

(she/her)

SFU Student Undergraduate

Beedie School of Business › Human Resource Management | Beedie School of Business ›

International Business

Study Abroad › Exchange

Program: Study Abroad › Exchange

University: Waseda University

Location: Tokyo, Japan

Experience Faculty: Beedie School of Business

Going on exchange broadened my mindset and boosted my confidence.

Experience Details

Semester: Spring

Year: 2023

Skills: Intercultural Awareness, Intercultural Communication, Introduction + Preparation

About five months ago, I landed in Japan to study at Waseda University. While it might seem as simple as submitting your application to SFU's ISS and to Waseda, it required a lot of prep work that I've outlined below.

Previous Experience

I had been to Japan once on a two-week school trip back in 2017, plus I had been consuming Japanese content for years (including learning the language), so I already had a decent amount of knowledge about Japan and its culture before my exchange. I did make some friends, however, who had little to no knowledge about Japan before arriving, so if you're in that boat, you'll be fine (but make sure to do some research before you come).

Financial Preparation

I created a monthly budget spreadsheet to figure out roughly how much money I expected to spend each month. Whether or not I stuck to my budget is a different story.

I was working part time in the months leading up to my departure, so I made sure to save up my total monthly budgeted amount during those months. For example, let's say I budgeted to spend \$500 per month in Japan. That means I would save up at least \$2000 (\$500 x 4 months) during my eight months of working before leaving for Japan. In other words, I would set aside \$250 each month.

Packing

I think I started packing a couple days before my flight. My semester was from April to July, and I heard that Japanese summers were extremely hot and humid, so I mainly packed summer

Schedules follow a period system, so classes generally start and end at the same time, unlike SFU where some classes can be scheduled at 9:30am to 11:20am, or 10:30am to 11:20am. The grading scheme for most of my classes consisted of 50% weight on a final exam or project and the rest participation or small assignments. Some instructors will grade your assignments as the weeks go on, but it's common for them to not tell you what your grade is at all. Class size varies, but my School of Commerce courses were similar to a third year Beedie class, around 30-100 students.

Accomplishments and Challenges

A challenge for me was trying to navigate a new country by myself. Japan is very bureaucratic with various procedures for residents, which can be challenging to understand, especially if you are not fluent in the language. Something that alleviated this was connecting with other exchange students through Discord so that we could help each other out, or at the very least, act as emotional support when encountering difficulties.

Studying abroad created many opportunities for me to travel and become more independent. When I came to Japan, there were so many places both within and outside of Tokyo that I wanted to visit, and I realized that the most efficient and simple way to visit these places would be to just go on my own. I went on my first ever solo trip to Osaka a couple weeks after I arrived in Japan. I was extremely nervous, as I had never travelled on my own before, let alone halfway across a foreign country. I remember when I finally made it to my hostel in Osaka and thought, "wow, I made it." It was extremely fulfilling to know that I could navigate between and within cities that I had never been to before.

Social and Extracurricular Activities

Waseda has an Intercultural Communication Center (ICC) that hosts cultural exchange events for both domestic and international students. I got to try on a yukata, learn a traditional Japanese dance, watch a taiko drum performance, and more. The ICC is a great resource to use if you want an easy way to experience aspects of Japanese culture and even meet some Japanese students.

There are also dozens of clubs (called "circles") for various interests, such as karate, music, and dance. Keep in mind that most circles require an entry fee, which can range from \$30 to \$100+. I, personally, didn't join any circles, but I recommend checking out Waseda's clubs days at the beginning of the semester to find any you may be interested in joining.

Wrap Up

While academics are important, experiencing life in a new country will be the most rewarding part of your exchange semester. Keep up with your schoolwork, but don't let it consume your life. You can always retake a class, but this might be your only opportunity to live abroad, so make the most of it.

Reflection & Tips

Most Valuable Aspects of This Experience

For me, the most valuable aspect of my study abroad experience was the independence and confidence I gained. I realized that I am capable of so much more than I thought. I was forced to do and figure out a lot of things on my own. Before my exchange, I liked to stay in my comfort zone and was afraid to go to places alone, but now, I feel like I can go anywhere and do anything I want, and having company is just a bonus. By nature of doing things by myself once or twice, I realized that they weren't as scary as I once thought. A year ago, I would never go on a day trip by myself, but during my exchange semester, I went to over 10 cities by myself.

Advice for Future Students

My first piece of advice for those going on exchange is to connect with other exchange students. Even though you may come from different countries or cultures, you are all in the same boat. Use each other as resources, not only for navigating life in a new country, but also for friendships that can last beyond your exchange semester.

