



Fachbereich Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften Nürnberg FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg

Erfahrungsbericht Auslandsstudium

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Angaben zum Auslandsaufenthalt	
Studiengang an der WiSo:	International Business Studies
Gastuniversität:	Kwansei Gakuin University Nishinomiya
Gastland:	Japan
Studiengang an der Gastuniversität:	Modern Japan Track
Aufenthaltszeitraum (Semester und Jahr):	September bis Januar
Darf der Bericht veröffentlicht werden?*	(Nicht zutreffendes löschen) JA

*Veröffentlichung unter: <http://ib.wiso.fau.de/outgo/partneruniversitaeten/>

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Themenbereiche:

1. Bewerbung und Auswahlverfahren an der FAU

I experienced the application process as a positive one, especially thanks to the support from the International Office. However, it is quite a long and sometimes confusing process, partly because the application process for us differed from that of other countries and previous semesters.

As always, we had an orientation day in November (which I found to be too late, as some deadlines are already at the end of November). During the session, we received all the necessary information regarding specific deadlines, available destinations, and Learning Agreements. While the session was quite flexible, I must admit that a significant amount of prior research is necessary before attending: many presentations take place simultaneously, so you need to prioritize and some information varies slightly depending on the source, so you need to be prepared to ask the right questions. For instance, we struggled to determine whether the required Japanese language level (A1) had to be met at the time of application at FAU or by the start of the exchange year. I am still not entirely sure about the exact requirements, so I highly recommend gathering this information in advance.

Afterward, we had to submit all the necessary documents online, which was relatively straightforward. In my opinion, there is no need to worry too much about writing the application itself. After receiving a response from the International Office, we were informed that we also had to attend an interview (a new requirement this semester), as Japan is a very popular destination, and there had been some issues with the language certificates. The interview itself was very casual and Mrs. Kuka mainly asked about our motivations for going to Japan, how well we knew KGU already, and how the exchange fit into our studies (e.g., Why do you want to go to Japan? Have you already looked at the courses offered?...). Fortunately, we received a positive response from FAU quickly.

My tips: Don't stress too much about the application. However, do research the courses KGU offers in your semester and see how they align with FAU's modules. Some of my friends applied to a university only to realize later that very few courses matched FAU's requirements, which meant that it was quite stressful to secure Learning Agreements.



2. Bewerbung / Anmeldung an der Gastuniversität

This was the most time-consuming part of the process but also the most straightforward. KGU requires a lot of documents, such as an application letter, a doctor's note, and a financial statement. However, gathering these is quite easy.

CIEC (the International Office at KGU) responds very quickly and offers in-person Zoom calls if you have any questions. You can upload everything online. Amina Dante (the responsible person from CIEC) supported us both before and during our stay in Japan, and she did an amazing job answering our questions and providing helpful tips.

However, it is a bit stressful that KGU sends the final admission letter relatively late, meaning you have to gather all the necessary documents very quickly. I very much recommend checking in with Mrs. Kuka from time to time, as we had some issues with our mailing address and not receiving the final approval mail from KGU.

3. Vorbereitung auf das Auslandsstudium

In preparation, we attended a Japanese language course at the "Bildungszentrum Nürnberg" to learn the basics, as we had no prior knowledge of Japanese. I highly recommend improving your language skills as quickly as possible, as English is not widely spoken in Japan...also not among students. You could take the same course we did, as it was well-structured and taught by the same instructor who teaches Japanese at FAU. However, the course is a bit expensive. A small tip: before paying, you can send them your enrollment documents, and you'll receive a 50% discount on the initial price.

Additionally, I took out international health insurance. Keep in mind that you will be enrolled in Japan's national health insurance system (which requires a 30% personal contribution), so you should evaluate whether additional coverage is necessary. I also made sure to get all the recommended vaccinations.

4. Anreise / Visum

Getting the visa was easy and efficient. Once you receive the necessary documents from KGU, you need to schedule two appointments (by phone or email): one to submit the documents and another to pick up the visa. I went to the Japanese consulate in Munich in person, and each visit took no more than 30 minutes. Overall, as long as you account for the processing time, the entire process is incredibly fast.

