

# JAPAN

Congratulations. You're going to Japan. There's a few things that you'll need to know, and a few questions that you have probably got wandering around inside your head. Well, let's see if we can help a little. I'll try at times to make this information applicable to the rest of Japan, but since the bulk of my experience is from Kyoto, there will be a certain bias. In some instances, all I can speak on is Kyoto.

There are a few basics you need to be sure to bring, and SFSU's Office of International Programs (OIP) is great about almost all of that. Be sure to bring some cash (Japanese yen) with you. Somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 yen is a good amount to cover yourself for things unseen for the first couple days. You can bring traveler's checks with you, but you won't be able to use them many places. Some banks even have a hard time with them. Despite the difficulties, traveler's checks are a pretty secure way to bring extra money with you.

Japan has most everything you will need, with a few exceptions. If you're a pretty big person in either the height or weight department, you might want to bring an extra pair of shoes or set of clothes. U.S. shoe sizes up to 10.5 or 11 are relatively easy to find. Anything larger is hard to find. Pants with an inseam up to 34 inches can be found, but any longer and you may be out of luck. Other than clothes and money, follow OIP's recommendations. If you box up extra clothes and extra dictionaries ahead of departure, you can have friends or family send them to you once you've arrived and have an address. This will make your travel much easier.

Chances are you'll arrive at Kansai International Airport (KIX). Kansai International is located on a sinking artificial island off the coast of Osaka. Even though it is a beautiful and impressive airport, for some reason (at least as of this writing) it's unpopular. Getting to Kyoto from KIX is easy. You can catch the Haruka express train at the train station across from the arrivals terminal. There's plenty of signage in both Japanese and English. Purchase a Haruka ticket for Kyoto (about 3,500 yen). Follow the signs down to the platform and board the appropriate train. The Haruka takes about 75 minutes to reach Kyoto station. Gaidai might offer to have students to meet you at the station (hey- instant friends!). If you're feeling adventurous, catch a Taxi for Kyoto Gaikokugo Daigaku (also Kyoto Gaidai or Gaidai) (about 1,500 – 2,000 yen). Don't take the bus – you'll have luggage which is difficult to get on and off the usually crowded buses, and inconveniences the other passengers.

An even better option than the train/bus adventure is to take the MK Taxi Airport Shuttle. There should be a form for this in the packet you receive from Gaidai, and the International Programs Office at Gaidai will make the appropriate reservations for you, if you wish. The shuttle driver will meet you at the airport (maybe even with a name sign), load your bags, and drive you straight to Gaidai. Since this option is easier, more direct, and cheaper (about 3,000 yen for the service), you'll probably want to go this route. I know I wish I had.

The international programs office is on the fifth floor (go-kai) of building number nine (kyuu-go-kan). Building nine is the narrow, tall, reddish brick building in the south-east corner of campus. If you're standing in front of Gaidai, it is the building closest to the corner on your right. Café Taro is on the first floor. Go up to the office, and they will sign you in and give you a key, map, and whatever else you need to get into your apartment. Gaidai provides furnished apartments for students at an excellent price. You'll have basic pots, pans, and dishes, bed and closet or wardrobe, and bedding. There may have been extras left behind by former students, such as TVs, stereos, microwaves, or other odds and ends. Other amenities, if needed, can be had for cheap (keep reading).

Anyway, now that you're here, there are five basic things you need to take care of right away in order to be a functioning human being in Japan. You might even be able to get some of these done before

orientation at school, where most of them will be covered in detail. Check with the international programs office if you have any questions. The sooner you tackle these five things, the better. They are, in order:

1. **Foreign Resident Card**, or Alien Registration Card. You get this at your local ward office. School can tell you where the office is, and what paperwork you will need (Passport, et al) to apply for and receive your card. *Keep in mind that government office employees generally speak only Japanese.* Take a Japanese friend along to help you out, or be prepared for a language workout. Because it can take a few days or weeks to actually produce your card, get a temporary card. The temporary card is produced on the spot, and costs somewhere around 500 yen. While it is an extra expense, it can speed up your whole settling-in process. Also, with the temporary card, you won't have to carry your passport with you everywhere (this may have changed, so check with school, your ward office, or the local police). With the temporary card, you can...
2. **Open a Bank Account.** Nobody uses checking accounts in Japan. Transactions are either taken care of in cash at whatever office, or by wire transfer from account to account. Which bank you choose is entirely up to you. Most Kyoto exchange students choose Tokyo Mitsubishi because there are lots of bank locations around the country, and therefore lots of cash machines available for use without incurring excessive transaction fees. Tokyo Mitsubishi has allowed a number of exchange students to open accounts with just their passport and proof of enrollment at Gaidai. You can open an account with as little as one yen. It's also a good way to have money wired to you from home, if necessary. Oh... and if you don't have a bank account, you can't get the health insurance rebates. Now that you have a bank account, you can...
3. **Get a Cellular Phone.** Everyone, and I mean EVERYONE in Japan has a cell phone. Out of the hundreds of people I met in Japan, two did not have a cell phone. Do some comparison shopping. AU is the only company to offer a student discount, but that is only available with a one-year contract (sorry, one-semester students; you lose). Keep a careful eye on your phone usage. You might want to change your plan from time to time as your calling habits change. Students that kept an eye on their plans and usage often manage to keep their monthly bills below 5,000 yen. If you're careless, you can find yourself with bills exceeding 20,000 yen. Remember: you only pay for outgoing calls, and text messaging is easier, faster, and cheaper. Now that you have a phone number, go...
4. **Get a Bicycle.** You need a phone number and alien registration number to get a bicycle, because you must register your bike. In Kyoto, bikes are like cell phones: Everyone has one. You can get a used bike for as little as 5,000 yen, or something fancier for 10,000 and on up (Jusco has good prices). If you live at Kyoto Gaidai's College Residence, they will supply you with a bike, but nobody likes those bikes. You'll want to make sure you have a lock or two, but won't need anything as insane as a Kryptonite™ U-lock. A wheel-lock and a simple cable lock will suffice. Most bike theft is simply because someone else has had too much to drink and needs to get home, so they grab the first unlocked bike they see. Don't get hung up on how the bike looks. Nobody cares. I strongly recommend getting a bike you're comfortable on. Something the right size, with a comfortable seat and a good basket. While I liked my bike (used: 8,500 yen), it was a little small and the seat was a little hard. Considering that you will literally spend hundreds of hours and hundreds of miles on your bike, comfort might be worth investing in. If I had spent closer to 15,000 yen, I could have purchased a new mountain-style bike with suspension and a nice gel seat. Live and learn. Since you're now mobile...
5. **Get Insurance.** I don't want to get into a huge discussion here. I don't care if your parents have a triple-guaranteed platinum health insurance plan, and your own personal physician follows you around in an ambulance. Get the national health insurance. School can tell you all the specifics, but let's just say that it's easy and cheap. There are a few different refunds that you can get because you're a student. In the past, it was up to the individual student to apply for the refunds, but now the international programs office takes care of this for you. As I hear it now, the insurance is about 800 yen a month after discounts. If you neglect to get the insurance, you will be ceaselessly harassed by the local city government. Adding insult to injury, the hospital will probably have trouble processing your foreign insurance. You need insurance because something will happen to you eventually. Not everyone crashes their bicycle, but many do. Not everyone gets sick, but some do. Be prepared. If you get sick or get hurt, ask to be taken to the Kyoto City Hospital. Some of the private clinics are truly frightening. I'll comment on that more

later. One last note: While the CSU system has an insurance plan that they make available, you probably won't need to consider it unless you intend to travel outside Japan on holiday. The international ID card you purchase before departing for Japan carries a little accident insurance with it, so that could come in handy as well. Just make sure it doesn't expire on you.

Get these five things taken care of as soon as possible. Doing so will start you on the right foot. With the five most important things done, what's next? Before school starts, take some time to get to know some of your fellow exchange students. You'll be spending a lot of time together, both in and outside of class. Exchange cell phone numbers. Go on a few adventures and check out your neighborhood. You'll probably have a convenience store nearby, along with other amenities. There's good places to go for karaoke near the Hankyu Saiin Station, and other places to go to eat and drink.

One note on getting around: Carry a map with you for the first few weeks. The map from the Kyoto International Community House is one of the best you'll come across. Because the city is mostly set in a grid, getting around is pretty easy. Locations are usually referred to by the intersection they are closest to, like Shijo-Karasuma, Sanjo-Kawaramachi, Gojo-Senbondori, and such. There are numbered streets that run east-west. Nijo (Second street) is to the north, and they continue down past Kyoto Station to the south. Sanjo (Third), Shijo (Fourth), and Gojo (Fifth) are three of the major streets that you will see referenced many times. Because Kyoto is bordered on the north, east, and west by mountains, you can always tell which way is north – there's no mountains to the south!

