A Student Study Abroad Survival Guide
University of Rhode Island
Japanese International Engineering Program
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## Pre-departure Preparation

This Survival Guide has been developed and maintained by students who have studied abroad and understand what it takes to prepare for this experience. Our goal is to outline the general process for you in order to make it as easy as possible for you. We would also like to answer the majority of the questions that you may have regarding what
to expect for your journey on the Japanese IEP program (JIEP). This packet won’t answer all of your questions but thankfully you have many resources at your disposal such as the Japanese IEP Director, Professor Manabu Takasawa, Professor Tatsushi Fukunaga, and the JIEP Student Ambassador(s).

**Academic Year**

**Course Requirements**

The course requirements for the GLAS major (Japanese track) can be found at this link here: [https://web.uri.edu/languages/academics/japanese/curriculum/](https://web.uri.edu/languages/academics/japanese/curriculum/). In order to pick the university and classes that best suit your interests/needs and level of Japanese, you should consult with Fukunaga sensei and/or Takasawa sensei directly.

**Timeline for Preparing for your Year Abroad**

During the fall semester of your junior year, Professor Takasawa, the JIEP Director, will contact you to set up a meeting. This preliminary meeting will be used in order to discuss your study abroad options. Visit the [Japanese International Engineering Program page](https://web.uri.edu/languages/academics/japanese/curriculum/) to view a timeline and learn more about how to prepare for your year abroad. Part of this preparation will include mandatory paperwork that you need to fill out in URI Abroad for your application and permission to study abroad, your application to the host university, as well as pre-departure orientations, and visa advising. Be sure to pay close attention to the deadlines listed in the timeline and to follow all the processes and guidelines so that you stay on track to complete everything. Note, that application deadlines for exchange partner universities can vary. Some are as early as February, so please note that these are hard deadlines that will not be waived if students miss them. IEP works very hard to ensure that you are selected to attend your chosen program, however **nothing is guaranteed**. The program is a direct exchange with our partnering universities. Therefore the number of slots at partner universities is limited and may change from year to year.

**Scholarships**

Trust us, you’re going to want to have all of the money you possibly can when you are abroad. Whether it is $20,000 or $20, any amount of scholarship money helps you immensely. Apply to any scholarship in which you are eligible because you never know what may happen! Keep in mind that the majority of scholarship applications require recommendation letters. Make a note of the deadlines and ask for references at least a month in advance. You know how you dislike it when professors give large assignments at the last minute? Well professors and other mentors would appreciate more advanced notice, too. You probably will not get the best recommendation letter if the writer is chugging coffee and rubbing their eyes the night before it’s due. That is, if they agree to write you one at all!
Make sure to occasionally check the IEP specific scholarship website (https://web.uri.edu/engineering/academics/iep/scholarships/) as there may be new scholarships posted for which you all could be eligible.

**Additional Japanese language study opportunities**

Even after all of the Japanese classes you’ve taken you likely still feel nervous about living in Japan. While most Japanese do not speak very much English they are incredibly kind and gracious, always willing to help you through the difficult language barrier. If you’d like to improve your Japanese before your year abroad experience there are a variety of resources you can use. The best practice for living in Japan is to visit Japan. You can see if there is a inter J-Term trip, where you can get exposed to the culture and language in a way that no Japanese class can prepare you for. In addition, Anki, a notecard app similar to Quizlet, was specifically designed for students to learn and practice Japanese vocabulary and grammar; it is a great resource to peruse while on a bus or train. There are also month long intensive immersion programs offered in and around Tokyo that will equip you to live in Japan and speak daily in Japanese, but these are quite expensive (bordering on $1000). For more information on affiliated and non-affiliated study abroad opportunities, contact the Office of International Education: oie@etal.uri.edu.

**Visa Process**

Although this is probably the least exciting part of this whole guide, it is also the most important. You must make sure that you complete each part of the visa process **EXACTLY** as the country’s requirements state. If any of your documents are not absolutely perfect, your visa request could potentially be postponed or denied. It is not difficult to complete any particular part of the process, but if you do not stay on top of it and plan ahead, you will definitely find yourself scrambling and stressed at the last minute. Don’t forget to make three copies of each of your supporting documents!

**Note** Be sure to check the consulate websites before going to be aware of any changes as the visa requirements are subject to change without notice.