Instead of flying directly to Japan, we first traveled to Korea via a direct flight from Munich, which I highly recommend. We found it to be much cheaper than a direct flight to Japan, so we spent a week exploring Seoul before continuing to Osaka Airport (KIX). I didn't book a return flight yet, as I wanted to travel after the semester, but I recommend looking for flexible tickets as they're much cheaper. However, I came to realize that February isn't the best time to travel in Japan, so Vietnam or Thailand would have been a much better fit.



You should know that KIX is quite far from Nishinomiya, so be prepared for an additional hour of travel after landing in Osaka. This should be manageable, as you can either take the Limousine Bus to Osaka Umeda or Nishinomiya or use the train. Google Maps will be your best friend! I found the trains in Japan to be incredibly reliable, but they don't operate between 1 AM and 5 AM, which can be annoying if you arrive in the middle of the night (or want to go out partying 😊).

Tips: Get an ICOCA card (recommended) or SUICA Card as soon as you arrive. You can top it up and use it for public transport all across Japan. You can also add an online version of it to your phone, which is super convenient. Also, withdraw cash right away, as you'll need it throughout your entire stay in Japan. Credit cards are often not accepted, and not having cash can cause problems. You can easily withdraw money at convenience stores like Lawson.

5. Unterkunftsmöglichkeiten (Wohnheim, privat)

I stayed at a dorm called *Yukoryo*, and I can honestly say that it was the best decision I made! The whole dorm is relatively new, and I had an amazing time there. The rooms are small but comfortable, and the dorm offers plenty of communal spaces, as well as clean and modern bathrooms. The rules were fairly relaxed compared to other dorms, and we didn't have a curfew. Additionally, the dorm manager was incredibly helpful, picking up packages and answering any questions we had.

I was lucky to make a lot of great friends there, but since *Yukoryo* is an international dorm, it can feel somewhat secluded from Japanese students, making it easy to get stuck in an "international bubble". However, we had plenty of dorm activities, including Halloween and Christmas parties, sports events, and cooking classes to get to know each other well. The location is also very convenient as it is just a 10-15 minute walk from the university. This meant that even on study days at home or weekends, I could easily head to campus for lunch at the cafeteria for just a few euros. Nearby, there's a Lawson (about a 10-minute walk) and *Kotoen Station* with restaurants and a supermarket (around 30 minutes away).

I really, really enjoyed the dorm, but if you're looking for a place with more amenities, you might prefer one of the dorms that provide two meals per day, as *Yukoryo* does not. That said, I never had issues with full bathrooms or crowded kitchens. While *Yukoryo* is quite a large dorm, it still felt cozy, and it was easy to get to know everyone.

One Issue to Note: Unfortunately, we did face a serious problem during our stay. A new dorm manager started at the same time as us, and towards the end of the semester, we learned that she had been inappropriately texting and speaking to some of the male students. The situation escalated, and she was eventually forced to resign. However, the way KGU handled the incident, both in terms of communication and de-escalation, left many of us ... dissatisfied. While I wouldn't consider this an argument against Japan or *Yukoryo*, it did highlight that Japan, and KGU specifically, has its own issues to address.



6. Fachliche und administrative Betreuung an der Gastuniversität (International Office, Fachstudienberater, Buddy-Programme, studentische Initiativen, etc.)

KGU is very supportive, and you receive great help from CIEC. For example, when I needed to see a doctor, they helped me find an English-speaking one and even booked the appointment for me. (Fun fact: In Japan, you'll often find female-only doctors, even for things like eye exams.) They also provided a lot of assistance at the beginning of the semester. During orientation week, for instance, they accompanied us to City Hall to register for health insurance.

KGU also offers a Buddy System, and some of my friends met great buddies through it...people they explored with or studied together. While it's a great program, I personally struggled because my buddies didn't speak English, and my Japanese wasn't good enough for proper communication so we didn't end up doing anything together.