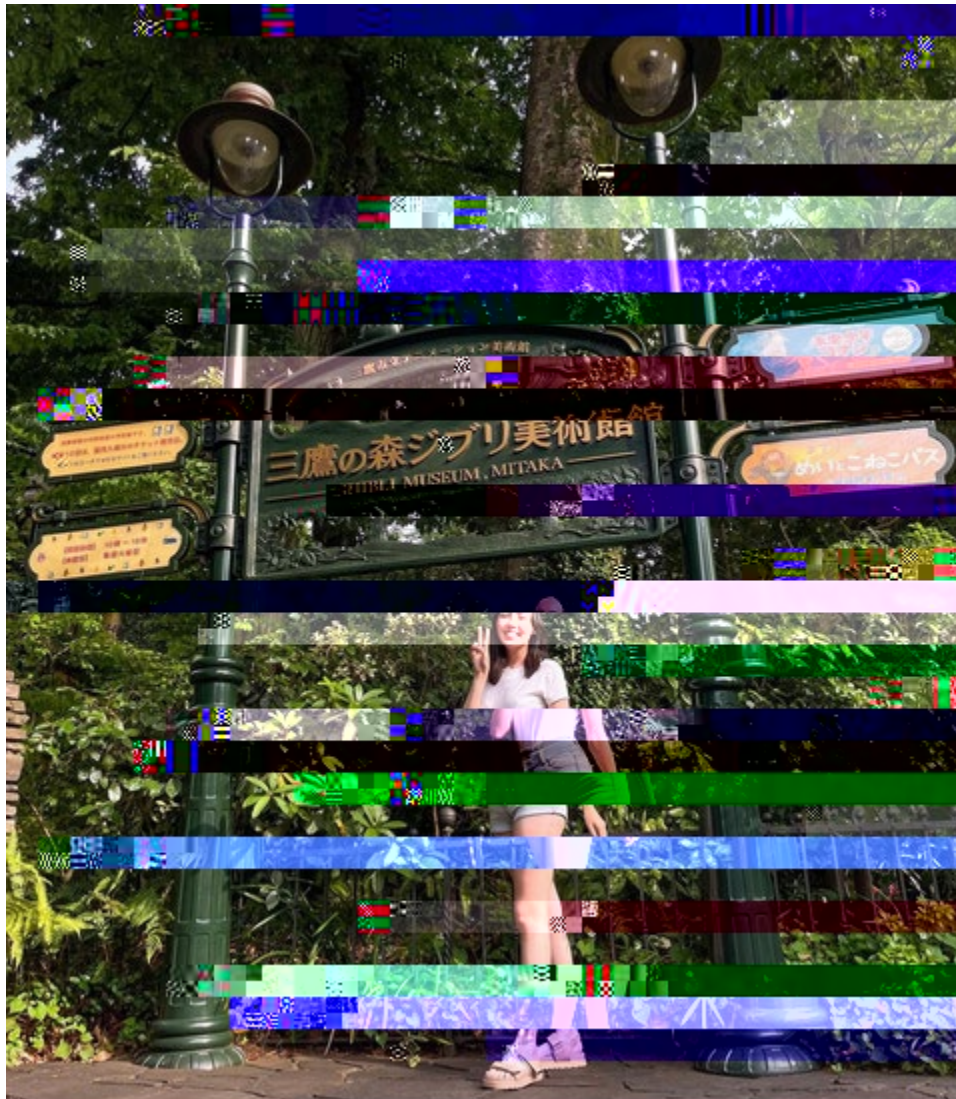
My second piece of advice is to not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone, even if you start with just a baby step. Eventually, that baby step will turn into a regular one, and soon enough, you'll find that your comfort zone has doubled in size.



