

Study report at Waseda University, Japan, winter term 2017/18 (Master – QTEM)

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1. Introduction

Going to Japan, to study and live for half a year is a big decision. Numerous concerns emerge as you are faced with the planning part of your journey. What are the eligibility requirements? Which courses can I pick? How can I arrange (or start arranging) my accommodation for the next 6 months? Apart from studying, will I get the chance to travel the country, experience the culture and people? And what about the finances? Worry not, my friend, in the following lines I will answer all of these and other major questions concerning your semester abroad at the Waseda University in Tokyo. I will guide you through the whole planning process, address the most important challenges, share my personal experience and give you some Pro-Tips around studying, living and travelling in the Land of the Rising Sun.

2. Preparation – before the exchange

The good news is that once you have been accepted into the QTEM Program, you will get a lot of assistance from your local coordinator as well as the coordinator of the host university. This way it is fairly easy to gather all the needed documents for your exchange. The tricky part is to get into QTEM. As for me, I knew I wanted to do a semester abroad in my masters. Thus, I read up about all the information events regarding the different exchange programs offered by the Goethe University in the first weeks of my masters and made it a priority to attend all of them, which I ultimately did. Attending these events is greatly useful. Not only will you get a summary about the relevant programs, but you will also get to know the coordinator of your program, get to know likeminded fellow students, who may share useful experience with you and, last but definitely not least, get a great overview of the organizational workload that will be awaiting you. The most important requirements to get accepted into the QTEM program are: a GMAT score of at least 650, a proficient level of English language and some extracurricular activities. As for me, I perfectly met these requirements and was lucky enough to get accepted into the program.

Pro-Tip: once you decide to go abroad, start to gather information on the requirements and the organization of your exchange **asap**. Even if you didn't get the accepted yet. It's best to start already during the orientation week.

Once you get the acceptance letter, that's when the planning really starts. First things, check the semester dates. The Japanese winter term starts in the middle of September. Thus, you will be able to comfortably complete your exams in Germany before heading out for Japan.

Now that you have planned your semester in Germany, it's time to think about the courses you'll pick at Waseda. The QTEM homepage offers a neatly arranged database of the units you can attend at the partner universities. I strongly suggest you to use this database when planning your schedule as it will give you a comprehensive overview of all available courses for the respective term. Moreover, all of the courses in the database will most likely be accepted by Goethe, so you don't have to worry too much about the approval. Keep in mind, since the courses at Waseda are worth only 5 CP, you will have to pick more courses than in Germany. Choose up to eight courses to submit for approval at Goethe. This will give you a nice flexibility later on (when you will learn more about the exact contents and the lecturers during your first weeks at Waseda) as you will be able to pick six out of eight courses.

Pro-Tip: unlike at Goethe, where you can sign up for an exam pretty late in the semester and sign out at a short notice prior exam, Waseda won't give you that freedom. The registration for exams is completed within the first couple of weeks and **can't be altered easily**. Thus, inform yourself about the subjects you're about to pick as good as you can in advance. Think carefully about: attendance, tests, homework, examination dates, papers to submit etc.

If you are a member of the European Union, getting a visa is done easily by submitting a request in a Japanese embassy. Unfortunately, I do not know the requirements for the citizens of outside the EU, thus you may want to consult your embassy in advance in order to avoid possible delays. After a successful application, you will get all the important documents online too. Don't worry too much about getting a health care in advance in Germany. Every student at Waseda is obliged to buy a Japanese health care policy at admission. It's nice, since everything will be prepared for you. For a fairly low price you will get the necessary insurance in no time. So save your money in Germany.

In terms of bank accounts, I would recommend getting an account at the DKB (Deutsche Kredit Bank). With the student credit card offer you can withdraw (not pay(!)) money free of charge all over the world, which is really useful. Additionally, it is very troublesome to get a Japanese bank account as a foreigner. It's a path full of bureaucracy, extreme language barriers, misunderstandings and frustration. However, should you be needing a Japanese account anyways, get one of the local students to help you. This will save you a lot of time and trouble. Still, I can't stress enough how useful a charge free credit card was to me. So, try and get one before you leave for Japan. Keep in mind that it may take a couple of weeks to actually get your card, be sure to start on time.

Finally, you'll have to think about the accommodation. There are several options to choose from. First, you may try get into a student dorm, which I did. You can apply for it straight from Germany. Second, you could try and rent a place while you are still in Germany. Third, book a hostel for your first week in Tokyo. Even though I heard stories about student dorms being very dirty, I applied anyway and never looked back. There are two major student dorms Nishi Waseda and Waseda Hoshien. Ultimately, you don't get a say in neither the dorm you will be assigned to nor the room. I got assigned to Waseda Hoshien and it was an amazing place to stay. On the ground floor, there is a big common room where you can meet other students, play all kinds of Nintendo, PlayStation and Xbox Games, meet for a couple of drinks and just hand out. I got my own room, which is a pretty small apartment-like accommodation with a bedroom and your own toilet with a sink. You share the showers and the big kitchen with other 9 guys flats from your floor. All the common rooms are cleaned daily by a cleaning lady, so you don't have to worry about cleaning which is pretty nice. Additionally, the dorm is 3 minutes' walk from the Uni and is located in the Student area of the city, full of small coffees, restaurants and shops. The only downside is the strict visitor policy in the dorms. You are not allowed to take anyone outside the dorm to your room, only the common room. However, it is a problem most of us managed to figure a way around pretty quickly. Unfortunately, I don't know a lot about looking for a place outside a dorm in Japan. As far as I know, all of the exchange students that wanted a room in a dorm also got one.