One thing to keep in mind: it's nearly impossible to join a student club at KGU. Most clubs are very competitive and so they often don't accept students with lower Japanese proficiency and those staying for just one semester.

7. Lehrveranstaltungen / Stundenplan an der Gastuniversität

Overall, Japanese classes are quite similar to school classes, as attendance is mandatory, participation is encouraged, and homework is regularly assigned. This differs from "normal" FAU classes. Overall, I would say they require more time than FAU courses. The examination format also differs, as grades are based on regular tests, assignments, participation, and final papers. However, the overall academic level, especially in English-taught classes, is way lower than in Germany. I was actually surprised by how the same topics were taught, as KGU seemed to introduce only the basic concepts of each subject without going into much depth. Don't get me wrong, the courses were interesting, but I had expected it to be a lot more difficult based on what I had heard about the Japanese education system. While KGU is quite a popular and well-known university in Japan, it does not rank high in a world ranking, so this might explain it.

Signing up for courses was also quite easy, especially for Bachelor's students in the "Modern Japan Track". However, Master's students have a more limited selection of courses. Throughout the process, CIEC provides support at every step. Course registration is divided into two main phases: First, you get a few days to sign up for classes online, followed by a trial period where you can attend the courses. After about two weeks, there is a deadline when you can drop or add courses. Technically, after this point, you are locked into your course choices and automatically registered for all exams. However, in November, there is one final deadline to drop courses if necessary.

Unfortunately, exchange students must enroll in at least seven courses to maintain their visa status, and one of these is a mandatory Japanese Seminar. This class mainly focuses on Japanese culture and history, with an emphasis on interaction between Japanese students and exchange students through shared presentations.



The

course is incredibly easy, quite interesting, and sometimes fun, though it can also be a bit boring at times.

Here are the seven courses I received a learning agreement for:

1. **Globalization and Social Welfare** (*LA: Economy, Organization, and Social Inequality*) – Extremely easy course (we were literally asked if we had heard of globalization before...), very relaxed teacher, no strict requirements. The final presentation and paper were on simple topics, though not particularly engaging.
2. **Global Leadership** (*LA: Auslandsblock*) – Very interactive and interesting, with a strong focus on women in business and workplace discrimination. However, the course content was somewhat superficial, and some students did not connect well with the instructor.
3. **Japanese Politics and Diplomacy** (*LA: Auslandsblock*) – A highly informative course covering Japan's historical development before and after the world wars. The teacher is very nice, but unfortunately, not the most engaging lecturer. Attendance is not mandatory, and the midterm exam was open-book with class materials. Funny enough, the mock exam was identical to the actual midterm (...like literally the same questions).
4. **Language and Culture in Japan** (*LA: International Studies I*) – One of the most interesting courses, with a lovely teacher. The class focused on women in Japan and how gender norms and stereotypes influence language use. There was a lot of homework, but the final exam was very easy. The course also encouraged plenty of interaction with other students.

8. Sprachkurse an der Gastuniversität (kostenlos, kostenpflichtig)

There are several Japanese language courses to choose from, and I attended two: *Japanese Language A* (twice a week) and *Japanese Language B* (once a week). I can recommend both, as the teachers were very kind and made the lessons interactive and fun.

Nevertheless, *Japanese A* was a bit unorganized. We spent more time on the alphabet and reading rather than grammar, which I found somewhat unbalanced. It was hard to actually speak the language when we did not know how to combine the vocabulary we learned into proper sentences. In contrast, *Japanese B* was much more efficient. Even though it's advertised to us as a course for "tourists who don't plan to continue learning Japanese after the semester," I actually learned a lot of practical Japanese that I could use in daily life. In many ways, I found this course more useful than Japanese A.

Both courses included regular tests, but it was incredibly easy to get good grades here too. Small tip: Be cautious with the *Speaking Japanese Level 1 and 2* course. Despite the name "Level 1", it is definitely not for complete beginners and it assumes you already have solid conversation skills...don't make the same mistake that I did ;).