**Summer**

**Travel**

Once you have all of your paperwork squared away, your visa is approved, and you know when you need to arrive at your host destination, you can finally purchase your flight! In general, it is recommended that you purchase a round-trip ticket and to then pay a change fee if you have to move the date of travel. Otherwise, a single flight could be very expensive if you have to book a flight to come in the event of an emergency. There are several different ways to purchase affordable plane tickets, especially for students. Some discount and student specific sites that you may not have heard of include:
Also consider some of the more-well known sites such as:

- www.kayak.com
- www.travelocity.com
- www.orbitz.com

Flight prices usually depend on the day and time that you travel. For example, a 2pm flight on a Saturday will generally be more expensive than an 11pm flight on a Thursday. Search different day/time combinations as well as airports where you plan to depart/arrive as this can play a major factor into the final cost of your plane ticket. Also note the time difference to where you are traveling. For example if you are flying to Japan the time difference is 12 to 14 hours, and flights often take upwards of 20 hours. Therefore if you plan to leave the United States during the morning time, you will have an “overnight flight” and arrive in Japan in the afternoon, one day later.

There is a variety of transportation that you can take around Japan: trains, planes, and buses to name a few. If you ever plan to visit any city on the main island of Japan the shinkansen is by far the most convenient though quite expensive, usually costing hundreds of dollars. A much cheaper option is to take a night bus from one city to another; Willer is usually the cheapest night bus costing around $30-70.

Outside of Tokyo there are tons of interesting cities that if given the chance students should visit. Kyoto is an incredible place to visit, filled with some of the oldest and most beautiful temples in Japan as well as incredible food. Many Japanese people consider the Kyoto dialect and culture to be the most beautiful and authentically Japanese, so it is worth a visit. Nara is an interesting place to visit for temples and ancient Japanese culture. If you love Tokyo most likely you’ll love visiting Osaka, which is the other large Japanese city, but tends to be more laid back than Tokyo. If you like any sort of snow sports then a trip to Sapporo, the capital of Hokkaido, is a must. If you’d like to learn more about World War II and the history of the atomic bomb from a Japanese perspective, the Peace Museum in Hiroshima is a powerful experience.

Packing

So what exactly do you need to bring? This is obviously going to be somewhat different for everyone, but overall there are a majority of things that everyone should bring. Before you begin packing, make sure to check the airline site that you are flying
with to see their allowances and fees for additional or overweight luggage. As difficult as it sounds, try to only bring things that you absolutely need. You will be able to purchase things such as toiletries, towels, school supplies, etc. As for hand luggage, the rules are generally one carry-on and one “laptop bag/purse.” They are much more lenient with this than with checked bags, so make something like a backpack your “laptop bag” and have a checked bag and a carry-on along with that.

Suggested Packing List:

- Copies (hard/electronic) of all the documents
- Passport photos of yourself, these are often required for applications for bus cards, phone contracts, etc.
- Enough cash converted to Yen to last you the first few days (a couple hundred, but not much more is suggested)
  - Also if you have a long layover you may want to bring that country’s currency to use while waiting in the airport, don't bring USD as the exchange rates are notoriously bad in airports.
- Apparel (for all occasions!)
  - Professional dress clothes for your internship
  - Black or dark blue suits only, do not wear bright colors to work
  - Region/weather specific clothes
  - Winter jacket, sweaters, etc. for Tokyo and Yokohama
  - Light summer wear for Kyoto, Kyusu, Osaka, etc.
  - Rain jacket (Though cheap umbrellas are sold everywhere)
  - Rain shoes
  - Clothes to hit the town!
  - Tight fitting bathing suits (loose fitting bathing suits are not allowed at Onsens, if any at all)
- Adaptors
  - Japan uses nearly identical plugs, the only difference is there is no ground plug, i.e. they only use a two-prong plug. Adaptors from 3 to 2 prong are available at many stores in the US
  - Be mindful of wattage capacity for certain items such as hairdryers
  - Cheap and fairly easy to find upon arrival as well
- Toiletries – small quantities
- Medicines
  - Items you can’t live without and don’t think you’ll find in Japan (hair product, brand of makeup, etc.)
- Pictures of family/friends/home
- A camera/camera phone to capture all your future wonderful memories
- Laptop and other electronics
- A purse/bag that makes travel easier (you won’t be an outcast if you have a fanny pack)
• DON’T BOTHER WITH:
  • Large quantities of personal care items/bedding/towels/other house items if you are struggling with space/weight- you can find them easily when you arrive
  • Too many clothes, there are many stores to buy interesting clothing while you are there (including Uniqlo, Muji, etc.)

