

# Waseda University, Tokyo Survival Guide

## Overview

From the food to the art, from the scenery to the society, Japan is renowned for its culture. However, reading about Japan in a book barely scratches the surface of the deep traditions that it boasts. As a student studying abroad in Japan, you will have a wide variety of experiences. Some of them will be amazing, like sitting in a hot bath watching the sun rise behind Mt. Fuji, and some of them will not, like being squished between two angry obaasan during rush hour.

### **Climate:**

Japan has a very humid, wet climate for most of the year. You will learn very soon after arriving that it will rain sporadically throughout the week. From Late June to late October expect hot, often humid and wet weather. Beginning near the end of October, the weather begins to cool down dramatically, and you will need to buy a warm, heavy coat that is preferably waterproof because you never know when it will rain even during the winter. It snows no more than about four days a year in Tokyo, but the days can get unbearably cold with January through March taking the prize as the coldest months. Japan begins to heat up again beginning in early April, but then heads directly into the rainy season starting in May, and reaching its peak in June.

## Before You Leave

As soon as you plan on applying for any study abroad program, get your passport. Passports take minutes to submit at any post office, but weeks to process. Do not wait until the last minute. Do not even wait until you submit your application. You will always need it for something. Waseda also has a reputation for its strenuous application process. Make sure you know the requirements, meet the requirements, and expect to do more paper work than the average program. Just remember, your reward for all of your hard work is a year at Waseda, and trust me, it is worth it.

### **Visa:**

When obtaining your visa before departure, you will have to go to the San Francisco branch of the Japanese Consulate. There, after you bring them all of your information for the visa—which will take about two weeks to process—they will give you a sheaf of papers along with your visa authorization. Keep these papers, and bring them to Japan with you. They will contain both instructions on how to register for your Alien Registration card and, more importantly, the addresses of the government registration offices in each Tokyo Ward.

### **Packing:**

Pack light. Japan is a major city, so you will be able to buy anything you want. You will not need to bring those four fluffy extra-large towels; they will only take up valuable space, and weigh you down. Bring water proof clothing. As mentioned above, it rains a lot in Tokyo. Once you arrive, you will be able to buy cheap, 100 yen umbrellas, but they will never replace a good rain coat and galoshes. Prepare a large variety of clothing to

bring with you to Japan because you will see more weather in a year than most Californians see in their entire lives. Bring a few pairs of sturdy clothes that can last you a year in case you cannot find your size, but again, do not over pack.

Due to rising fuel prices, airlines have begun lowering the weight limit of baggage. Returning from Japan, bags had to be 25 kilos or less. It cost 3,000 yen for the first five kilos over weight, and then rose sharply to 20,000 yen for even a fraction of a kilo above 30 kilos. Things will vary depending on the airline, but always check before you go.

### **Arrival:**

Many students received help from their host families when they first arrived in Japan. However, many students also lived alone, and did not have the support structure that the students with host families had. For students without this support structure, ask for help from the CSU coordinator in Japan. She has nearly thirty years of experience, and is very resourceful. Also, make sure to befriend the Japanese in the Waseda International Club (WIC) and Niji no Kai. They are there to specifically help you, and will create several events to help orientate you to Tokyo.

### **Alien Registration Card:**

As noted above, you will have to go to your ward office to register for your Alien Registration card once you have accommodations. When signing up for your card, make sure to request a paper copy of your alien registration card to take with you while you wait for your real card. It costs about 300 yen per copy, but without either that paper, or the real card, you will not be able to buy a cell phone, or open a bank account. At this time, you will also have to register for Japan's national health insurance in the same building. Make sure to request the student discount while you do so. You will not have to pay anything while signing up, but will begin receiving bills in the mail that you must bring to your coordinator, so she can pay them for you.

### **A Note on Japanese Law:**

The Japanese government requires all internationals, whether tourists or visa holders, to carry either their passport, or their Alien Registration card. If you are caught by a police officer without either of these documents, they will arrest you, and hold you in jail until you can prove that you are in Japan legally. This happened to one of the students during Fall 2007. Luckily, he was able to talk himself out of it, but do not count on being so lucky.

### **Cell Phones:**

Cell phone plans usually come with a free or cheap cell phone. You can also use some phones such as Razors by simply removing your American simcard and replacing it with a Japanese one. Look online to find out if your American phone will work over seas with multiple carriers. Try to get a plan with a lot of data transfer for emails because very few Japanese actually call on a cell phone, and minutes are very expensive. You will need your Alien Registration card to get a cell phone and one to two year contracts have about a 10,000 yen cancellation fee, so ask about pricing before you sign up. Keep in mind, cell phones in Japan are also highly proprietary, so do not bother spending a huge amount on

a cell phone: outside of Japan, your awesome cell phone will become a large lump unless you plan on continuing your plan.