As you settle into your apartment, you'll probably find that you need a few extras. Japan is, after all, known for cool electronic gadgets (among other things). You can usually find a good deal on electronics at Jusco (a store somewhat similar to Target, with a supermarket) or one of the many electronics stores. Kyoto also has a small electronics shopping district just south of Shijo-Teramachi. If price is a consideration, you can find small stores that offer used goods. Some of them specialize in electronic goods, while others carry anything from rice cookers to dishwashers.

Learning to cook at home will save you money, and can teach you more about the culture by way of the food. Japanese produce is a little more seasonal than in the U.S. It's also a little more expensive, but not as bad as the fabled \$100 melons. (Those are gift melons that you can buy at a department store.) It might help to remember that much of the food you are accustomed to back home is now foreign cuisine... and thus more expensive. If you're not big on cooking, check out the prepared food at JUSCO or LIFE. They have something akin to a deli section. The prices aren't too bad to begin with, but then they come out and affix discount stickers to the various dinners or lunches right before closing time. Keep an eye out for this, and you can grab dinner for pretty cheap.

With the proper visa waiver, you can work up to a maximum of 20-25 hours a week. There are plenty of possibilities for employment, from teaching English conversation to waiting tables at a hotel restaurant. Many students get leads on jobs from previous exchange students. The international programs office will get information on jobs from time to time. There is also a bulletin board at school as well as the internet. Teaching English conversation typically pays best by the hour, but it can be hard to find enough jobs to stay busy. Working elsewhere pays less per hour, but can be a better cultural experience. Please keep in mind that you are here first and foremost as a student. If work gets in the way of school, your visa could suffer. You don't want this to happen. If you want to pursue a part-time job, speak with the staff in the international programs office. They can advise you on the types of jobs you are allowed to pursue, and they can help you navigate the paperwork necessary to get the proper visa waiver. Because it bears repeating: **If you do not have a waiver, do NOT work.** It's not worth risking deportation.

With all that done, we now have time for a little history and such. Wikipedia (<http://wikipedia.org/>) tells us the following:

### **KYOTO**

Kyoto (Japanese: 京都市, Kyoto-shi) is a city in Japan that has a population of 1.5 million and time zone UTC + 9 hours. Formerly the imperial capital of Japan, it is now the capital of Kyoto prefecture, as well as a major city of the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto metropolitan area. An obsolete spelling for the city is Kioto.

### **HISTORY**

Though archaeological evidence places the first human settlement on the islands of Japan to approximately 10,000 BC, the Kyoto area was not settled until the 7th century by the Hata clan from Korea. During the 8th century, when the powerful Buddhist clergy became meddling in the affairs of the Imperial government, the Emperor chose to relocate the capital to a region far from the Buddhist influence.

The new city, Heiankyo ("Heian capital") became the seat of Japan's imperial court in 794. Later, the city was renamed to Kyoto ("capital city"). Kyoto remained Japan's capital until the transfer of the government to Edo in 1868 at the time of the Imperial Restoration. (Some believe that it is still the legal capital: see Capital of Japan debate.) After Edo was renamed to Tokyo (meaning "Eastern Capital"), Kyoto was known for a short time as Saikyo (西京) (meaning "Western Capital"). Kyoto is the only large Japanese city that still has an abundance of prewar buildings, although modernization is continually breaking down the traditional Kyoto in favor of newer architecture, such as the controversial Kyoto Station complex.

The city was designated on September 1, 1956 by government ordinance. In 1997, Kyoto was the site of the Kyoto conference that resulted in the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions.

### **GEOGRAPHY**

The city is located on the middle-western portion of the island of Honshu. Because Kyoto is surrounded by mountains on all sides, it is famous for its stifling summer nights with no air movement.

The city was laid out in a grid pattern in accordance with traditional Chinese geomancy. Today, the main business district is located in the south and center of town, with

the less populated northern area retaining a far greener feel.

Kyoto is divided into the following wards: Fushimi-ku, Higashiyama-ku, Kamigyo-ku, Kita-ku, Minami-ku, Nakagyo-ku, Nishikyo-ku, Sakyo-ku, Shimogyo-ku, Ukyo-ku and Yamashina-ku.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

As of 2003, the city has an estimated population of 1,466,163 and the density of 2,402.68 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. The total area is 610.22 km<sup>2</sup>.

### **CULTURE**

Kyoto is renowned for its abundance of delicious foodstuffs. Unlike the volcanic Kanto region the rich soil of Kyoto allows for the cultivation of a variety of vegetables, and the various bodies of water provide ample fishing.

