



SCHOOL OF MODERN LANGUAGES

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

JAPANESE@NEWCASTLE

EDITED BY HARUMI CAVANAGH

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YEAR ABROAD EXPERIENCE

Victoria Coppard, BA Modern Languages (Spanish with Japanese)

For my year abroad, I went to International Christian University in Mitaka-shi, Tokyo. Before I went, I had panicked about being able to survive in one of the biggest cities in the world when only two years previously I had been amazed at the size of Newcastle. Luckily, ICU is in the middle of a forest conveniently located 30 minutes from Shinjuku! I lived in a dorm where 95% of students were Japanese, even my roommate, so from the first day I was immersed in the language. Luckily, they were all so welcoming and put up with my attempts to string a sentence together.



there were lots of other exchange students from all around the world, which let me learn a lot about other countries and also confuse them about ours (what exactly is a 'cheeky Nandos?' was a popular topic), whereas in the other I was the first exchange student to ever join. They even thought I was a transfer student for the first four months, so it was a good confidence booster for my Japanese skills!

I decided to throw myself in completely to ICU life and joined two clubs as well as all of our dormitory activities. Through a year of performances, themed parties, trips and other things, I feel like I got to experience what life as a normal student at ICU was like. In one club



my dance club

In terms of language, I chose the intensive course at the beginning, which really was true to its name. However, as the classes advanced the hours became less (although the workload increased), and I went from doing speeches about 'my most precious thing' at the end of the 2nd year to writing a full essay on problems with organ transplants by the end of my time at ICU.

Trying to explain all of the experiences I had on the year abroad in one small piece of writing would be like trying to fit a hippo into a carry-on suitcase. I made friends from all over the world, visited places more beautiful than I could ever have imagined, and done things I hadn't ever dreamt about doing before. On top of that, I feel that I really grew as a person. I'd never hesitate to tell anyone that a year abroad is the best thing that I have ever done.



With my Newcastle tandem partner

My dormitory



My dormitory



Cherry blossom at ICU

Japan. Love it or Hate it!

Laura Onciu, BA Modern Languages and Business Studies

To begin with, Japan is amazing! From the first sentence you can probably tell I'm in the "love it" group.

I think that if you knew beforehand what you were getting yourself into, you'll love it too. I researched a lot about Tokyo before going there, so I had an amazing time during this one year abroad. I went to all the amusement parks I wanted to go to – FujiQ, Disneyland, Disney Sea, USJ, I went to watch all the films I wanted to (which otherwise take ages to be released on DVD/BD if you're not in Japan), I attended **almost** all the concerts I wanted to and travelled throughout Japan and Asia. Actually, I am writing this article two days before embarking on a trip to Singapore and Seoul.

Tokyo is, and I'm not exaggerating, the most amazing place on Earth. Safe, fun, and not as expensive as online rankings make it seem! Actually, in Tokyo, I had no problems eating out four times a week, whereas in Newcastle, once would be pricey enough! not to mention the fact that food in Japan is really amazing (healthy aside) – the sushi of course, but also Okonomiyaki (Japanese savoury pancake) and even the cheap gyudon (beef bowl)!

The university I went to, Hitotsubashi, which is really famous in Japan, is quite small. They have a really great exchange pro-



gram, and because it is one of the few red-brick universities in Japan, it gets constantly featured in TV series and anime (TV series: Gakkou no Kaidan; anime: Ookami Kodomo; Charlotte etc.). It is quite amazing to watch an episode of something, and then go to school in that exact same place.

I experienced every season in Japan, each with its own "limited edition" products that the Japanese love: Autumn with Kouyou (red leaves) and Kuri (chestnut) – flavoured, well, everything; Winter with illuminations everywhere; Spring with Sakura; and Summer with watermelon, nagashi-soumen, fireworks and all summer-themed products.

I also went to Career Fairs, and while I did not experience it first-hand, I saw my friends here go through the painful "shuukatsu" (job hunting) process. On the one hand, Japan is super convenient and has the latest generation products, but on the other hand, there is still a lot, and I mean it, a lot of bureaucracy. Whether you apply for a job or for Internet banking it is mostly done by filling out long forms, while this is annoying, everyone is incredibly kind and ready to help you out.

Of course, some may be bothered by the fact that they stand out just by being themselves, or that they cannot make friends with everyone, but I think that being open and adapting yourself to the new environment will get you a lot more than complaining about it. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

There are, of course, advantages and disadvantages in everything, but in Japan and in Tokyo in particular, I felt at home, therefore I will do my best to come back here once I have graduated!



YA Japan Page

Oliver Smith, Graduate 2015, BA Linguistics with Japanese



Hi everyone, I'm Oliver and I work behind the scenes as the administrator of the YA Japan Page (JA Japan Community on Blackboard). However, you may have seen me walk around campus or at Sunnycon 4, an anime convention in Sunderland where I taught a Japanese taster session.

