



1. Student information

Study programme WU	MSc. Plant Sciences
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	01/04/2024 until 04/08/2024
Exchange destination: University	Kyoto University
Faculty	Division of Environmental Science and Technology
Country	Japan
City	Kyoto

2. Motivation for exchange

a. Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I wanted to go on study exchange mostly for my personal development. I was looking to improve my problem-solving skills and adaptability. I think going on study exchange also improves career opportunities and looks great on your resume.

b. What is the reason you chose for this country?

I chose Japan because I've always had an interest in Japanese language, media and culture. I had learned some Japanese as a teenager and I have always wanted to visit. This was a unique opportunity to stay in the country for so long. Japan is so very different from the Netherlands and that's what makes it interesting to me.

c. What is the reason you chose for this university?

Kyoto University is one of the best Universities in the world, and considered the best in Japan for natural science. Kyoto is also a beautiful city, with many temples, shrines and it's still close to nature. I had also seen that they offered courses on agriculture in Japan, which interested me very much.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

a. Do you have any advice about reaching your exchange destination?

Flying directly to KIX (Osaka) or NRT (Tokyo) is both possible from Schiphol. It is a little more expensive than having layovers. From both stations, it's still quite a long commute to Kyoto itself. Personally, I went to Tokyo first to sight-see and took the bullet train over to Kyoto. It was nice to see some of the country before starting my classes.

4. University and studying

a. Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	Forest and Resources Economics A	6	Advanced economics class on experimental methods and design. Covers game theory in developmental contexts.	5	I learned the most in this course. The teacher is really approachable and friendly. Examination is done by the assignments and a final presentation.
2	Crop Production Ecology	6	Course on yield gaps, and how to close them. Part of this course was reading one paper together.	1	This course was very easy and the teacher seemed too busy with other things. Course consisted mostly of listening to other people's presentations.
3	Sustainable Agriculture – a cross cultural perspective	6	Course on sustainable agriculture methods. Each week we explored a topic related to food and food production.	2	While this course did give a wide overview of sustainable agriculture, it felt a little black/white sometimes. Some nuance was lost in presenting the topics. Here, there was a lot of interaction between students in the group work, which I liked.
4	Agriculture and Environment in Japan	6	We covered different aspects of Japanese agriculture, given by 3 professors which each their own expertise. We covered geography and soils, fruit production and Japanese cattle.	3	Fun course to learn more about Japanese agriculture and their perspective. Especially interesting to see how differently fruit cultivation is done.

b. I had sufficient possibilities to select suitable courses that were taught in English (Yes, No - Explain):

Yes, there were 18 courses that were given in English at MSc level.

c. I had sufficient possibilities to select suitable courses in my field of interest (Yes, No - Explain):

Some were not relevant to my degree at all, so in the end I had about 10 courses I could have taken. It was a shame some of the courses I had seen in the previous course guides were not given any more this year.

d. I am satisfied with the level of the courses that I followed (Yes, No - Explain):

No, the courses I took, apart from Forest and Resources Economics were at a too low level. With that I mean lower high school level. I have heard from peers that classes at different universities are easier than in Wageningen, but this was quite extreme.

e. I am satisfied, in the end, with the selection of courses I followed (Yes, No - Explain):

Yes and no, I am content with the courses I have followed now. I do wish there would have been more choice to follow courses on plants and agriculture.

f. What is it like to study there?

E.g. Study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material?

Studying here was really low-key. It was nice to have so much free time, but I feel less of a connection to the University itself. The full-time students here also have their own research, which is their main focus. For them the courses are a side-thought. This could explain why the courses are relatively easy and little work.

For all the classes there was big focus on giving presentations. Presentations on sustainable agriculture, and agriculture in your own home country. This was very nerve-wrecking for the Japanese students. I don't think they need to present very often, as they were extremely nervous.

g. What is the culture of the university?

E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with WU?

Generally, there is more distance between the lectures and the students, but it depended a lot on the teacher. Some were very open and made many jokes, others adhered strictly to the lesson plan. Students ask very little questions in class. The teachers from our own faculty were very nice and welcoming.

h. What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. Catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

The school cafeteria is great. They have very tasty lunches for really cheap. There is also an international office which organizes activities for exchange students. Kyoto University also has many clubs. It's difficult to join one if you don't speak any Japanese though.

5. Housing-traveling-living

a. What are the possibilities for housing?

E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?

The university has a lottery system where you can get assigned a dorm room, self-contained or in a corridor. Not all students can get a place there, so there are also

private renting companies. Some students live in a studio, but landlords generally only rent to Japanese people. These studios also come unfurnished, which is not so convenient.