You got your courses lined up for Germany and Japan. You successfully applied for the visa and got a room in a dorm. Now it's time to get a flight. I definitely recommend booking a 'nice' airline, as you'll spend around 24 hours in the plane. I used Skyscanner to find an affordable flight and booked Emirates. It was a nice flight of 6 hours to Dubai, transition of 2 hours, and another 13 hours from Dubai to Tokyo. Should you get a return flight straight away? It depends on your plans. The Japanese semester is over just in time for you to go back and catch the German exam period. Some may choose to do so. On the other hand, when is the next time you may end up in Japan? As for me, I took two months to backpack after my studies and had an amazing time! In the end, it is for you to decide.

3. Waseda University

Waseda University is the one of the biggest universities in Japan. In Tokyo it located in a nice and calm area. It is really nice with lots of green, places to relax, some cafés and places to eat. There is a gym, a basketball court and some places to get food and coffee around. In terms of study material, you will find all you need here. There are books, working space as well as computers.

Pro-Tip: there are lots of small eateries all around the campus with low prices and amazing food. Definitely worth discovering!

Japanese academic approach differs greatly from the German. First of all, all of the courses will have an attendance sheet, which will determine a part of your final grade (up to 40%(!)). Many courses will have weekly homework that you'll have to hand in either on paper or online. Almost every course will have some kind of a group project, that you'll have to either submit, present or both by the end of

the semester. Compared to Germany, the required volume of work during the semester is definitely higher, however in my experience it is significantly less challenging. Additionally, due to the high workload during the semester the finals will have a lower impact on your final grade, typically 40 – 60%. It has lots of advantages, as your final grade is not decided by a one-time-performance (i.e. exam), rather you get the chance to impact your grades at different points in time throughout the semester, which may come useful. Another advantage is that many lectures are recorded and uploaded online for your access. However, don't fall into the trap of not going to lectures and later forgetting to listen to the online version, you'll definitely need one of those to pass the exams. One other thing to pay attention to are the group projects. If you care about your grades, make sure to find the right people to work with (!). For some reason many exchange students (including myself) had troubles with their groups in terms work ethic. If you're unlucky, you may end up working on several assignments, of which each is meant for five people, all by yourself. As for me, I took *Advanced Corporate Finance*, *Business Transformation in a Digital Era*, *Statistical Finance*, *Trade Relations and International Finance*, *Growth Strategy & Creation of Sustainable Business* and *Organizational Strategy*. Unfortunately, I can't recommend any of the courses. Most of the time the contents were either extremely unchallenging, like in Business Transformation, or extremely overwhelming, like Advanced Corporate Finance. However, what I CAN recommend are courses with easy credits. Such as Trade Relations and International Finance, where 40% of your grade is determined by the attendance and the other 60% by a 3 pages report you write about a paper. I still didn't quite get neither the goals nor the point of Growth Strategy, but the lecturer was a very nice guy. Business Transformation, although very trivial course, had lots of guest speakers CEO's and CFO's of companies like Mitsubishi and Financial Times, which was really interesting. Lastly, I heard Sport Finance was a very interesting course.

Pro-Tip: for the group projects, try to create a group with 70% other QTEMers and the rest local students. This way you'll get some exposure to the local ways but wont risk to mess with your final grades

Waseda offers a ton of leisure activities, so called circles. Many student associations, sport clubs, gym memberships, bar crawls, you name it. Most of the clubs will introduce themselves during the welcome days. As for me, I didn't take part in any of those activities, except for boxing. Yet, for many exchange students joining club activities makes it a lot easier to meet new people.

4. Life in Tokyo

Japan is slightly more expensive than Germany. But if you keep an eye on the price tags while shopping you should be fine.

Tokyo is known for good coffee, food, drinks and amazing night life so make sure to try out different places. Also, it is a city of many 'hidden bars' and has a huge pub culture. It's fun to explore the different locations. There is lots of street musicians, art, live music, concerts and other events all around the city. You can stay up to date using Facebook and the information provided by Waseda Clubs. I can't give you a recommendation for a specific place or event to go or attend, simply because there have been so many of them. Make your own experiences and explore as much as you can. You are spending the semester in an amazing city, make it count!

5. Travel

It is needless to say that you should explore the city you are staying in, first things. Try not to focus too much on the studies, you are in Tokyo, my friend, enjoy.

Finally, take some time and travel around the country if you can. Japan is extremely exciting to travel around. Thus, I travelled as well. My favorite destinations were Osaka with its amazing food, completely different breed of mentality and an amazing night life I will never forget. Nara is a place where you can hand feed some wild deers, who will bow in front of you to ask for food. Hokkaido is in the North of the country and pretty cold. You can go skiing and snowboarding there, or simply enjoy some amazing landscapes. Additionally, you can try and discover some countries around Japan. I've spent Christmas and New Years in the Philippines, visited Korea and Taiwan.

6. Conclusion

Japan is amazing. I would definitely recommend Waseda as a host university to study abroad. You will have a great time studying and experiencing a totally different way of living.

Overall, the QTEM program offers a high value package for the students, with two semesters abroad and numerous corporate partners. I am glad to have been a part of it and hope that this report will help you to get a head start on an amazing time, which is lying on front of you. Enjoy the the Land of the Rising Sun!!