9. Ausstattung der Gastuniversität (Bibliothek, Computerräume, etc.)

The university campus is absolutely beautiful, especially during the warmer months. It's quite large, so it's easy to get lost at first so I'd recommend using the campus map they provide at the orientation week.

There are plenty of convenient spots to grab food, including convenience stores, a Starbucks, a Korean restaurant, and two big cafeterias (Big Mama and Big Papa). The food there is incredibly delicious and very affordable, costing only 3-4 euros per meal.

While the lecture halls themselves are standard, the library is very cozy and a great place to study. Friends who used the gym also said it's well-equipped. Since you've already paid for it through your student fees, it's basically free to join...but keep in mind that it's often packed with student athletes.

10. Freizeitangebote

The university itself doesn't organize many festivities and most events are arranged by the individual dorms. Occasionally, there are concerts by the school band, a summer festival, and various sports games, but you will not find a centralized place to check for their dates. You'll mostly rely on flyers and word of mouth from other students. Little tip: Especially fun to watch, are the Cheerleaders, as I have never seen cheerleading done like this before. Unfortunately, joining school clubs is nearly impossible for exchange students.

That said, I wasn't too bothered by the limited university-organized activities because we always found plenty to do on our own. Osaka, in particular, has endless events and activities, so boredom was never an issue!

11. Stadt (Sehenswürdigkeiten, Feste, Museen, etc.)

Nishinomiya is a small but beautiful city, with lots of greenery around the campus. I loved living there, especially grabbing an ice cream and sitting by the fields in summer was such a vibe.

One of my favorite hidden spots is a small waterfall near the university and Yukoryo. You reach it by walking through a little river, surrounded by a forest, where you can then go for a swim. It's super refreshing on hot days! Unfortunately, it's not on Google Maps, so you'll need to ask someone for directions. (General hint: Walk past the university, down to the Daiso, turn left, follow the "river," stay on the right side until you find the biggest bridge, then cross to the left and walk into the forest.)

For food and nightlife, head to Kotoen Station. There are a few restaurants and cafés. The best spot, however, is Kitaguchi Station, where we always went for Izakayas and Karaoke. It's the most fun area around, but keep in mind it's a 40-50 min walk, so check when the last bus leaves. Additionally, there's the Nishinomiya Museum (..which I highly recommend as it has monthly changing exhibitions) and Nishinomiya Gardens (a big shopping center).



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des these areas, Nishinomiya is pretty calm and if you don't want to travel 50-60 minutes, options for entertainment are limited. I thought, however, that the city has a Ghibli-like aesthetic, and after spending a hectic day in bigger cities, coming back here was always so peaceful.

That being said, we often took the train to Osaka to spend nights there. From Kitaguchi, the ride is only 20 minutes, but from the dorm/university, it's closer to 60 minutes. **Just keep in mind** that trains stop running from 00:30 to 5:00, so if you're out partying, you either need to stay out all night or head back early!

12. Alltag (Geld-Abheben, Handy, Jobben)

Here are a few tips on that:

1. Always Carry Cash: Like mentioned, Japan is still very cash-based. The cheapest way to withdraw money is at Lawson or 7/11 ATMs.
2. SIM Card from the University: You can order a SIM card online before arrival and can pick it up at the airport (recommended) or at the university a few days later. CIEC will explain it all to you.
3. Bike Rules: You must have bike insurance to legally ride a bicycle in Japan. Rental companies usually offer this for a fee.
4. Maps & Apps: Google Maps works great for navigation, but for finding good restaurants and bars, use Japanese apps (friend recommended Tabelog or GuruNavi)
5. Communication: All communication (with new friends, the dorm managers,... happens on *LINE*, so best is to download it before you leave.)
6. Language Barrier: Japanese people are super polite and friendly, but many don't speak much English. If I had known more Japanese before my semester, I think I would have connected better with local students. Learn as much as possible beforehand!
7. Travel While You Can: Japan is amazing for travel, and train tickets can be surprisingly affordable. My top picks:
 - a. Okinawa – Tropical island vibes, beautiful beaches.
 - b. Hokkaido – Amazing landscapes, especially in winter.

