

## Study Abroad Essay

Over the summer in 2023, I participated in a study abroad experience in Japan. We left for Japan in late May and landed in Tokyo. Once we landed in Tokyo, we stayed there for one night and then proceeded to travel to Kyoto where we stayed there for three nights, acclimating to the time change and exploring locations of cultural significance in the area. From there, we traveled to locations such as Kanazawa, Himeji, and Shirakawa-go. In each of these locations we further explored areas of cultural significance and learned more about Japan as a whole. After approximately a week of exploring these different areas in the Kansai region, we then moved to one of our main locations in Osaka, Japan. There we spent approximately a month studying Japanese language as well as contemporary elements of culture in places such as Kobe and DenDen Town in Osaka, Japan. The course involved studying grammar, conversational practice of natives, and learning about elements of Japanese culture specifically regarding the Kansai region. We spent time learning about the Kansai dialect of Japanese, and even learning to speak some of the dialect. During this time the study abroad students including me experienced many aspects of Japanese daily life, such as grocery shopping, visiting convenience stores, and visiting common chain restaurants exclusive to Japan.

In Osaka, many of our focuses were on our studies and exploration of nearby areas. This included learning to understand Japan's railway systems as well as adapting to certain cultural aspects such as using cash more, and not tipping. The cultural differences in Osaka were not as apparent as later when I went to Tokyo. Interactions with people tended to be a lot more friendly than in Tokyo, assumably because in the area we were in, that people did not have as much exposure to foreigners than in Tokyo. One of the things I found most interesting, especially in the beginning of the trip, is the aspects of Japanese culture that rooted itself in the United States are often minor aspects of Japanese culture. Sushi is a good example, most people in the United States would most likely think

of sushi when asked to think about Japan, however with my experience in Japan, it is most common for sushi to be either Sashimi or Nigiri, however in the United States, the Maki roll is the most common form of sushi and is what is typically thought of as sushi.

In the latter half of the summer of 2023, I had gotten the opportunity to intern with Fellows Inc. with the focus on translating their website. I spent approximately three weeks in their office in Ebisu, Tokyo commuting from Shibuya Tokyo. I worked about eight hours a day through the normal five-day work week schedule. During my time there, my manager and I went to a job fair in the convention center in Odaiba, Tokyo, Japan. I also went to multiple outings with the office as team-building exercises and building camaraderie. Besides the outings my main tasks involved translating the website and other miscellaneous forms from Japanese to English and providing a basic business English course for any interested employees.

Japanese business culture is very different than American ones in many ways. Japanese offices are about teamwork and working as one to achieve a goal for the company, rather than the American concepts of individualism. Most people spent lunch with someone else, or as a department, creating a welcoming and unified atmosphere. Everything about working in a Japanese office was to work with other people to complete tasks that benefit the company. Structure was also done differently in the Japanese office rather than an American one as well. During my internship, we had times to clean our station, then head into our morning meeting and announcements, recite the company motto, and then begin work. When I came into work, I would say good morning to everyone, and when I left work, I would thank everyone for their hard work. This ritual of Japanese culture is missing in American culture where the office workers are more disconnected from each other.

When I was not at my internship, a few others doing internships as well would go visit different parts of Tokyo together. We visited areas such as the Tokyo Tower, the Tokyo Sky Tree, Akihabara, Ginza, and where we lived, Shibuya. We lived in a share house in Shibuya, a few blocks down from the train station which provided easy transport to anywhere we would want to go in Tokyo. A notable thing about the train stations in Tokyo is that they were much busier than the ones in Osaka or the places we visited in Kansai. On our days off of our respective internships, we would avoid the trains during the two busiest times, in the early morning, and early to mid-evening. The Shibuya station in particular was especially crowded during these times and often it would be hard to get on the train and exit the train when your stop came. These experiences with trains are some of the most memorable and clashing with many concepts contained within American culture. American transportation is mostly reliant on cars, rather than public transportation. However, in Japan, public transportation is the way of life, the easiest way to move through the city and beyond. It was seldom that I met any Japanese person, especially in Tokyo, that used a car to travel. It was not necessary to have a car with a well-structured public transportation system.

My time in Japan was well spent learning and growing as a human being. It's important to learn about other countries and to broaden your horizons. Keeping an open mind to aspects of other cultures and being knowledgeable of the differences between cultures is incredibly important to learning. These experiences allowed me to further my education and my future career by exposing me to new ideas and different ways of life.