

Beyond the Classroom: Embracing Culture and Community in Japan

Exchange Semester Experience October 2024 ~ February 2025

Osnabrück University , Germany



I am grateful for the opportunity to partake in the JOY program. My main focus during the study abroad was the study of Japanese language. YNU offers various lectures depending on your proficiency and on how intensive you would like to learn Japanese. My Japanese classes were strict with having an attendance quota of 70% and homework every time. I took the J121 essential Japanese lecture, which took place 3x a week and was perfectly fit for my Japanese level. Besides that, I took a tennis class for additional 2 credit points, and I would highly recommend attending a sports class. There was also a speech contest, which offered us international students to give a speech in Japanese independent of your Japanese level. I am very proud of myself to gather the courage and give a speech in Japanese, even though I was at JLPT N5 level. I highly suggest to join as many events as possible provided by the university as well as some circles that focus on international students and activities, such as YNU105 and the ESS.

Besides the lectures, I was overwhelmed with the number of various circles and clubs that one could join. I chose to join some circles. These do not require a regular attendance and I found it easier to make friends there. The traditional tea ceremony circle (茶道) and the calligraphy circle (書道) gave me a delve into the roots of Japanese culture. The people there were really friendly and although not everyone could speak English, communication was no problem. Looking back, I enjoyed the fact that 90% was conducted in Japanese, as it was like being thrown in cold water. It may be not the most pleasant but it did help me improve my Japanese by a lot. I was participating diligently in the tea ceremony circle and in the end, I was able to play the role of the tea host for our first tea ceremony of the year (初釜茶会).

Besides university activities, I enjoyed spending time with my fellow international students. Living in the Tokiwadai International Residence made it easy to attend lectures, and I was able to meet people from all over the world. In my shared unit type I was living with 7 other people (4 of them Japanese). Although the housing rules are rather strict, parties were still manageable, and I really enjoyed my stay there.

Overall, I made many friends from various countries, I discovered new hobbies like tea ceremony and calligraphy, which will accompany on my future Japanese study. I saw many places like Sapporo in the spring break or the heart of big cities such as Osaka, Tokyo and of course Yokohama. Learning languages and doing an abroad semester is a wonderful thing. Please don't be afraid and take the once in a lifetime opportunity.