### **Banks and Money:**

Bank accounts are becoming more and more difficult to open in Japan if you are an international. The banks require proof of residence, your Alien registration card, and a hanko (personal seal). They will not accept a normal signature. As for Citibank, if you simply continue using your American account, they will charge a 2% “non-Citibank teller” fee at all Japanese Citibank tellers, and a 3% fee at all other tellers for normal Citibank accounts. Platinum Citibank cards come with a 1% fee.

Japan loves its currency. Most places do not take credit cards, so get used to carrying large sums of cash. In order to pay bills such as rent, you will have to carry a large wad of cash down to the closest convenience store, walk up to the front counter with your bill, and pay there. Get used to carrying at least 10,000 yen with you at all times for weekly expenses, but make sure you do not forget to stay vigilant; you can still be robbed. Bank and post office ATMs do close early, but things are changing, and you can always go to a 24/7 convenience store to withdraw money as long as you do not mind the charges.

### **Transportation:**

Travel around Tokyo is very easy. The trains and subways go everywhere you need to go, and the busses go wherever the trains do not. The rates are much more reasonable than BART, and they have special commuter passes (teiki) for students along fixed routes if you have to take the train each day. Train ride prices are based on distance, and rates run between 130 to 400 yen, and average about 170 yen for normal excursions. The subway is about 30 yen more expensive. You can buy a 500 yen Suica or Passmo, which are rechargeable electronic rail cards that are very useful. When you are leaving Japan, you can return the cards to the stations for a full refund. When buying your teiki, make sure to pay the extra 500 yen to turn it into a passmo/suica, and it will make life much easier.

## **Housing**

Waseda has several types of housing available including, host families, Dorms, and Sakura house. Costs are similar to housing prices in San Francisco.

### **Host Families:**

Host families are cheap, provide support to incoming students, and allow students to practice Japanese while learning about the culture. They also provide at least two meals a day. Students who lived with host families enjoyed living there. The drawbacks of host families are curfews, family obligations such as chores, and not being allowed to bring friends over to their houses. Host families are normally about a half hour ride on the train from Waseda University. They are also becoming more and more scarce, so if you want a host family, speak up.

### **Dorms:**

Dorms vary greatly. Of the nine students who entered the dorms in all of them moved out except the three boys staying at Wakejuku Boys Dorm. The dorms are not close to

campus. In fact, they are not even affiliated with Waseda. Instead, they are private dorms that you must contract with individually. They serve two meals per day, and are not coed dorms. The dorms' distances from campus range widely from Wakejuku's five minute walk to an hour's ride by train from the private dorms. The dorms range around 60,000 yen per month plus electricity, heating, phone lines and internet. They also require "key money," which is about 100,000 yen on top of a deposit. It is basically a bribe, and you do not get this money back.

### **Apartments:**

Apartments also require key money, of course do not provide food, and will be more expensive than dorms. Normal apartments are highly discouraged.

Sakura House is an international apartment service with several different options, but the quality of the apartments and number of occupants varies greatly between apartment sites. Pricing also varies. Unlike dorms, they do serve food, and they do not require key money, but do require a refundable deposit. The closest Sakura House is an old building that is not well kept because they have no one to clean the place, and it is a little more expensive, but other houses within the area do have cleaners come in, and students were pleased living at these other locations. If you plan on entering Sakura House, make sure to get tour, which they should offer you, before you sign the contract.

### **Academics**

To succeed as a student at Waseda, you will need to change the way you study. Waseda's SILS programs have very little homework and many teachers lecture without using any form of student interaction; therefore, teachers will base grades on only a few papers and tests. However, unlike SFSU, Waseda places a large emphasis on attendance. You must attend at least 3/4ths of all lectures, or you will fail the class. Aside from these requirements, Waseda runs on an A+ to F grading system, and expects teachers to give 25% of their class an A, 25% a B, 25% a C, and 25% a D. Fs have no required percentage, but you can still get them, very easily. They also inflate all grades by one grade level and do not show Fs on transcripts. However, CSU requires Waseda to notify them of any students who fail a class, and plans to discontinue accepting grade inflation, if they have not already. This makes classes seem much easier to pass, but the deceptive ease caused several students to fail classes as well, so be careful.

### **Campus Life:**

Waseda's campus is very different from SFSU. It is large, and the buildings vary in age, range, and original intended purpose. All of the buildings maintain the image of an Ivy League school on the outside, but vary greatly on interior quality from drafty and damp to sweltering. The furniture within the buildings also runs the gamut from plush chairs in from of table that boast both a power supply and an Ethernet jack to tiny desks you will have trouble fitting in to. Luckily, Waseda is in the process of building a grand, new SILS building specifically for their international students.

### **Campus Food:**

You can find just about anything else you may need within walking distance of the campus. Restaurants are prevalent as well as fast food, and behind the school there is a “bento street” where you can find cheap lunches (about 300 to 600 yen) for on the go, and a near-by post office. A few extremely tasty suggestions: Ippudo where you can get all you can eat rice and gyoza at lunch times and Café Retro, which sells 200 yen gin tonics before 7 pm, and also carries Omtrak omelet-rice—the delicious Japanese take on omelets.