Me wearing a yukata at an ICC event



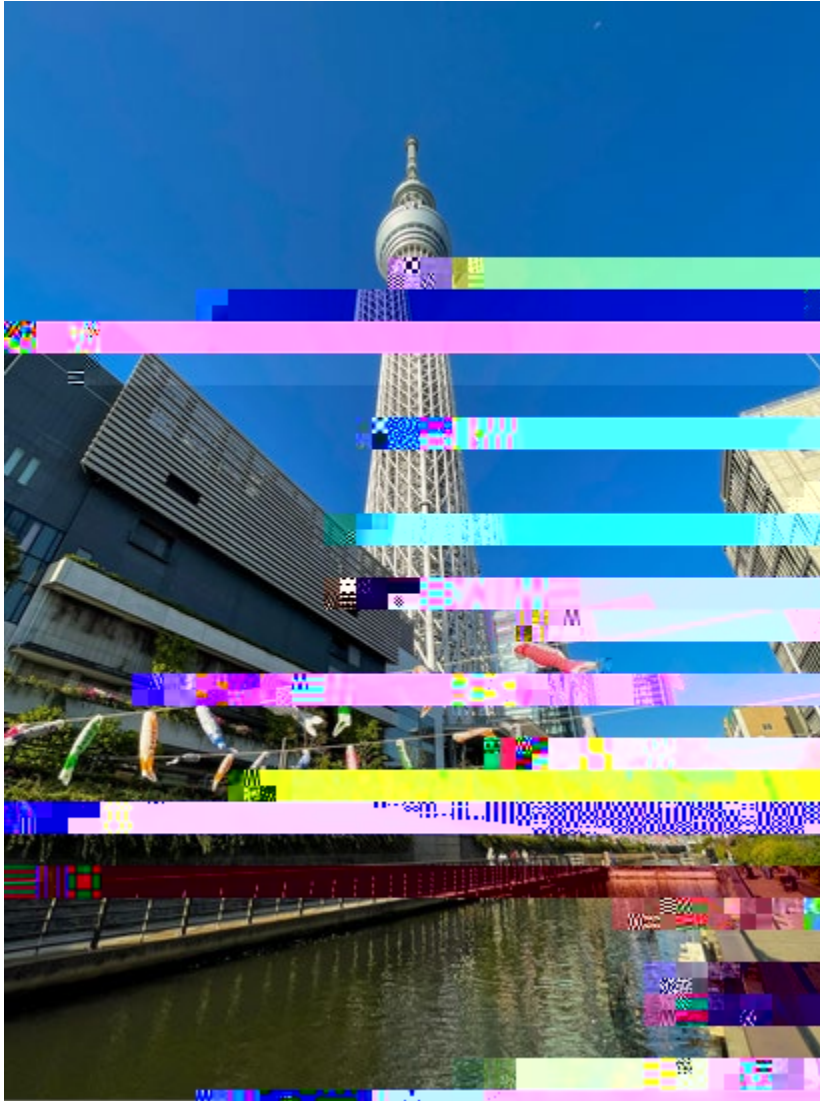
The view from a high floor in one of Waseda's buildings. View of Shinjuku city buildings.



Me at the Ghibli Museum



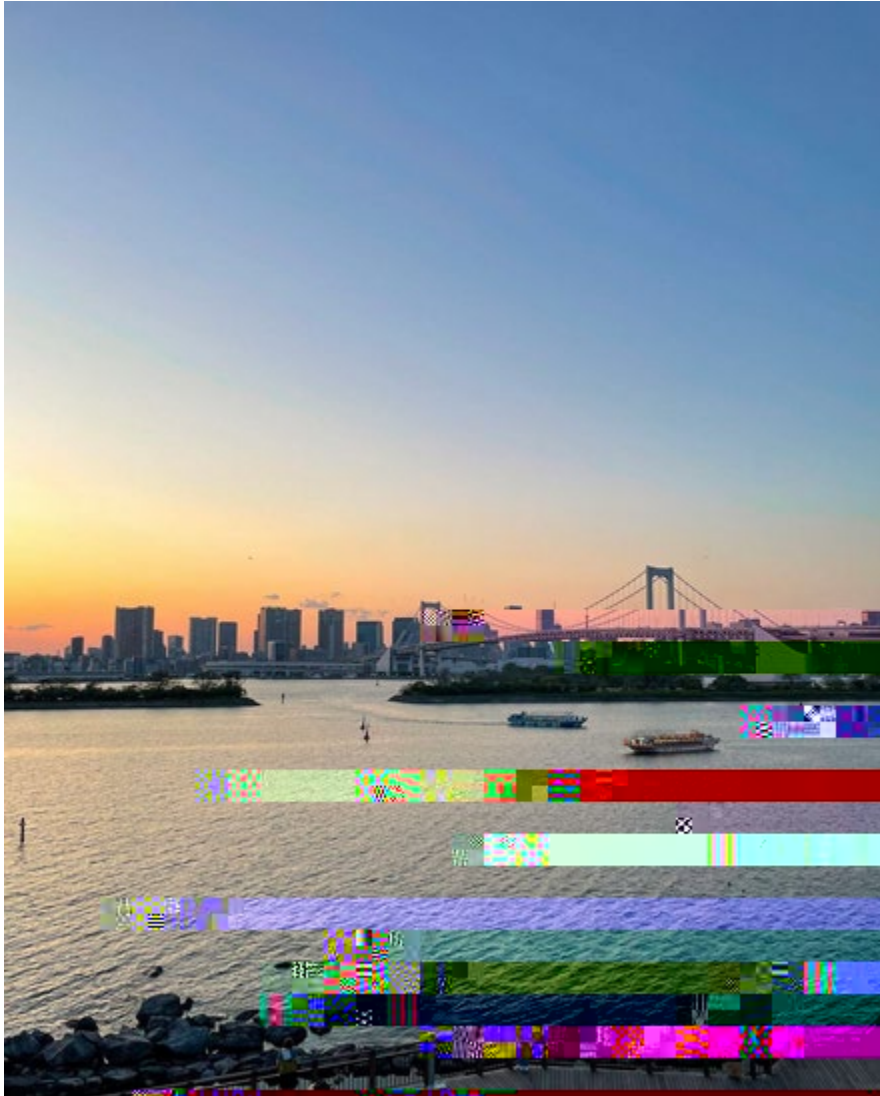
Godzilla road in Kabukicho. Shinjuku street encompassed by tall buildings.