Kyoto is considered the cultural center of Japan. During World War II when firebombing was conducted throughout the country Kyoto and its 1600 Buddhist temples, 400 Shinto shrines, palaces, gardens and architecture was spared. The Kyoto area has some of the most famous temples and shrines in Japan, including:

- Uji's Byodoin (the world's oldest wooden structure, which appears on the 10 yen coin);
  - Kiyomizu-dera, a magnificent wooden temple supported by pillars off the slope of a mountain;
  - Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion;
  - Ginkaku-ji, the Silver Pavilion;
  - Heian Jingu, arguably Japan's most famous Shinto shrine.
  - Ryoan-ji, famous for its rock garden
- Other notable sites in and around Kyoto include Arashiyama and its picturesque lake, the Philosopher's Walk, and the canals which line some of the older streets.

The "Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto" are listed by the UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. These include the Kamo Shrines (Kami and Shimo), Kyo-O-Gokokuji (Toji), Kiyomizu-dera, Daigoji, Ninnaji, Saihoji (the Moss Temple), Tenryuji, Rokuonji (Kinkaku-ji), Jisho-ji (Ginkaku-ji), Ryoan-ji, Hongan-ji, Kozan-ji and

the Nijo Castle. Other sites outside the city are also on the list.

Kyoto natives also speak a Japanese dialect called Kyoto-ben, a variation on the Kansai dialect spoken throughout western Japan. Kyoto-ben is most famous for the phrase "maido, ookii-ni," meaning "thank you very much."

### **ECONOMY**

Tourism forms a large base of Kyoto's economy. The city's cultural heritages are constantly visited by school groups from across Japan, and many foreign tourists also stop in Kyoto.

The city's industry is mainly comprised of small plants, most of which are run by artisans who produce traditional Japanese crafts. Kyoto's kimono weavers are particularly renowned, and the city remains the premier center of kimono manufacturing. Such businesses, vibrant in past centuries, have declined in recent years as sales of traditional goods stagnate.

Kyoto's only sizable heavy industry is electronics: the city is home to the headquarters of Nintendo and Nintendo of Japan, as well as the headquarters of Omron Corporation, Kyocera (Kyoto Ceramic) Corporation, and Murata Manufacturing. The apparel giant Wacoal Corporation and the car manufacturer Daihatsu also operates in Kyoto. However, the growth of high-tech industry has not outpaced the decline in traditional industry, and as a result, Kyoto's total output has declined relative to other cities in Japan.

### **COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Kyoto is known as one of the academic centers of the country, and is home to thirty-seven institutions of higher education. The three largest and best-known local universities are Doshisha University, Kyoto University, and Ritsumeikan University. Among them, Kyoto University is considered to be one of the top universities in Japan, with several Nobel laureates such as Yukawa Hideki.

Kyoto also has a unique higher education network called the Consortium of Universities in Kyoto, which consists of three national, five public (prefectural and municipal), and 41 private universities, as well as the city and four other organizations. The consortium does not offer a degree; hence is not a federal body like

University of London, but offers the courses as part of a degree at participating universities.

So, go to it. You've got the tools you need. Make friends, get involved in school activities, and see what Kyoto and Japan have to offer you.

Sources of additional information:

Kyoto University of Foreign Studies

<http://www.kufs.ac.jp> (Japanese)

[http://www.kufs.ac.jp/kufs\\_new/english/english\\_fr.html](http://www.kufs.ac.jp/kufs_new/english/english_fr.html) (English)

Kyoto City International Foundation

<http://www.kcif.or.jp/en/>

Wikipedia on

Kyoto: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyoto%2C\\_Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyoto%2C_Japan)

Japan: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan>

Wikitravel on Kyoto

<http://wikitravel.org/en/article/Kyoto>

Kyoto City Official Website

<http://www.city.kyoto.jp/koho/eng/index.html>

**Additional Report-June 2003** If you are reading this now, you have made the right choice. There is no other country like Japan in the World and especially no other city in the World like Kyoto. I have traveled all across Japan. Take it from me Kyoto is one of the best cities that Japan has to offer. In this I will tell you why Kyoto is so wonderful and how to make every day a lasting memory.

But first I will tell you about me. I am now a 26 years old male senior at S.F.S.U now. I have studied Japanese on and off for two years prior to the year I spent in Kyoto. I am a Latino/Chicano/Hispanic/American-Mexican from Los Angeles who has received financial aid for his studies. And I have worked my whole life various jobs since I was 16 years old. So by this I hope you could imagine an older hard working more experienced person giving you advice from what I have learned and seen.

