

University of Waterloo  
Faculty of Engineering  
Department of Systems Design Engineering

## **2005 Waterloo – Tottori Exchange**

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of GENE 303



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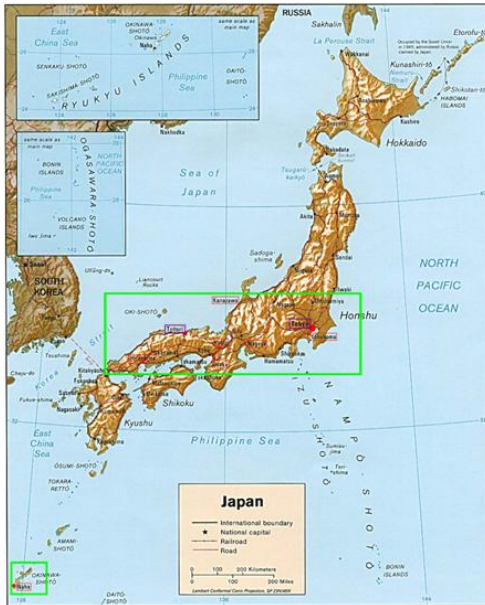
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# 1

## Introduction

### General overview



From April to December, 2005, I spent a total of 9 months away on exchange. The exchange was subdivided into three distinct sections: a) April – July in Tottori, Japan completing my 3A school term at Tottori University (TU), b) the whole month of August traveling around Thailand, c) September – December in Tokyo, completing my fifth coop term working at the Mitsubishi Research Institute (MRI).

Because the school year in Japan officially commences in April, myself and the other exchange students to TU had to terminate our fourth coop in Canada one month early in order to be able to start school in Japan on time. This move of one month created a month free in August; most students use this month to travel either throughout Japan or go to other parts of Asia; China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, and other countries of South-East Asia. Personally, I chose to spend the month exploring Thailand because a) I had gone to high school in Japan (more about that a little later on) and felt like I had seen a lot of Japan already and b) because I was interested in going to a tropical country that was relatively cheap to travel and where I had been told by friends that was a great place to visit.

### Rationale for participating in the exchange program

My reasons for wanting to go to Japan, was not to discover a new country and a new culture, but rather to visit old friends, get in touch with a part of my life with which I had lost touch, and improve my Japanese language skills.

When I was sixteen years old, I was chosen as one of two students from all high schools across Waterloo region to represent the Rotary club of Kitchener as a sponsored Rotary International Youth Exchange Student ([http://www.rotary.org/programs/youth\\_ex/index.html](http://www.rotary.org/programs/youth_ex/index.html)). The program is the biggest in the world, involving more than 8000 youth around the world representing 82 countries, and the most well-recognized of all youth exchange programs. I had the opportunity to live in Kanazawa, Japan for a full academic year. Thus I spent my whole grade 12 year attending Kanazawa Commercial High School as an exchange student, and living with 5 host families; about 2-3 months each. By living with these families, I was able to get a deeper appreciation for the Japanese culture and really gain insight to how the society functions as a whole. While abroad, I tried to immerse myself in the culture by partaking in Karate classes, Traditional Japanese dance, Ikebana (flower arrangement), Japanese calligraphy and painting as well as learning the Japanese tea ceremony. Having arrived with no knowledge of Japanese, I also attended language classes once a week to help me be able to communicate with my classmates and my families.

During my year in Japan, I fell in love with the people and the culture, but mostly the experience of exchanges and the potential for personal growth. Since then I have been very involved in promoting exchanges and opportunities for international studies and travel to other students.

## Purpose and layout of report

The purpose of this report is not to introduce the reader to Japan or the Japanese culture, nor is it to summarize my thoughts and feelings. There are thousands of books in libraries and informational sites on the internet describing Japan and its people. As well, a subjective view on the country would barely help anyone other than to bias them, since every person has their own personal interpretation of the world around them that is unique to them, and thus expressing my own views seems hardly fitting.

What I am hoping to provide with this report is a detailed description of the preparation that I had to undergo prior to leaving for Japan and Thailand in order to be prepared for the year abroad. The report then outlines the structure of the exchange, specifically for a Systems Design Engineering student on exchange to Tottori University, and where they can find help and services to aid them for a successful exchange. The report is full of travel tips and logistical, safety and money-saving tips. The coop term is described in more of an informational setting, since in-detail information for that part of the exchange would be relevant to very few students; only the ones working at MRI.