Banking and Money

Talk with your bank about their policies regarding foreign withdrawals and transfers to a foreign account. Will the fees be manageable at least until you can create a bank account? If not, you can create an account with another banking company that has no fees or fewer fees, such as Bank of America. With their account, you can withdraw money from any of their partner ATMs without an ATM fee. Additionally, Bank of America offers a Travel Rewards credit card which you can use anywhere in the world in any currency with no fees. Regardless of which banking or credit card company you decide to use, make sure to notify them of your travel plans so that your transactions will not be denied and you can access your money when you need to.
Year Abroad

Things to do upon arrival

Leaving the Airport

When you arrive in Japan you will either arrive at Narita International Airport or Haneda Airport and will nearly immediately be issued a government ID, a Zairyu card. Both of these airports are outside of the center of Tokyo, Narita to the northeast and Haneda to south, so you will have to take the metro into the city. This process can be somewhat confusing, especially from Narita. From Narita you can take the NEX (Narita Express) to Tokyo, Shibuya, or Shinjuku station for approximately 3000 yen ($30). Pay attention to which train you take though as some only go to Tokyo station and not on to Shibuya and Shinjuku. For a cheaper though more complicated route into Tokyo, you can also take the Skyliner or Sky Access line to Asakusa and transfer to the metro, but this is not recommended since you may have to traverse long passages and stairwells with your bags. Bus transportation to various points of Tokyo is also available, and you can find a bus to Tokyo Station for approximately 1000-1500 yen ($10-15).

Establish Residency

For students who will be living in Japan, the visa you obtained from the consulate only lasts for 90 days. In order to legally reside in Japan you must establish your residency and register at the local ward office within 90 days of arriving. See the Japanese embassy website for the most up to date information. We recommend that you speak with the International Office at your institution and ask them what their protocol is regarding registration at the ward office.

Housing

Waseda University

There are dormitories specifically for exchange students at Waseda University. Waseda University International Students House, Waseda Hoshien, and Waseda University Nishi Waseda International Students House are all within walking distance from Waseda, Toyama and Nishi Waseda campuses. The information can be found at: https://www.waseda.jp/inst/rlc/en/student_dormitory/exchange/

Additionally, it is customary in Japan for college students to get their own apartments while taking classes; therefore it is possible to find an apartment to rent from a private company though this is quite difficult and expensive. In order to coordinate housing over the phone with either the university, dormitory, or private company you may have to speak with Professor Takasawa.
Communication and Cell Phones

You’ve just landed and gotten off the plane and the first thing your loved ones expect you to do is notify them that you are in fact still alive and breathing. One way to do this is to bring a device that allows you to connect to wifi. If you have a device that you can connect to wifi, you will be able to Skype and use other apps such as Facebook, Whatsapp, and Viber to communicate. However, only using wifi is a temporary solution. Eventually you will need to get a new number that you can use to communicate in your new country. The sooner that you can do this, the better! As a point of advice: if you ever need to use Wifi while travelling around Starbucks and McDonalds both allow you to connect to their networks for free.

We recommend that if you have a smartphone (any kind of smartphone), you make sure that it is unlocked with your American phone company and you bring it with you to use and simply purchase a SIM card. If you do not have a smartphone, very basic cell phones can be purchased for cheap. We also recommend that you cancel your American phone plan right before you leave. Even though you will not be using your American number while you are abroad, most (if not all) phone companies will still charge you your monthly fee.

In order to purchase a phone or start a phone plan, you must have your passport with you for legal reasons. You can purchase SIM cards as well as phone plans at any of the big electronic stores including Bic Camera and Yodobashi. The typical price range for a monthly phone plan ranges from $10 to 20.

Banking

In order to avoid US bank fees (if you have them), we recommend creating a bank account as soon as you are settled in your host country. Generally speaking, you will only need a valid form of identification (passport or Zairyu) to open an account. However, it is possible that you may be asked to complete a W-9 form or complete/show other paperwork. Therefore you should bring copies of all your documents with you. If you are asked to do this, do not worry as it is simply for security and liability purposes for the bank.