13. Finanzielles (Lebenshaltungskosten, Stipendien)

In Japan, eating out is very cheap, and you can get a full meal with a drink for around 5–10 euros. Snacks from convenience stores are also incredibly affordable and delicious. Despite eating out nearly every day, I spent very little money on restaurants and bars compared to Germany.

However, buying fresh fruits and vegetables in supermarkets can be tricky, especially if you're vegetarian or vegan. Fresh produce is expensive (...an apple can cost up to 5 euros, and grapes up to 10). If you want to get your vitamins in, I recommend buying smoothie cups with frozen fruit that you blend yourself or sticking to bananas, as they are still relatively cheap.

Free-time activities such as karaoke, clubbing, traveling, and going to the cinema are also much cheaper compared to Germany. One surprise, though, was that clothes and cosmetics were not as affordable as I had expected. We went shopping once or



twice

, and while stationery was really cheap, the rest wasn't necessarily so. That said, shopping in Japan is still a fun experience, and we found so many unique and quirky stores to explore. Secondhand and vintage shopping is also very popular, and you can score some great deals to save money.

To help cover rent, flights, and groceries, I applied for several scholarships, including the PROMOS program and the JASSO stipend, as they can be combined. These were a huge help, and I'm very grateful to have received them. I especially encourage you to apply for JASSO, even if you don't think your grades are "good enough". I only know two people who applied and didn't get in. It doesn't just provide financial support (around 500 euros per month), but it also requires you to open a Japanese bank account to receive the money in yen, which means you avoid exchange fees when using those funds. That's a really nice bonus to have.

14. Fazit (beste und schlechteste Erfahrung)

There's so much to say, but to sum it up: I loved it! Japan is a beautiful country with endless opportunities to explore, learn, and grow. I highly recommend visiting, especially if you have the chance to do so for 6 months and through such a well-supported university program.

Of course, Japan has its downsides too. We once saw a man hitting a child in public, and no one intervened. People will often avoid telling you the truth and instead choose to be very polite, and the working life can be incredibly stressful, especially for women. These are realities that shouldn't be ignored, but they're also important to learn about.

Overall, the advantages far outweigh the challenges. So if you get the chance to go...GO!

15. Sonstiges

Here are a few of my final thoughts and tips:

1. Japan is much hotter than I expected in the summer, and it's incredibly humid too.
2. If you wear contact lenses, make sure to bring enough with you. Otherwise, you'll need to visit a doctor to get a prescription. However, this process is very efficient and inexpensive.
3. Near Yukoryo (and the Lawson), there's a small Taiwanese restaurant. Ask around, and you'll find it. The food there is both delicious and very affordable...we went at least eight times.
4. Being vegan or vegetarian in Japan can be challenging. I often had to explain what both terms meant. It's usually easier to simply ask for a dish "without meat" rather than requesting vegetarian options. That said, some of my friends managed to stay vegan/vegetarian for the entire trip, so it is doable.
5. Two of my favorite culture shocks, so you're prepared:
 - a. Shopping in Japan: When you enter a store, the staff will immediately approach you and offer help throughout the entire shopping process. They'll bring you bags for your clothes, remove



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angers, suggest other pieces that match what you've chosen, and if you so much as glance at a top for more than three seconds, they'll encourage you to try it on. They're always incredibly kind, but I am not used to receiving so much attention from store clerks.

- b. **Sickness:** One thing I really appreciated is that if you feel even slightly unwell and start coughing, it's expected that you put on a mask immediately. It helps prevent others from getting sick and is seen as a sign of respect, even if it feels strange at first. However, one thing that surprised me is that many Japanese people don't use tissues to blow their noses. Instead, you'll often hear them sniffing or clearing their throats loudly, believe me it's something you'll notice right away.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Unterstützung!