The last section of the report outlines briefly the sightseeing trips that I have taken while away. The map on the previous page shows a general map of Japan, where the areas outlined by the green boxes have been enlarged just above. In the enlarged images above, every city that I visited while away and is mentioned in this report is encircled by a red box, while those cities that I lived in during my exchange, Tottori and Tokyo, are also encircled in blue for extra effect.

## 2

# Preparation and Logistics

## Getting to Tottori

A plane ticket to Japan costs in the range of \$1000-\$1500 when booked well in advance. The cheapest flights that we found were, with taxes, \$1010 through Tai Bao Travel Agency located in Scarborough, Ontario. Tottori is closest to the city of Osaka (not Tokyo). There are no direct Toronto -> Osaka flights, so there is a stopover in Vancouver. Once in Osaka, the cheapest and best way to get to Tottori is by bus which takes about 5 hours and costs about \$50. The express train is also a good bet, but will cost double and take the same amount of time. Upon arrival at the terminal in Tottori, a representative of Tottori University picks up the students and drives them to the International House, the University Residence for exchange students, your home for the next 4 months.

## Japanese language preparation



The level of English in Japan is quite low amongst the general population, including even the English language educators! Relying only on English for communication can prove to be very difficult and frustrating, thus it is recommended to complete as many Japanese language classes prior to departure as possible. On the plus side, the expectation to speak Japanese in Japan is quite low, and the people are easily impressed, thus nobody will ever lose patience with you if you cannot express what you want in Japanese. Overall though, the better you get the easier it will be on you and on making friends, thus I recommend as many Japanese language classes as possible.

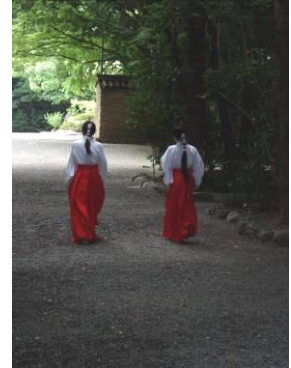
## Courses: outlines, textbooks, and paper

In order to ensure compatibility of the courses, we contacted all the professors who would be teaching the 3A courses at UW and took course outlines with us to Japan as well as the textbooks for those courses. Most of the courses that we took at TU were catered to the exchange students with private English instruction according to UW course outline and textbooks, so we were told to bring our textbooks with us prior to departure.

Note that Japan uses the metric system, so the paper size used in Japan is larger than the North American 8.5" x 11" paper, thus all binders, clipboards, and paper will be incompatible. So do not bring any paper or binders with you; it's easy to purchase school supplies at the school shop at TU.

## JASSO Scholarship

Every year, the Japanese government through JASSO, Japan Student Services Organization, sponsors one UW student for the exchange to Tottori. This scholarship consists of the return flight to and from Japan and a monthly endowment of approximately \$900. The winner of the scholarship is chosen by the Japan coordinator at UW, and honored by the Japanese counterparts of the exchange. Note that the flight that is provided does not reimburse for an already-purchased ticket. Thus, it would be worthwhile to wait to buy the plane tickets to Japan until after the winner has been announced, otherwise you will have to return the originally purchased tickets for a 70% refund. As well, the taxes on the JASSO-provided ticket is not paid, so bring a credit card to the airport to pay the additional fees before you can pick up the tickets at the ticket counter at the airport the day of the flight.



## Clothing and weather



Tottori is on the coast of the Sea of Japan and is very humid in the summertime, wet in the rainy season in the early summer, and cold and wet in the winter with lots of snow. Luckily, the school term is in the spring and early summer, so you only have to deal with the heat and humidity.

It is important to note that generally most buildings including school buildings, do not have air conditioning, so it can get very sticky in the summer. As well, in the winter there is no central heating systems, so it can get very cold in the classrooms, so bringing enough clothing for layering is a must.

## OHIP and health insurance

OHIP covers you for up to 6 months outside Canada. If you want to be covered for the full year, you have to go to your local OHIP office (there's one in Kitchener) and get your coverage extended, and a new card, which can be done without a hitch for the year. You need an official letter stating that you will be out of the country and why – which you can obtain from the Registrar's Office at UW. Make sure to do this well ahead of your trip because the office will issue you a new card which you will not in the mail for 3 weeks.

As well, the UW health plan can be extended to cover your coop term following your academic term, thus you can be covered for the trip through UW as well. For details go to:

<http://www.hr.uwaterloo.ca/benefits/medical/medical.html>

## Immunizations for SE Asia: Malaria and Typhoid

In preparation for traveling through South-East Asia in August, I talked to my doctor about getting vaccinated for the possible diseases in the region (there is little or no threat of diseases in Japan – but still talk to your doctor). The most common are Malaria and Typhoid. Malaria is a disease which requires a special immunization or pills for a particular geographic region in which you will be traveling. Since before my departure I had not yet decided which countries and which parts of those countries I would be visiting, there was little point in getting immunized. Typhoid was more of a sure decision for protection. Keep in mind that some vaccines take a number of weeks or months to become effective, and some need a few doses, thus I recommend going to Health Services or talking to your doctor as early as possible.