In each city there are several different companies you can choose in order to open a bank account. Before deciding which company you would like to use, we recommend that you ask your university or host company if there are any banks they recommend or there are banks with international/student options.
Orientation

Before the semester officially starts, each university hosts an orientation program. The International Office of your host university will contact you towards the beginning of the summer with the details and schedule of the orientation. Typically, in addition to introduction games to help you meet other international students, the orientation programs include useful information specific to the university and city and similar to topics we have discussed in this document (housing, phones, banks, etc.). You will also be given information regarding how to register for courses. If you find that the courses offered do not match the ones that you had prior approved, do not panic. You can get these new courses approved.

The majority of your questions should be answered by the end of your orientation session. However if you still have other questions, in addition to Manabu and the JIEP Student Ambassadors, you should reach out to the International Office at your host university.

Life in Tokyo

While commonly referred to as a city, Tokyo is actually a prefecture, the Japanese equivalent of a state. There are technically 23 wards within Tokyo, with a total population of almost 40 million people, making it the most populous city in the world. The different areas of Tokyo have entirely different architectural and cultural tendencies. Waseda University is located near Shinjuku, the governmental center of Japan and one of the central cultural centers of Tokyo. While there are approximately 5 different train stations in Shinjuku, the JR Shinjuku station is the busiest station in the entire world, catering to the business districts and entertainment spots that surround it. There are various bars, restaurants, arcades, clubs, parks, zoos, and other activities in and around Shinjuku, though it tends to cater to a slightly older - young professional - crowd. Some of the most interesting places to visit in Tokyo are Golden Gai and the Kabukicho district that are both in Shinjuku, though the lower part of Kabukicho is the red-light district and is controlled by the Japanese mafia so students should avoid going down there.

Other areas around Tokyo that are great for students to visit include Shibuya, Roppongi and Akihabara. Shibuya is much like Shinjuku, filled with hundreds of interesting bars, restaurants, and shopping but it tends to be cheaper and attracts a younger college aged crowd. In addition Shibuya is a short walk, or an even shorter train ride, from Harajuku, which is a mecca for anyone interested in Japanese fashion. Roppongi on the other hand tends to be an area dominated by foreign visitors, international business people, and ex patriots. Roppongi is filled with bars, restaurants, and clubs where many Japanese people go to practice their English and meet foreigners. Akihabara is the anime and video game center of Tokyo. There are hundreds of card shops, arcades, comic book shops, and maid cafes around this district. For anyone interested in anime and nerd culture, Akihabara is somewhere you must visit.
Other interesting areas of town students may enjoy visiting include Asakusa, Tokyo, Odaiba, Shin-Okubo and Ikebukuro.

Transportation

The main form of transportation in and around Tokyo is via the vast train networks. Because constantly buying train tickets is cumbersome and time consuming it is strongly recommended that students get a PASMO card, a rechargeable card that can be scanned through a wallet at all train stations to pay for tickets. In addition, if you need to take a train to school everyday you can purchase a PASMO card that while expensive upfront allows students to travel between the two end stations for free for any number of months. For example, for approximately $300 I was able to travel one hour each way to university everyday for about three months.

In order to find the best route around the city you should download the Tokyo Subway App on your smartphone: it outlines the quickest route, the cost and the time it will take. Another alternative is Google Maps, which you can set to public transport to find the best train or bus routes.

You should be aware that while the Tokyo system is timely and clean it is also complicated. Signs are generally in both Japanese and English so getting around the large train stations should be relatively easy. The complication comes from boarding trains on specific tracks. There are a variety of trains, local, express, super express, etc. that are all listed as the same line but stop at different stations along the way. You should always check the signs next to the tracks and the signs on the train itself to make sure you are taking the right train at the right time. Though don’t worry: if you ever take the wrong train, you can always get off at the next stop, hop on the same line heading the opposite direction, and end up at your original location.