Okay before you get to Japan whilst you are in the application process please, please, please try to learn more of the Kanji and more of the history of Japan. This will save you hours and days of studying the Kanji characters in Japan and it will make your classroom and everyday life go a little more smoothly. If you were to just read up a little on the History of Japan especially on Kyoto you will be able to enjoy seeing all the temples and castles more and you will be able to teach your other foreign friends that you will make a thing or two. So remember while you are still applying practice more kanji and research a little on the History of Kyoto and you will be one step ahead.

So you have been accepted to study abroad. You have eaten at all your favorite restaurants. You are packed and ready to go. But no, no you are not ready. Go back to your suitcase or suitcases, and take out half from about each. Please trust me on this one. I left to Japan one month before

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I actually moved in to my apartment. It was horrible having to try to find ways to move around my 75 pounds of luggage, most of which were cloths. I had friends that just took one small suit case and made it through with the greatest of ease. Washing your cloths will be about 5-7 dollars to wash and dry.

I had enough cloths for maybe 10 students so I did not wash once a week like most of the foreign students. I washed maybe once every three weeks. Almost all of the Japanese people wash there cloths in there homes everyday.

I was foolish to bring so many cloths with me because I actually bought a lot in Japan too. So this is the best thing to do, pack very light maybe three pairs of shorts, a pair of jeans, a pair of nice pants/skirt, about seven t-shirts, a couple of dress shirts and one light coat. You will be arriving in the midst of summer in Japan. I will bet that you have never felt a hotter heat and a sticker humidity as you will in Kyoto. That is why you should pack so light. Most of the cloths in Japan will be outrageously expensive. But, there are a couple of places that have some really cool cloths and for prices cheaper that back home, one of them being Uniqlo. I bought plenty of Jackets and cool stuff for less than \$10 and in my size too. Seriously thought living in another country is really no fun if you cannot shop in that country. So pack light and buy cloths there. One final tip on the clothing is that in the winter months you have your family send you a box a winter cloths that you already have packed and ready to go. Winter in Kyoto is very cold and you will need several sweaters, jackets, gloves, and scarf's. Being from L.A. I have never thought of wearing a scarf but in Kyoto you will need it. So to sum it up; pack light, pack some winter cloths and have your family send it to you in the winter, and do not be afraid to buy cloths.

Once you arrive at the airport you will have to take a shuttle bus to the architectual wonder that is Kyoto Station. The University will send some students to meet you at the Kyoto Station. You should try to be friend them for you will not have any one else to talk to for a couple of days. These kids will be the first Japanese people you will spend time with because they will take you from the Station to school and to your new place of living. Once you get to your apartment keep an eye out for other foreigners. You are now in a different country and most likely you do not know many people yet. So the first two weeks or so you should be ready to be very, very, very, personable and friendly. The more friends you make the more fun you will have. Now it will be easy to make fellow foreigners your good friends, that is what everyone does. But do try to make friends with the Japanese students too. There is where the true challenge lies. You will find that most of the natives will be quite timid and shy. They will be eager to make friends with you but, you will find that it is not quite the kind of friendship that you had in mind. Some will just want to have a foreign person to help them with there English and not a friend at all and others might be looking specifically for a boyfriend or girlfriend. Just try to be friendly and honest with everyone out there and I am sure things will work

out.

You now find your self settling in to your new place and making new friends and all the while you notice that you have been walking to school, walking to go out and eat, and walking to train stations and other destinations. I strongly suggest that within the first two or three days you make one of the most important purchases you will need to make while in Japan. No not your first bottle of sake in Japan, a bicycle! There will be plenty of time for the Sake. Everyone in Japan owns and rides a bike. It will be the best and most reliable means of transportation you will have. The most common of bikes in the Japan are what the natives call a "Mamma Cheri", which means, "Mamma's Charriot", and the price is anywhere between \$40 to \$70. It's a basic bike that has no gears and a big basket on the handle bars which everyone places their back packs, purse's, grocery's, alcoholic beverages, and anything else you might need. There were a couple misguided international students who had went the year without buying a bike because either they were scared of riding one or they did not know how to. If one does not have a bike that individual slows everyone down in a group going out and after awhile just becomes a pain in the others leg when they have to ride you on there bike. Now I have ridden bikes before in the states. So I went all out and I bought mountain bike with shocks and all the good stuff. I cost me around \$400 but it was worth every penny. With a mountain bike you have gears and the ability to climb step hills with ease. I was the envy of all my friends, and even those I didn't know very well always complemented me on my bike. By the end of the year my close friends said they all wished they had bought a mountain bike too. You see the trains and bus's are great and far better than anything we have in the states but, there are some temples and far of places that are just too hard to get to by public transit. I was able to go where ever I wanted and at any time thanks to my bike. One day I rode from Kyoto to Nara on my bike which took about 6 hours. Yes with my mountain bike I was able to see everything Kyoto had to offer and more. So do yourself a favor and pick up a good bike real quick like.