### 3

## Arriving in Tottori



### Residence – International House



The International House (I-House) is a 5-storey building with single rooms and a separate wing with family apartments, providing housing for international students. On the single side, the floors are divided by gender and have shared showers, laundry facilities and a kitchen on every floor. Housing is very subsidized, costing about \$45/ month, and the rooms on the very corners on every floor have a small kitchenette (literally 1' x 4') with a sink, some cupboards, and an electrical grill, and they go for about \$10 more monthly (pictured on the right). There is a toilet in every room and all rooms come fully furnished with a bed, shelves, table and chair. Utilities are an additional cost, however, and depending on the amount you use your heater or air conditioner, this can cost in the range of \$10-\$50 / month. There is no cleaning service for the residence, and all taking out garbage and all bathroom and kitchen cleaning and floor sweeping is done by the residents based on a rotating weekly assignment.



### Alien Registration

All foreign nationals in Japan have to be registered with the government and file for an Alien Registration Card – this is your ID. You have 2-3 weeks after entering the country to apply for one. They can be obtained at any city hall. The city hall in Tottori is in downtown Tottori, which is about 6km away from the university. It is easiest to have someone take you, or to take the local train. After obtaining this ID, you are responsible for updating the government upon any subsequent move, so if you change locations, such as for coop, you again have a 2-3 week window to go to the city hall of the new location and update your information.

Warning: you need to have this piece of ID with you at all times. A grad student from Kenya was detained and questioned by the police after being randomly stopped on the street and asked for his Alien Registration card and being unable to produce it (he left it in his room). The police made a big deal about it, detained him, and questioned the university and all of his professors to prove his identity and threatened to arrest him the next time it happens.

### Japanese and English language classes



Upon arrival, there is a Japanese language preparedness test administered by the university in order to determine the appropriate level for language classes which are 3 times/ week. There are also two culture classes per week as well as Kanji writing classes offered for free for the international students at TU. Likewise, there are also many English classes offered for the Japanese students and other



non-English speaking international students. The university is always looking for native English speakers to help teach English conversation classes. This is a paying position, so if you want to save up for traveling or helping meet expenses of the exchange, this is a good way to make some pocket change.

## **Labs**

Social Systems Engineering is the department that Systems Design Engineering students are enrolled in while at TU. They teach modeling and controls, just like SYDE, but the focus of the department also overlaps quite a bit with Civil Engineering. Students enrolled in graduate school and 4<sup>th</sup> year undergrads get assigned to labs related to their interest and research fields.

There are 7 labs in the Social Systems Engineering department, and every exchange student to the department gets assigned to a lab, where they can have a ‘home base.’ This includes a desk for belongings and personal internet access for your laptop, as well as access to a free printer. The lab professor becomes the ‘go-to’ contact at the university for the exchange student. The students spend a lot of time in their labs and with labmates, and this includes having a welcome party for the exchange student and various social outings such as lab tennis mini-tournaments.

## **Campus clubs & the school system**



The Japanese education system is quite contrasting to the one we are accustomed to in North America. In Japan, students study hard from elementary school and write entrance exams to get into junior high school, high school and university, all of which are of varying levels of difficulty and reputation. High school is a very difficult time as students study hard to enter university. After the student has been accepted and enters university, the workload on the students is significantly less than at a comparable European or North American university. This means that students have a lot of time for extra-curricular activities and socializing, and campus clubs are the most popular way of doing so. I would venture that more than 90% of the student body belongs to a club, and each club meets at least 3-4 times / week. Clubs range from sports such as basketball, badminton, tennis and swimming to music such as the hip hop, jazz or mandolin club, martial arts such as judo and kendo and cultural clubs such as the international club, which many international students

become part of.

I and every exchange student that I have talked to has recommended joining a club. It is a great way to meet other students who share similar interests. Most Japanese are very shy to approach foreigners, so this is a great way to break the ice and make friends. When the students are not practicing their sport or instrument, they are out socializing with clubmates, so they pretty much get engulfed in their club lifestyle. This can make it difficult to meet people and find time to socialize with other students if you are not a member of the club yourself.