The YA Japan page aims to provide information on three topics: Japanese universities, daily life tips for living in Japan and lastly what to expect when you first come to Japan. The page was created three years ago by a former student and since taking over two years ago, the page has expanded dramatically with the addition of three new partner universities. (Hokkaido University, Aichi Prefectural University and Kyoto University)

But, what kind of things might those topics cover? In summary: lots of things! For example, where can you buy cheap daily life items in Japan? Another question might be what can you buy in Japan and what do you have to bring from home? Yet another question might be how do you act polite in Japan and what should you NOT do in Japan? Finally, some students might also ask how they can use their study abroad to more effectively improve their Japanese skills. All these questions (and many more) have been attempted to be answered in the YA Japan page.

On top of this, the YA Japan page also aims to introduce students to things they can do in Japan that they might not have thought of. While on my year abroad at Hosei University, my teacher, Kumi Casey, added some information about WWOOF, (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms)

where you can volunteer your time on a farm for reduced or free rent. Not only does this save you money while travelling, but can also help



www.woofjapan.com

Visit WWOOF's website to find out

improve your Japanese ability as you live with a farmer family who can't speak English. Win win! If it wasn't for my work with the YA Japan page I would never have known about this. I didn't do WWOOF, but a friend did one in Kyushu and said it was one of his best experiences in Japan!

Overall, I've had fun working on YA Japan for the past two years and hope I've helped students prepare for their year abroad. If I had any words of advice it would be to use YA Japan to plan before going to Japan so you can spend more time having fun!



You can save a lot of money at 100 yen stores in Japan!

My study life at Newcastle University

Caitlin Rollison, BA Combined Honours in Geography and Japanese

From the first week as we slowly struggled through writing our names in the first of three Japanese writing systems, I knew I had let myself in for a challenge. That same week, some classmates and I visited the Japanese Cultural Festival at Teikyo University in Durham. We tried on Japanese yukata, watched the kendo displays and generally embarrassed ourselves attempting Japanese calligraphy. You might get laughed at for not being able to use chopsticks properly, or frighten Japanese tourists when you spontaneously try to practice your language skills, and I won't say there haven't been late nights with my grammar book and frustration at the endless learning of kanji script, but I have had some amazing and surreal experiences in the process of learning Japanese.



For me, the most rewarding part of learning Japanese is speaking, even though finding the confidence to speak is one of the most difficult things I have ever done. As I have learnt, even attempting to speak Japanese can get you a long way. In November, a friend and I went down to London to see J-pop/metal band Babymetal. It was pouring with rain and only just above freezing as we queued. Behind us in the queue were an elderly Japanese couple

who lent us their umbrella for nearly three hours, and taught me how to talk about queuing in Japanese, simply because I had introduced myself in their native language.

For months, introducing myself was about the best I could do, because Japanese is undeniably a difficult language to learn. Thankfully, we have some amazing teachers who are willing to give up their time to teach us important skills (such as authentic sushi making), and the small class sizes, meaning it's a lot easier to work together, make close friends and do things like class meals or trips to the Tyne-side cinema to see slightly surreal Japanese films such as this year's 'A Letter to Momo'.



When you're speaking Japanese with the world's most unlikely-looking heavy metal fans or making sushi with your teacher, you don't even realise you're learning Japanese. I am incredibly glad I chose to study Japanese for moments like these. The chance to experience another culture and meet people you would never otherwise have spoken to is what makes learning a language so different and so enjoyable for me.



LANGUAGE TASTER AT SUNNYCON

Oliver Smith, Graduate 2015, BA Linguistics with Japanese



Sunnycon is an anime convention that was created with the aim of celebrating anime and cosplay culture in the north-east of England and for promoting traditional Japanese culture. Past events have included cosplay and skit competitions, a marketplace for local artists and stores, kendo and taiko demonstrations, Japanese taster sessions (held by none other than Newcastle University!) and panels with special guests such as voice actors Christopher Sabat (*Dragonball*) and Vic Mignogna (*Fullmetal Alchemist*) as well as Akemi Solloway, a lecturer of Japanese language/culture and the founder of *Aid for Japan*, a charity dedicated to the orphans of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Sunnycon 5 will be held on 17th June 2016 in St. James Park. For more information on the next Sunnycon as well as their smaller events, you can visit <http://www.sunnycon.co.uk/>.



OUR TEACHER

Ms. Suda obtained an MA in Contemporary Literary Studies, with the dissertation on postmodernism in the writing of Haruki Murakami, from Lancaster University. She has been one of our Japanese language teachers at Newcastle University since February 2012. She is married to a Geordie and has a 19-year-old son who has turned out to be a fluent Japanese speaker.