Groceries

One of the main differences between living in America and Japan is the food. While you may have had sushi and miso soup before, Japanese sushi is totally different and is usually a delicacy, the Japanese equivalent of an American steakhouse. If you live in an apartment you will be responsible for cooking your own food, and one of the biggest cultural shocks is the lack of options at grocery stores. Instead of large supermarkets where ingredients can be bought in bulk, instead most grocery stores are quite small and only carry Japanese meats, fruits and vegetables in single serving sizes. Because the Japanese take intense pride in the quality of their food, most items at the grocery store are incredibly fresh and have no preservatives so they taste quite different and go bad within a few days. It’s probably a good idea to practice cooking a couple of simple Japanese dishes before departing. The site japanesecooking101.com is a great resource for interesting and simple recipes.
Nightlife

Tokyo has a vibrant nightlife. There are likely thousands of bars, restaurants, and clubs around the city. As mentioned before, some of the best areas to hang out in are Shibuya, Shinjuku, and Roppongi. Other interesting spots are Shimokitazawa (young college vibe), Ebisu Yokocho (cool bars), and Hoppy Street (street of delicious izakayas in Asakusa.

There are a variety of ways to spend an evening out with friends in Tokyo, much like New York the city never sleeps, many bars literally never close or close at 8 am. As you may have guessed, karaoke places are located in every part of the city. Though karaoke is slightly different in Japan, instead of singing alone in front of a bar of strangers, in Japan friends rent a karaoke room for a certain number of hours, or even all night sometimes, and sing along to songs together. Usually nomihodai, unlimited free alcohol, is included with karaoke rooms. Therefore for about $20 each, friends can rent a karaoke room for two hours and have drinks delivered to the room while they sing along to their favorite songs! Another fun way to spend an evening is to go to an izakaya, a Japanese style pub. Izakayas are mainly tapas bars where everything on the menu is quite inexpensive, but small, and shared with everyone at the table. Drinks are usually extremely inexpensive as well. Most izakaya offer nomihodai or tabehodai, which are free drinking and free eating respectively. There are also any number of different bars, pubs, restaurants, conveyor sushi places, and whatnot everywhere in the city.

Day Trips

Tokyo is the cultural and governmental center of Japan, but there are also many interesting places that you can visit around the city. Some popular places include Yokohama, the second largest city in Japan just to the south of Tokyo, Kamakura, and Hakone. Yokohama is another massive city with many museums, restaurants, parks, and shopping. Some interesting places to visit in Yokohama are Chinatown, the Ramen Museum, and Cosmo Clock 21, a massive ferris wheel in the center of the city. Kamakura is a gigantic Buddha statue south of Yokohama in the Kanagawa district that many foreigners and Japanese alike visit. Hakone is a resort town near Mt. Fuji that can be reached from Tokyo by a train from Shinjuku station. In Hakone visitors can get a great view of Mt. Fuji as well as visit various onsen, hot springs. Hakone is a perfect trip for either a romantic getaway or a weekend with visiting family members that want to get a taste of authentic classic Japanese culture.

Cultural Integration

Part of the enjoyment of travelling abroad is experiencing new and interesting cultures. Learning that other people around the world approach life completely differently is a fascinating and exciting experience. Anyone who has studied Japanese language and culture has learned about some of the various subtle and not so subtle
cultural differences, but none of this can fully prepare you for the experience of actually living there.

Before going abroad you will learn about culture shock in one of your pre-departure orientations. They outline the various stages of culture shock that you most likely will experience while abroad and how to navigate and mitigate them. If you feel homesick it may be a good idea to set up weekly Skype calls with family and friends. Building a sense of belonging and community, in Japan and back home, will help you to make the most of your experience.

Health and Safety

Each university is located in a city, and Japan is known for being one of the safest countries in the world, with extremely low violent and non-violent crime. However, it is recommended that you use traveler’s caution and follow normal safety precautions, such as protecting your wallet and phone while you are out - though the Japanese rarely steal, so if your wallet is lost likely you will find it exactly where you dropped it. Always leave your passport in a safe place and at home, as it is not easy to replace if you lose it. However, make sure to be carrying some form of ID, the Zairyu card that you will be given when you first enter the country, in case of an emergency.