## **Communication: landlines, cell phones and the internet**

In Japan, cell phone use is much more prevalent than it is in North America. The phones are technologically more advanced, the coverage area is almost without holes, and the prices are very reasonable. Thus many Japanese have, for almost a decade now, been moving away from landline phone use. There is no landline provided in the individual rooms in the I-House, however there is a payphone in the main floor lobby that can be used for international calls with the use of a calling card which you can buy and activate at Lawson convenience store, just across from campus.

In order to purchase a cell phone, you need proper ID (your Alien Registration Card) and a bank account. Cell phones can range in price from 0-\$300 for the phone itself, and monthly subscription starts

from about \$35/month. AU offers special student discount rates which are approximately ½ the cost of a regular monthly subscription. To get this discount you need to bring your TU student ID (which you will have to obtain) when signing up for a subscription. Cell phones are extremely convenient for text messaging. Most Japanese prefer to text message each other rather than call. Text messaging can also make communication with Japanese friends much easier since it gives you time to try to translate and interpret the message before responding and provides a great chance to practice reading and writing Japanese.

You can also pay extra to have internet access in your room at the I-House. Some students my year tried to do that and it turned out to be a big hassle. Internet access will cost you about \$50/month, but if you have a wireless router and can share the line with other students, you can reduce the associated costs. In order to get internet access you need to have a landline phone in order to have ADSL internet (just like Bell Sympatico). Personally, I opted for using internet at my lab since it was free and I could use it whenever I wanted to. As well, it gave me an incentive to be at school and socialize and to leave the internet behind when I go home and be able to relax or get work done. Those students who did get internet access in their rooms seemed to spend the majority of every day in their rooms and only leave to attend classes. The advantage to getting internet access in their rooms, however, is the ability to use Skype. International calls from a payphone or from your cell phone can be extremely costly. Incoming calls on your cell phone are free, however anyone calling a cell phone in Japan from Canada will be paying more per minute.

## Food



Meals are very cheap and tasty at the university cafeteria. There are two cafeterias on campus and a filling meal at either will cost in the range of \$4. It is a buffet-style meal, where you pay for what you select, and there are endless possibilities, so it is not easy to get bored with the selection. There is also a couple of grocery stores down the street from the campus, but unless you have a bicycle, lugging the groceries back to the residence can be a nuisance. As well, the kitchens at the I-House are rather uncleanly, so I opted not to cook there. The little stove in my room served just fine for heating up leftover meals. Convenience stores are very common and carry quite a variety of nutritious ready meals and snacks, so they are always a good option.



## Transportation

Tottori University is about 1km from the I-House residence, a nice walk but a distance that is more quickly covered by bicycle. There is a limited number of bicycles given on loan every year and allocated by raffle by the International Students Committee and the Centre for International Affairs (CIA) at TU sometime in May. Our year, all 5 of us managed to get bicycles. Unlike in Canada, getting around on bicycle is very popular in Japan, so if you cannot secure a bicycle through the raffle, then getting a loan or an unused one from another exchange student requires just some asking around.

## Money, money, money



In order to open up a bank account in Japan, you need to have a “hanko”, a stamp. It is the Japanese equivalent of a signature, and any time you need to sign any official document, you will use your personalized stamp.

There are no big banks in Japan that service the whole country and are easily accessible. Each prefecture/city has its own local banks which serve the community. In Tottori there is the Tottori Bank. There are also bank accounts that you can open at the post office, that you should be able to access at any post office, but I do not know more about this option.

There are ATM machines in some post offices which accept bank cards working on the Cirrus system. It's a toss-up to find a post office that will have one of these ATMs. A tried and true Canadian bank that works on this system is Bank of Montreal, tried and not is Royal Bank and PC Financial.

*Money access in Japan is a problem!* No matter which bank you sign up with in Japan. Banks do not work weekends and ATMs are not as widespread as in Canada and they have specific working hours, so if you do find one but its closed, you can't take out money until the next time it opens. Bank cards cannot be used as debit or cash cards. This can be a big nuisance, especially when traveling. It's really important to have enough money with you when traveling; you don't know where you will find an ATM, if it will be within the ATMs operating hours, and if your bank card will work at all at that machine (often times it will not work). There is an ATM machine on campus at TU.

## Electricity

Voltage in Japan is the same as in North America, so all electronics you bring over will work. However, all the plugs are 2-prong, so any electronics that have a 3-prong plug (like some laptop batteries) won't work. However, you can buy an adapter for 3- to 2-prong plugs from any electronics store for about \$3.

