available for the route which students travel between their accommodation and the campus. As for daily meals, for those who are planning to come to the University of Tokyo, I think the school cafeteria is very affordable and delicious at the same time. Even though there is a mini kitchen in the dormitory room, I do not cook very often, as it is time-consuming.

Fortunately, I have my family's financial support during my exchange. I have travelled inside Japan and experienced its food culture. That could be counted as extra cost. For an exchange student, the monthly budget of 90,000 to 100,000 Japanese Yen should be sufficient. In addition, in Japan it is legal for international students with an overseas study visa to have a part-time job with limited hours. The detail and limitations differ based on the policy of the host university.

I believe that there is no better way than being in the environment when it comes to the studies of the culture and society. That is why I made my choice to come to Japan. I have made many Japanese friends and learnt more about Japanese culture and society not only on academic level but also on daily life base. It has been a fantastic experience for me to cherish for a lifetime.



The orientation party at a Japanese Izakaya (I am front row, first right)



The common hall of the dormitory where usually events are held
(I am second row, first right)



Tokyo Disney Sea