• You cannot shop for over the counter medications/ medical supplies in a drugstore like you can in the US. Many of the drugs in Japanese pharmacies are different and some popular American medications do not exist altogether. You can find ibuprofen for example if you ask for a painkiller, but you will not find NyQuil, Vicks, or Tums so for this reason I recommend bringing some medications you typically use over the course of a year. Bring antacids if you are prone to heartburn or NyQuil if you can’t live without it when you get the flu.
• All citizens, including foreigners living in Japan for an extended period of time, are required to purchase insurance, much like the Affordable Care Act in the United States. This costs approximately $10 a month and can be paid at a post office.
• In Japan it is common to go to a local municipal hospital if you are having any sort of illness, from the sniffles to a broken leg. Be advised though that most doctors do not speak English and you may have to return on another day when an English speaking doctor is available.
• Be aware that Japan is prone to daily earthquakes. It is not completely unlikely that a large earthquake could occur while you are living in Japan. The typical course of actions is to get under some sort of table or desk in the event of an earthquake. Also, be aware that if you feel an earthquake that is moving up and down rather than side to side there is a good chance that a tsunami will approach soon afterwards, therefore you should avoid windows and make your way to higher ground.

Specific to Japan:
• Keep in mind the emergency number in all of Japan is 119, for all medical, fire, and police emergencies
• Instead of carrying your passport or license on you, once you have obtained your Zairyu, you should carry that with you at all times.

**Academics**

For the majority of your classes, the grade that you earn on your final exam will be the grade that you earn in the class. **In order to have credits transfer back to URI, you must earn a C equivalent at your partner university, as per URI policy.** The Japanese schooling system is very different from the American system. While High School is incredibly challenging in Japan this trend ends in college. After students take their extremely difficult entrance exams for college they don’t do anywhere near as much work as American students in college. Instead of dense lectures, constant homework, numerous papers, etc. the Japanese university system often does not even require students to come to class, instead focusing on one final project. Many Japanese students skip class to hang out with friends or play video games. Though the Japanese system may seem less stressful, you should stay on top of your work, and always attend class. Once you have completed your time at your partner university and seen your grades, you should have the partner university send an official transcript directly to the OIE office at URI and you should try to obtain a hard copy for yourself as well.

Throughout the course of the semester, you should check your e-campus to make sure you do not have any holds on your account. If you do have a hold, you should contact your academic advisors to have the hold lifted so that OIE can enroll you in your internship semester.

**Internships**

Undoubtedly you will be stressed about the internship process throughout all of the fall semester. Take a deep breath and count to three. Everything will work out. In order to help ensure that you obtain the internship you desire, make sure that Prof. Takasawa has all the documents he needs to communicate with companies in an efficient manner. Additionally, respond to all emails from Professor Takasawa and the IEP Department in a **PROMPT** fashion. They are working to help your career, and how can they do that effectively without your input?

One incredible resource for internships is **DISCO International**, a yearly conference held in Boston where many Japanese companies come to hire bilingual employees. In the past students from other universities were able to find incredible paid internship opportunities in Japan through this conference. Anyone interested in attending this conference should get in contact with Professor Takasawa or Director Berka.

After you’ve obtained an internship, now you can begin the second half of your journey! Whether you are staying in the same host country or traveling to another country, you know that moving won’t be so hard this second time around. You’ll have experience finding apartments, and if you could do it once, you can definitely do it again!
Make sure to keep in touch with Professor Takasawa during your move and regarding your transition.

Before you begin your first days at work, ask the company if there is any paperwork they require. Some companies will ask that you obtain a local Social Security Number, and some won’t. Some companies require that you have a bank account from a particular company, and some don’t care. It’s better that you ask ahead of time and complete it or set up appointments to complete it before you begin working. No one wants to start off their first week panicked because they have a lot of unexpected paperwork to do, especially since you’ll most likely be nervous to begin with!
After Returning

Sharing Your Experiences!

Did you have one of the biggest life changing experiences this past year and wish you could do it all over again? Then why not help out the next generation of IEP students?! They are going to want to hear all about your adventures and ask you lots of advice and questions. You could even be the next person to write a pamphlet like this! See the IEP Coordinator (TJ House office) about being a Student Ambassador. You’ll get to talk to prospective IEP students and 3rd year students about to embark on their own journey, and help make the IEP a better program. What better way to remember your time abroad than by giving back to the program that made it possible?

While you’re at it you can keep your Japanese skills sharp by going to Japanese Chat Hour or even living with international students at the IEP House! The Assistant Director of the IEP Living & Learning Community will send applications to live in IEP housing via email in spring when you are abroad.