## Coop placement

Coop placements, or internships as they are called in Japan, are not very commonplace. Since these student interns have not yet graduated, the pay reflects that. Hourly wage runs usually between \$7-10/hour, but many times the students will receive free or subsidized housing, transportation, food or relocation expenses covered as additional compensation. Some corporate housing resembles a university-style residence with shared bathrooms and a cafeteria with a chef, but since most of these residences are only for male employees, any female student wanting to work at that company must be willing to make their own living arrangements if they want to work at the company. It is extremely difficult to find housing on your own in Japan, since any foreigner cannot take on a lease on an apartment unless a Japanese citizen is willing to co-sign and act as a 'guarantor' for the foreigner that they will pay rent, else the guarantor becomes liable for the missing rent and any other damages.

Coop placements for the exchange students are arranged by the professor who is in charge of the exchange. Basically it is an informal process whereby the professor calls his old friends and students and asks them to take on a UW coop student. The coop jobs are easily arranged because it is rude in Japan to tell someone 'no', especially an older person and having a notable social status such as a professor. Therefore jobs and companies depend solely on the professors connections, and not on the individual's abilities for a match with a company, or the company's need to fill a position.

The process of calling contacts and arranging the coop placement usually doesn't get started until late May or early June and may take a while, therefore it is recommended to very politely inquire about the status of the process every so often; many times the professors have too many things on the go and tend to forget. While not only frustrating to be waiting in order to be able to plan summer vacation and know where you will be moving in the fall, it is also important to get all paperwork settled with the government before going away. In order to be eligible to work (since students are most likely on a student visa, and not

a work visa) you have to file a form called “Permission to engage in activity...”, and this paperwork cannot be filed until you have an offer letter from work.

## Getting sick in Japan: healthcare and health insurance

Healthcare can be somewhat of a pain in Japan as well as dealing with the hospitals and insurance afterwards. I cut my foot on a beach in Thailand, and by the time I got back to Japan, my foot became extremely infected and ballooned to twice the size. I needed to see a doctor immediately for surgery, and the first hospital I went to turned me away. Luckily I was admitted by the second hospital after filing a lot of paperwork.

For insurance reimbursement purposes if you are with the UW plan, it is important that everything and anything that you have done at a hospital or clinic you:

- a) Get a letter from the doctor stating exactly what was wrong and why you needed to see the doctor. Its ok if this letter is in Japanese, the insurance company pays for plenty of translators, so don't stress.
- b) Call the insurance company (Worldwide Assistance takes care of students abroad on the UW plan) within 24 hours and open a claim.
- c) Keep the *original* receipts to send to Worldwide Assistance when all is said and done, but remember to keep a photocopy of all receipts with you in case the original claim gets lost in the mail.

## Time differences: when night and day are reversed

Japan doesn't subscribe to daylight savings time, so the time difference between Toronto and all of Japan is 13-14 hours, with Japan being ahead.



## Prejudices: racism and sexism in Japan

In general, the Japanese are a *very* polite people and will try in any way to be friendly and helpful. But there is a level of sexism that is tolerated by the Japanese culture that has turned some female exchange students against the culture and the country. The genders are not on an equal playing field; a woman's role is to be a good housewife, while the man brings home the bread. This mentality of female inferiority is taught at a very early age: all throughout the school system boys and in the homes. For example, soccer, baseball and judo are seen as only boy sports – no girls can participate, whereas activities such as table tennis are seen as more fitting to the female gender. Following that mentality, there are also culturally imposed gender separated jobs and sports, and breaking out of this stereotype can be seen as very odd.

Engineering is also seen as a male field. In my lab of about 30 undergraduate and graduate students, I was the only female.

Racism is also alive and well in Japan, although the Japanese are shy to speak about this topic and will rarely let foreigners in on this viewpoint. Racism can exist against any foreigner not Caucasian or any Asian not Japanese, although this prejudice is less pronounced in the younger generations.

## **Images of Tottori and surrounding area**

### **Famous Tottori Sand Dunes**



### **Uradome coastline just 20km outside Tottori**



### **Cherry Blossom Festival in Tottori**





## 4

### Coop in Japan



#### MRI: location and the commute



I completed my coop placement in Tokyo working for the Mitsubishi Research Institute (MRI) during Sept – Dec 2005. MRI is located in the heart of Tokyo's financial district, right by the Imperial Palace and the main Tokyo train station, so it is in a great location and very easy to commute to. My apartment was a part of the MRI residence building in a great community location which has single-style apartments very similar to the I-House in Tottori, but cleaner and

brighter. This is about 10 train stops from work, and with walking time and train wait time and transfer time, this makes the commute just under an hour.