I went with a private rental company (8NEST), as I didn't want to end up having no room. There are many more rooms available than in Wageningen, so I wouldn't worry too much. Some companies that rent to foreigners are:

- Room Free D
- Oakhouse
- Borderless house
- 8Nest
- Expo house
- Social apartment

b. What is the culture like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

The people are so very nice and helpful. When I looked lost, people immediately came up to me to help. The service in restaurants is really good. I had heard before coming here that, 'Noone speaks English outside of Tokyo and Kyoto', but I have found this is not true. Especially if you try in Japanese first, then people are very willing to try to help you in English.

Japanese are very quiet in public spaces, and keep everything very tidy and clean. Trash collection is also on a tight schedule, and waste sorting is very important. Trains, busses and streets are kept so clean, despite there being no trash cans. Everyone just takes their trash home.

People here often go out for food and drinks and it is very affordable. It's considered impolite to walk while eating, and people do not eat on the streets.

Gift giving is another big part of Japanese culture. It's tradition to bring back gifts after travelling, or when someone does a favor to you. I think this is a very nice and thoughtful custom.

Lastly, it's shoes off in the house, temples, and even in some restaurants. I recommend bringing shoes that are easy to slip on and off.

c. Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?

Public transport in Japan is well organized. Although some stations can be larger and confusing, all trains come on time. Paying by Suica, Pasma or ICOCA (Japanese OV-chipcard) is very convenient, and these cards can even be used to pay in some shops and most supermarkets. The bullet train can get very expensive, so it might be worth it to take a highway bus if you're travelling.

Public transport in Kyoto itself can be very crowded, especially around tourist attractions. My share house was a bit further away from the university, so I bought a bike to cycle to it. I don't per se recommend getting one if the distance to university is walkable, as bike

parking spaces are very limited around the city. But if you need it to get to the university, by all means get one, as squeezing into a full bus every day is not pleasant.

6. Expenses

a. Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

Category	Expenses
Travelling there	€1200
Visa - if applicable	Free
Vaccinations - if applicable	n.a.
Insurances (extra) - if applicable	n.a.
Daytrips/sight-seeing	€4000
Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation	€370 for share house room.
Grocery costs per month	€30
Public transport costs per month	€70
Restaurant/going out for dinner costs per month	€400

b. The price levels were in general [higher; lower; equal] in comparison to in the Netherlands:

Lower. The yen was historically weak when I was there. I had about twice the purchasing power that I had back home.

c. Additional remarks regarding expenses?

I've spent quite a bit of money for travelling, hence the high public transport costs as well. It can certainly be cheaper if needed or wanted.

7. Free time

a. What are must-sees in the area?

I loved biking next to the Kamo river and visiting the national gardens. At night, the area around the river comes alive, with many people enjoying food and drinks next to the river. There are often music and dance performances too, so it's a great place to hang out at night.

I also really like Nishiki market. It can get very busy. Some of the shops are tourist traps, but others have amazing food. My favorite in Nishiki market is Daiyasu, an oyster restaurant with the best oysters I've ever had! The donuts at Konna Monja are also amazing.

b. What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth seeing/doing?

I really enjoy seeking out lesser known area's to explore, as the touristy areas are very crowded. My personal recommendations:

- Ishigaki.
 - o Tropical island very south of Japan, reachable by plane. Pristine beaches, snorkeling and coral reefs.
- Hokkaido
 - o Recommended in the summer when it gets too hot in Kyoto. Beautiful nature and national parks. Great for hikes.
- Kagoshima

- Active volcano to visit using a ferry. Amazing beef.
- Obuse
 - Village close to Nagano. Recommended to stay here instead of Nagano if you want to visit the snow monkey park. They also have a very nice museum on Hokusai, the painter of the wave of Kanagawa.

Some of these places it might be nice to rent a car for easier transportation.

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

a. Any challenges? How did you deal with them?

I have diabetes and travelling comes with extra challenges for me. Organizing my medication was tedious, and the food here is very rich in carbohydrates. It was quite an adjustment to switch to Japanese food.

I've also missed my family a lot. I kept a blog while on exchange so they could read what I was up to, and we called each other to keep in touch.

b. Best memory?

I had an amazing time driving around Japan in a rental car. I got to explore areas which were not well connected with public transport. A lot of Japan is still unknown with tourists, and people are happily surprised to see you visit their town. At the end of my stay, I travelled to Hokkaido, and then made my way down again to Kyoto. I loved seeing the smaller towns and villages, and seeing the great nature in Japan. Going to Ishigaki was also one of my highlights. A friend of mine was backpacking in Japan and we went together, which was amazing. It was so beautiful and unlike anything I had seen before.

9. Contact details

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name & email address (if yes)		