

My Semester in Japan

For the last four months, I studied abroad in Osaka, Japan at Kansai Gaidai. This is my second time living in Japan, and it was a whole new experience. Like most parts of life, the experiences that you get during study abroad will mostly be influenced by the people you're with. The good thing about Japan is that it's easy to be with people and find things to do with them.

I became friends with many people living in my dorm, and we would go out to eat, sing karaoke, take the train to downtown Osaka or Kyoto, or just walk to the grocery store together all that time. The Japanese students were eager to be friends with the international students, and it was easy to meet them by joining a club, or just talking to them in the lounge of the international building. The campus was very active, and there were always people hanging out outside, or playing soccer or basketball in the field, and quite often the school held events such as festivals or pageants or performances..

My school had some wonderful teachers and interesting classes. The Japanese classes were engaging and well taught. It was easy to see the improvement in everybody's Japanese speaking skills. I got a language learning experience that I could not have received anywhere but in Japan, and while I feel like I could have practiced speaking Japanese more, I have noticed a distinct improvement in my reading, writing, and listening skills.

I also took Shinto and manga classes. The manga class was very unique, and definitely something that I could not experience in Japan, simply because we don't have the tools available to create manga as it is usually made. As a class, we made a manga book that was a collection of short manga by each student. It was amazing to be able to exit the class with a tangible product to show our hard work.

Overall, I have learned so much about Japan by studying abroad there. The first time I went to Japan, everything was new and exciting. This time, it was familiar and welcoming. I felt at home there, and find it very easy to live in Japan. The trains are easy to figure out and walking around feels safe, even at night, so it's easy to get to wherever I want to go. Everything I needed was within a half hour walking distance. Campus was 25 minutes from the dorms, and the nearest train station was about half an hour away. The nearest grocery store was five minutes away, but if I had 30 minutes to walk to a grocery store, then I had about half a dozen to choose from, as well as several convenience stores. There were also many places to eat, barber shops, a library, post offices, small shops, and clothing stores. It's amazing how easy it is to walk several hours a day when we have somewhere to walk to.

In the future I hope to live and work in Japan, at least for a few years after graduating. At first I would like to teach English there, probably with the JET program. I would also enjoy teaching at a Japanese kindergarten. After I get more comfortable and become more fluent in Japanese, however, I would like to do other jobs in Japan. Ideally I would open up a small business in Japan, because Japan is a great place for small businesses. I would like to put to use my artistic skills in Japan, a place where I am comfortable and inspired.