#### MRI: overview of company structure and my role



MRI is a research institute with over 700 employees that does consulting in areas of energy, transportation, social systems, economics, and others. The UW coops that have interned there (about 10 over the years) have worked in the transportation department, except the Electrical Engineering students which worked in the Elec Eng lab at MRI. I worked in the transportation department, and the type of work is very dependent on the projects that are currently being undertaken by the department. MRI is very flexible in giving the student the choice on which project to work on – any and all help is very appreciated, since all the researchers work on a bonus for performance basis. When I was there, since I was the only native English speaker and was the fastest to go through and extract information in English, my job was researching to find relevant journal articles to what the projects were, and then to read and summarize findings to the other researchers who would take the information they needed and translate it into Japanese for their reports (or keep it in English if the client organization was foreign).

At my job I was paid a salary of \$80/day (no overtime) and my core hours were 9-6, but I would usually stay until 7 or 8. By about 8 o'clock maybe half of the workers would go home. I was told that quite often the full-time employees stay until midnight. This resembles the stereotypical image of the hard-working Japanese businessman that works long hours, and this stereotype is not very much true today – except at MRI. Because the employees' salaries are not reflective of seniority, but rather on a productivity basis, most of the employees juggle about 5 projects at a time, in order to bring home big bonuses. This is why having a coop student can really help them. Unfortunately, though, since the researchers are very busy with their work, they rarely take any breaks throughout the day and work through lunch. This absence of socialization can occasionally leave the coop student very isolated and alone, especially in a new city, so I recommend getting involved in extracurricular activities after work in order to meet people, make friends, and avoid homesickness.

At the end of the term at MRI, I gave a presentation about UW, the coop system, and SYDE. The researchers were very interested in what the coop system does and how it functions.

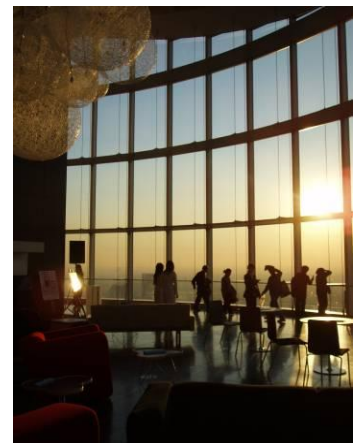
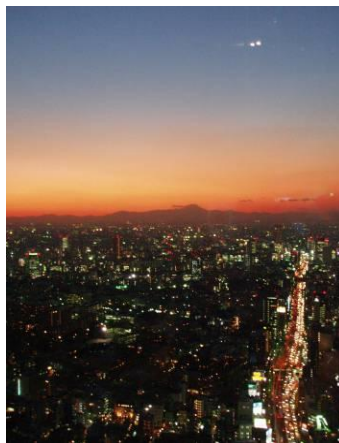
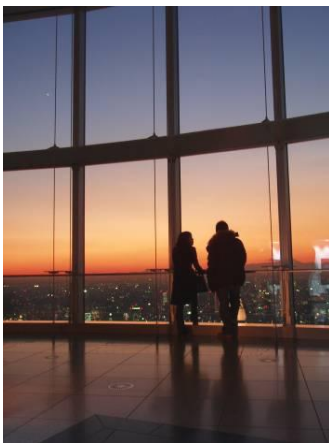
## **Covering other life expenses, the commute and getting around Tokyo**



My relocation expenses (travel to and from Tottori) as well as my residence was covered, however any additional expenses such as utilities I had to pay for. At some companies, the company is known to reimburse employees for train passes to get to and from work, however MRI did not have this policy in place for their interns. Commuting costs can add up (about \$10/day), but if you get a train pass, you save more than 50%. Train is your best bet for getting around Tokyo. Cars are extremely impractical, bikes useful for only a short distance, and taxis extremely expensive. A 15-minute cab ride can cost you upwards of \$60! When taking a taxi, the customer pays any road tolls and also pays a 30% premium after midnight.