Now you may be worrying about what the class's will be like and you should.

They will be long and trying. That is why I stress that you study hard now in the states so that you will be able to understand what is going on in the class rooms and be able to spend less time studying outside the classroom. The class's will be conducted entirely in Japanese. I found that more often than not I was buried in my dictionary trying to figure out what the Professor had just said. But do not worry too much because you will be given a proficiency test before class's even begin and they will place you in a class according to your ability. Now once you get the results you have a choice, during the first week of school you can choice which class's you want to be in. You might feel that the current class you are in is too hard for you or maybe it will be too easy. You have the choice if you want to really challenge yourself you could most certainly enter into a higher level class than what you tested into. Actual most of

us International students felt that they may place you in a slightly lower level so that you will be able to adjust to their system. But I and most others all went for a higher level than we placed in and it all worked out. In all actuality the class's are not that hard. It all depends on how much you want to put in and how much you want to get out of the class that will be the deciding factor on how tough the class will be.

Now when your thinking about which level you want to be in for your class's there are two important things that you must also consider, work and clubs. If you want to be like the many international students who worked and made a lot of money you might not want to be in a higher level class due to the fact that working will take away some of you studying and playing hours. Same goes for the clubs of sports teams and other clubs. In Japan the clubs are really serious for sports most of the time they require you to be there at least three times a week for about 3-4 hours every time. So try to think about how you want your time to be spent and go from there.

Which brings me to the subject of working. Teaching English I the only job worth spending you time on in Japan. There is no better job for an international student in Japan. From all the stories I have heard and all my friends that had English teaching jobs they all said it was very easy and paid very well. The only thing bad was that it did take time away from studying and going out. I was very, very, immensely luck to have received an amazing scholarship along with my financial aid that enabled me to live rather moderately without having to work. Now not having a job did make it hard for me at times but I was able to go more places and do more things thanks to the freedom I had from not working. Yet teaching English is a great way to make more money if you need to and that option is always there for you being that finding a teaching English job is as easy as finding a sushi restaurant.

Next I would like to tell you a little about the clubs at the University. There is are two kinds. One is called the club like the soccer club or karate club and then there is the circle like the tennis circle or judo circle. The club is mostly for those who know the meaning of dedication. The club's are only for the hardcore. The club will take up a good part of your time free time if you wish to join. They are a little strict and they follow closely to the idea of seniority. The older members are treated with the up most respect while the new members have little or no respect. While in the circles they are more for people who want to have fun and make friends and are not able to or willing to put in as much time as one would for a club. I think the clubs are cool and have there worth but, you are only there for a year. You should try to make best what little time you have there and be free to roam about the country and still have time to study and not get stuck in a routine of school, club practice, sleep, school, club practice, sleep. By joining two or three circles you will be able to diversify yourself, learn more about the Japanese culture, and make even more friends than you would if you were to join a club. The year that I was there very few international students joined any clubs for the exact

same reasons that I have listed above. But the time is yours to choice.

One year is not long time at all. It will fly by like it was yesterday. While in Japan take the time to see Japan. Ride through it's small streets and alleyway's. Eat all that weird stuff they have to offer at least once. Don't waste a minute of your time. You will be home soon so try your best to stay there and resist the thought of going home during your vacation time. The money you will spend flying home could take you all around Japan.

There is a Japan Railway Pass that all non native Japanese may purchase. There are one week pass's and two week pass's and they will cost around \$350 depending on the money rate at that time. But trust me, that one pass can save you thousands if you use it to get to one end of Japan to the other and back. So use it.

Lastly the one thing you must remember is this, different cultures have different customs. You not only be meeting Japanese people but also you will befriending many students from around the world. This is your chance to learn more about Japan and yourself through the eyes of people from another country. I made many great Japanese friends but I had definitely bonded with the other International students and made friendships that will last a life time. So shall you.