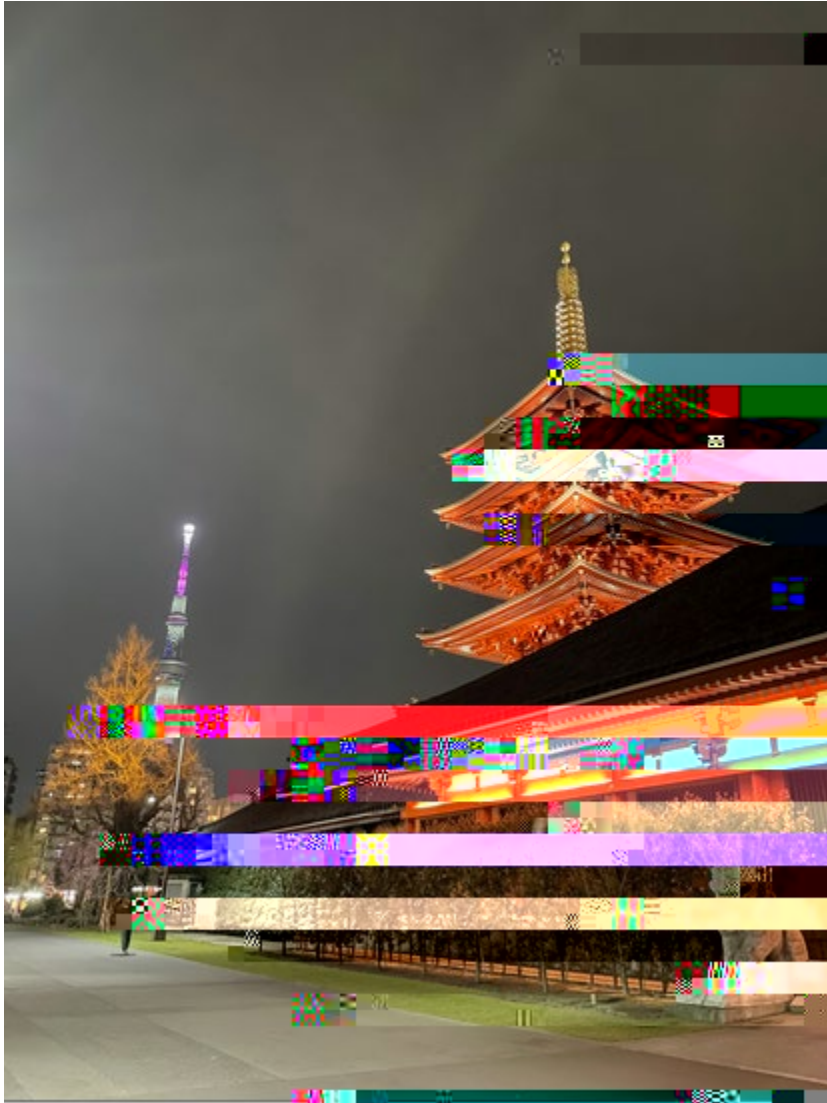
Tokyo Skytree above a canal lined with koi fish decorations



A snippet of Ikebukuro, just three stations from my dorm. Tall city buildings under a clear blue sky.



Rainbow Bridge at sunset. Tokyo's skyline at sunset from the water.



My first night in Tokyo