## **Images from around Tokyo**

### **Mori Building**

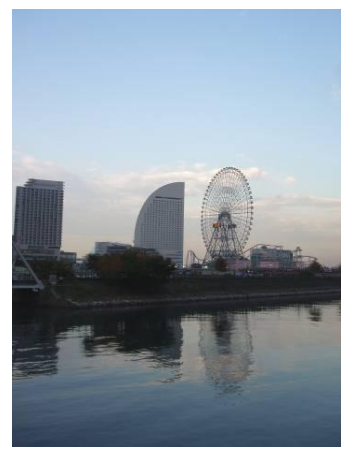




## Imperial Palace



## Yokohama



## 5

# Traveling in Japan

## Getting around Japan



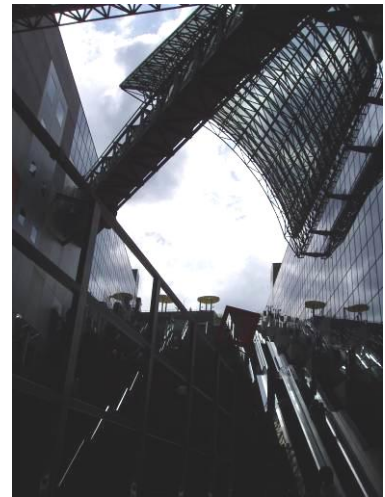
When traveling from Tottori, you can get student discounts for trains with a note from the student services office confirming that you are enrolled at the school. This is intended to make it cheaper for students to go home for the holidays, but you will need to look into restrictions and applications in detail. A general rule of thumb (that I came up with and seems to be a good travel expense rough estimate) is that a bus will cost you approx. \$10/hour of travel. Thus a trip to Hiroshima 5 hours away, will cost about \$50 one way. The buses are quite comfortable and relatively cheap. Trains will cost double what a bus will cost, take the

same amount of time and provide the same level of comfort. Plane tickets can be expensive, unless you get a special discount ticket, in which case it becomes very cheap. Its called the “birthday hayawari”

<http://www.ana.co.jp/eng/dms/fare/birthday/index.html>

and you can fly anywhere in Japan for \$90-110 (regular price \$200+) the week before and after your birthday with up to 3 friends with ANA and JAL airlines.

The shinkansen (bullet train) is a scenic option that I would strongly recommend everyone do once. It is quite pricey (close to the amount of a plane ticket) but it is a great experience. The shinkansen runs only along the east coast of Japan connecting south Japan (Kyushu island) with the north (Morioka and eventually as far north as Sapporo, Hokkaido island). So for anyone trying to get out of Tottori on the west coast, the closest location to hop on the shinkansen line is in Okayama, directly 3 hours south.



## My travels around Japan

### Hiroshima and Miyajima



The first trip that I went on was to beautiful Hiroshima for ‘golden week’, a sort of spring break for all students in the first week of May. I stayed in a business hotel right in the center of town. Business hotels are clean and small hotels with *very* tiny rooms with just enough room for a bed, that are intended for businessmen who just need a place to sleep while on business trips. Thus you can get a room for pretty cheap; in the range of \$40/night, but remember to bring your passport – you can’t check into a hotel in Japan without one. The first week of May is also the ‘flower festival’ in Hiroshima, where there’s thousands of people on the streets with tons of vendors, performances, dancing, and parades. It’s quite exciting!

We spent one day on an island called Miyajima which is just across from

Hiroshima and a short ½ hour ferry ride away. It is one of the most beautiful places in Japan for its naturesque beauty and is considered one of the 3 most beautiful spots of Japan.

### Hiroshima



### Miyajima





## Okinawa



In June, we spent a week in Okinawa. Okinawa is to Japan as Hawaii is to the US. A beautiful tropical set of islands far away from mainland with its own unique history, culture and attractions so diverse from mainland. We traveled there with ANA airlines with the birthday hayawari discount, and stayed with a friend, an English teacher that we met while on golden week in Hiroshima. Okinawa is very much off the beaten track for a lot of foreigners and Japanese alike since it is so far away and expensive to go to. Early June is when rainy season ends, but our year it was still in full force. The tropical rains were very heavy and went on 24/7

while we were there. My advice: wait until at least mid-June to be sure to avoid the tail end of it. On the up side, we managed to do a lot of cultural sightseeing, that we might not have done if the weather was nice since we might have opted for the beaches instead.



## Kanazawa

Kanazawa is a city in Ishikawa prefecture with a population of 500,000 just further north-east along the coast of the Sea of Japan from Tottori. I visited Kanazawa in late June, since I had lived there for a year when I was a Rotary Youth Exchange student. Kanazawa is one of the most beautiful cities, and is often referred to as the “little Kyoto” (Kyoto is considered by most Japanese as the most beautiful city in Japan because of its rich history, castles and parks). Kanazawa has one of the 3 most famous parks in Japan: Kenrokuen and famous Kanazawa castle and Ishikawa gate.

Japan Tent is a short-term exchange program in July/August bringing together international students from all over Japan and putting them up with guest families in Kanazawa and the surrounding areas in Ishikawa prefecture. UW students participate almost every year - this is a great way to go and see Kanazawa.

