

Rowena Kobrak

Tanaka & Green Reflection

Spending this past year living in Japan, I was presented with numerous opportunities to learn about Japanese culture, interact with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, and experience living independently in a foreign country. Although there were many ups and downs, overall I very much enjoyed my time in Japan.

While at Waseda University, I took both Japanese language classes and liberal arts classes in English. Through my language classes, I was able to greatly improve both my language skills and my confidence in Japanese, particularly with speaking. It was incredibly rewarding to be able to see improvements with my Japanese in real time, whether it was ordering food at a restaurant, reading advertisements on the train, or conversing with members of my circle, every day I had chances to practice and improve my language skills.

As for my liberal arts classes, I mostly took classes related to my International Studies major, and one or two just out of interest. This was one of the aspects of Waseda University I was most excited for because there were many classes offered about Asian studies and relations that are not offered at my university in the US. Some of the classes I took included Japan's Foreign Policy, Sino-Japanese Relations, and Pacific Perspectives on Empire, War and Globalization. These topics were of particular interest to me and having the opportunity to study them with peers from both Japan and various other countries, and with professors from different backgrounds, was truly amazing. These classes in particular taught me a lot about Japan and its place in the world, and the students in the class provided me with many different perspectives on issues facing Japan and its neighbors.

Outside of classes, two of my main time commitments were my circle and my part-time job. Throughout my year at Waseda, I was part of a circle called Waseda International Festival, or WIF, which was an international dance group whose goal is to promote friendships between Japanese and international students through dance. WIF was one of the best parts of my study abroad experience. I learned dances in both Stomp and Musical styles, made many wonderful friends, and even had the opportunity to participate in the university's famous Wasedasai (School Festival). Outside of school, I also had a part-time job as an English Facilitator for a conversation café. I ended up enjoying this job much more than I expected as every day I was able to learn more about life in Japan and the perspective of Japanese people on many different topics. I not

only helped customers learn more English, but I could teach them about the United States and my experience as a foreigner in Japan. I also learned so much from my customers about their hometowns, their lives in Tokyo, and their perspective on various current events or important issues. I think this experience was invaluable as it allowed me to talk to Japanese people of varying ages and backgrounds rather than mostly just university students.

One of my reasons for studying in Tokyo for a full year was to see if I would like to live in Japan full-time in the future. I decided that although I would like to return to Japan in the future, perhaps for graduate school or work, I would not like to live there indefinitely. Living in Japan and travelling around Asia during my breaks sparked a desire to experience living in different cities in the future, so perhaps if I return to Japan, I will look to live in a city other than Tokyo. I plan to continue studying Japanese with the hopes of one day becoming fluent, although I hope to somehow combine this with my interest in environmental policy at some point in the future.

Overall, my year in Japan has vastly expanded my understanding of Japanese culture, language and lifestyle. Now that I am back in the US, I miss Japanese food, the convenience of public transportation, and the incredible views around Tokyo. I have a renewed excitement in studying Japanese and a motivation to keep working hard so I can one day fulfill my wish of returning to Japan.