## **Social Life**

You will have to work hard to make Japanese friends. Most Japanese people that you will meet will be polite, and happy to talk to you, but unless you put in a lot of effort, you will end up with a lot of acquaintances, and not a lot of friends. You need to remember that, as a study abroad student, you are a novelty that will leave in a year. In order to get around this issue, you should make friends in your classes, join a club or circle related to something you are interested in, and take the initiative to ask your new friends out.

Waseda also has a large population of international students. During the 2007/2008 year, there were about 400 students representing 42 different countries in SILS, the college where you will do most of your studying. Waseda also had another 1500 international students outside of SILS, and they plan on raising these numbers to around 8000. Although most students wish to study in Japan in order to learn Japanese from Japanese, do not count these internationals out. You will find many brilliant minds among these people that you may never get a second chance to encounter.

### **Religion:**

Religion in Japan is very open, and non-judgmental. However, be aware that the Japanese say they believe in around 8 million gods, and new religions are always welcome, but they do not know much about religions outside of Japan. For example, several Japanese have admitted to praying to Santa for good luck, and Christmas in Japan looks a lot like Valentine’s Day in the United States. The primary religions are Shintoism and Buddhism with several smaller religions wrapped in to the two main religions. If you practice a religion, you can find small centers for you to worship, but expect at least a half an hour commute to the nearest church, mosque, etc. On the other hand, as mentioned above, you can find Japanese shrines all over Japan, sometimes even several in one location. From the Waseda campus, there are at least seven shrines within a five minute walking distance.

## **Leisure and Travel**

Waseda is a college town. Throughout the ward are a variety of food shops, small boutiques, and cheap bargain stores. You will also find several different karaoke places, game arcades, coffee shops, and other entertainment. Anything else you may need is only a few train stops away. Tokyo has many different tourist attractions, but you can also find amazing places simply by taking a walk down the street. Another suggestion: look up and down. Some stores and clubs are hidden on purpose and only circulate by word of mouth in order to keep the clientele select. However, many other shops are hard to find in order to more efficiently use space.

**Shopping:**

Of course, Japan has an amazing amount of shops from high class boutiques in Shibuya to tiny 100 yen shops scattered around the city, and tourists flock to these places each year. Japan does have many amazing electronics, and the Japanese have an obsession with brand names rivaled only by Los Angeles in many cases. They also have many amazing specialty shops that you will not find without help from the locals. Enjoy yourself, and if you bring your passport, internationals do not have to pay sales tax.

Ladies, beware the sizes. Gentlemen will face similar issues as well, but they are nothing as extreme as women's sizes. Always try on items before purchase because you will find clothing items to be much smaller. Japanese sizes are also at least one size different than American sizes as well, so if you see an item that says it is a size small, know that it is at least a size extra small in the United States. Shoes are also just as hard to come by, and an American size 8 in women's shoe will translate to around a LL, their largest size. Men will have issues finding anything above about a 10.5 size shoe. To find clothes that fit, go to imported clothing stores, and pay exorbitant prices, mid-range cheap clothing stores like Uniqlo, or go to the high-end used clothing stores like Hanjiro where you can find a wider variety of sizes.

**Travel:**

You can find a lot of fun, easily accessible activities within Tokyo, but if you get tired of the city, there are plenty of places to visit that are just a train ride away. Before you go, be sure to buy a guide book of Japan. If you forget to buy one, you can also pick one up at some large books stores that carry an international book selection at import prices. For Tokyo and the surrounding area, you can pick up free brochures and pamphlets on local events and attractions at the government Diet Building (an attraction in and of itself) in Shinjuku.

Waseda have a comprehensive, cheap travel trip planner on campus in the Co-op (pronounced coupe in Japanese). For more information about where the Co-op is on campus, you can ask your on campus advisor while you are in Japan. You can also get several different discounts for being a student in Japan, including a booklet of 5 JR rail passes for about 12,000 yen. They are one time use all day passes that are much cheaper than the bus, and much faster. Many museums and other attractions also give student or international discounts, so always look out for these discounts. Part of your over all fees for study abroad at Waseda go in to trips to places like Okinawa and Kyoto as well as smaller bus trips. Try to go to all of them. You do not get reimbursed for the money if you do not go on the trips, and the program coordinator is very good at getting large discounts on the trips that you do go on, so it is in your best interest to travel with the group.

Although Japan is relatively safe, especially in comparison to the United States, and you will not have to worry too much about safety while traveling, always be aware of your surroundings, and do not invite trouble.

## **Closing**

Japan is an amazing place, with plenty to do, and new experiences awaiting you. When you go, make sure to be open to everything. Work hard in school, and play hard with your friends because one year of study abroad goes by in a flash.