## Kanazawa



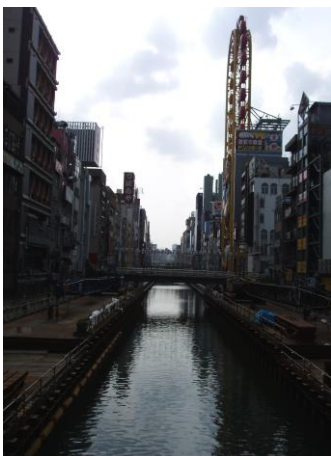
## Nagoya and Osaka



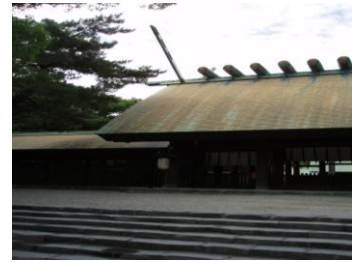
In late July just before taking off for Thailand, I spent a week visiting friends who were working at the World Expo in Nagoya, Aichi. Nagoya is the fourth-largest city in Japan located on the Pacific coast.

On my way, I spent a day in Osaka, the third-largest city in Japan and popular among the youth for its vibrance and good shopping; similar to Tokyo. A popular sightseeing spot in Osaka is the Kaiyukan Aquarium, which is one of the largest in the world.

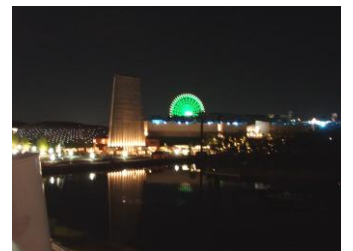
## Osaka



## Nagoya



## Aichi World Expo





## Traveling outside Japan: Thailand



Since the first half of the school year in Japan ends in mid/late July and the scheduled coop term doesn't commence until September, there is a full month to get some travels in; and, for many of those at UW Engineering used to constantly going back and forth between school and coop, this is a unique opportunity to take a nice extended vacation in an exotic place.

My year, there were five students from UW that participated in the UW-Tottori exchange. I chose to spend a month in Thailand, although my initial inclination was to travel around all of South-East Asia. The other students in my year visited China (Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjin, Hanzhou, Hong Kong), Taiwan, Korea, and south Malaysia (Sabah), as well as numerous cities within Japan.

In order to leave Japan to travel, you need to apply for a re-entry permit, since the student visa that is granted to the exchange students is valid only while in the country. A single re-entry permit costs about \$30 and a multiple re-entry permit \$60.

I spent a full month in Thailand, and the path of my travels are shown in the map on the right. Overall, I covered a total distance of 5000km by train, bus, motorcycle and boat and visited in the following order:

- Bangkok
- Ayutthaya
- Kanchanaburi
- Chumphon
- Ko Tao
- Ko Phangan
- Suratthani
- Phitsanulok
- Phang Nga
- Khao Lak

While on Ko Tao island, I received my PADI Open Water Scuba Diving certification (Ko Tao, along with Ko Phi Phi are considered the two scuba diving havens in the country). Thailand is a great place to get certified since it is a fraction of the cost of what you would pay in Canada or the US, but the water is warm, beautiful and filled with an array of tropical fish.





Overall, Thailand is a beautiful country with very rich and exotic food, culture, and landscape. From big Buddhas and majestic temples, to the tropical waters in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea, to the lush jungles in the north, Thailand has a lot to see and do.

The best place to go to for information about Thailand is the Lonely Planet series book on Thailand; they also publish one on South-East Asia, but it is less comprehensive. Another great source upon arrival is any travel agency that is TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand) registered; beware of fake tourism agencies that will just take your money- they are not certified. For more information, you can go to <http://www.tourismthailand.org/>

Since there is plenty of published information about the country, I will not go into too much specific detail on the country, but I will give three very strong warnings to anyone going there:

- *Always travel with a friend*
- *Watch out for scams*
- *And **never** travel at night.*

Here are a few of the pictures from my adventures:



Bangkok



Ko Tao



Chumphon



The Bridge on the River Kwai,  
Kanchanaburi



Ayutthaya



Koh Phangan



Patong Beach, Phuket



Phang Nga



Phitsanulok

# 7

## Conclusion

I am addicted to exchanges. For anyone that loves to travel and experience a new culture, perspective, and way of life, participating in an exchange program will change you forever, regardless of the country you chose.

The UW-Tottori exchange is one that has been going on for many years now, at least 15 years that I know of. Don't expect things to run smoothly though, you will run into a few obstacles here and there, but the staff at Tottori University are very helpful and want to see that everyone's exchange is successful and enjoyable and will do everything in their power to make it so.

In my opinion, an exchange is a great way to not only meet new people from other parts of the world, but it is also a great way to step outside your comfort zone and grow as an individual in ways that you couldn't by staying at home in front of the tube.

So what are you waiting for? Go on and get out there and enjoy!