What is Ms. Suda's personality like? How does she teach Japanese to her students? ALL is revealed by her students from the last academic year.

Thank you for everything. You are a ray of sunshine and have made studying fun! (Year 4 student)



Thank you so much for being a brilliant and wonderful teacher this year! I've loved our lessons and learned so much! I will miss your energy and positivity! Don't stop being cute! Ever!
(Year 1 student)

Thank you so much for everything you've done for me this year! You've been amazing and have really given me a passion for Japanese! You make every class enjoyable and always make me smile! So lucky to have you!
(Year 1 student)

4年間本当にありがとうございました！須田先生のやさしさいつも覚えていますよ！
(Year 4 student)



Thank you for everything! You've been a great and hilarious teacher! I can't wait for fourth year! I'll miss you till then! (Year 1 student)



Thank you for being such a wonderful teacher. Despite how difficult Japanese is, you have made me enjoy my first year of learning it and your smile always cheers me up when I'm having a rough day. (Year 1 student)

Ms. Suda says she loves her teaching profession at the university. She enjoys teaching both a new intake of students and students she taught before they went on their Year Abroad in Japan. She is also the teacher of UWLP Beginners Japanese.

Ms. Vicky Young presented

A Home within Foreign Borders

On the 6th March 2015, our language teacher Vicky Young presented a screening of a new film from Japan by director Ms. Keiko Okawa, entitled “A Home within Foreign Borders: Levy Hideo’s 52-year return to Taichung”. The film centred on Levy Hideo, who is considered to be the first Westerner to become an established novelist in the Japanese language. The screening event was held at the University of Leeds where Young is currently completing her PhD in Japanese Literature.



It was one of six similar events hosted at universities across the UK, including SOAS, Manchester and Edinburgh.

Levy Hideo was born in California, he lived here until the age of five with his family, then relocated to Taichung City in central Taiwan. They remained in Taiwan until Levy reached the age of ten, following his parents’ divorce, he returned to the US with his mother and younger brother. At the age of seventeen, Levy returned to Asia to join his father who was by then based at the US consulate in Yokohama. Levy studied Japanese at Waseda University and on the streets of Shinjuku, and after a brief academic career in teaching and translating classical Japanese literature and poetry, he began to write his own fiction and essays in Japanese. Following relative critical success, including an Akutagawa Literary

Award nomination in 1996 for his novel *Tiananmen*, Levy is now regarded as one of Japan’s foremost “border-crossing” writers.

Ms. Okawa’s documentary follows Levy on his first return to his childhood home in Taichung after an absence of fifty two years. The film captures Levy on this emotional journey as he revisits places that for decades have only lived in his memories. As he recalls the strangeness and alienation he felt as a blonde boy in Taiwan and the shock of his parents’ separation, he must also wrestle with the fear that by returning he may lose his creative impetus to write.

Young opened the event with an introductory lecture that situated Levy’s background and fictional work within the framework of “border-crossing literature” in Japan. The screening was followed by a Q&A session with Ms. Okawa and Thomas Brook, an undergraduate from SOAS who had produced the English subtitles for the film. Ms. Okawa spoke candidly about her experiences spending time with Levy and making the film, while Mr. Brook, who submitted his undergraduate dissertation on Levy’s fiction earlier this year, shared his own insights and impressions of Levy’s work. The screening at Leeds was made possible thanks to sponsorship by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and the White Rose East Asia Centre (WREAC) at the University of Leeds.



My JET Life

Emma Wilson, graduate 2013, BA Linguistics with Japanese

Before I came back to Japan for the JET programme last year, I had never lived outside a city. Now I have been living in a small town in the Fukushima countryside for over a year! My town is nestled in the mountains in the north of the prefecture. It couldn't be further removed from my year abroad in Hiroshima city. People warned me that the winters can be very cold out here but after three years living in student flats in Newcastle I was more than tough enough. Having *akotatsu* (heated table) has definitely helped though, that thing is magical.



small way part of the recovery. The people here are just so nice, it's almost beyond belief.

As for the JET programme itself, I have felt very well looked after. I work in eight schools in my town and know pretty much every child who lives here. This leads to more than your average waving during a normal walk round the supermarket.



They are the (unsurprisingly) the cutest and most well behaved kids. The job is a lot of fun and there are plenty of holidays to get some travelling done. Moreover, my board of education (and the JET programme in general) is very supportive of my Japanese studies. I have Japanese class that is subsidised by my town and have passed the JLPT N2 since I arrived and am taking the N1 in December; I'm still working on writing by hand though.

If you're thinking about applying when you graduate, I would recommend it. There is nothing like immersion to get your listening and speaking up to scratch. Plus it's a pressure free way to use all you've learned while at Newcastle everyday all day!

JET Programme (The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme <http://jetprogramme.org/en/>)

Of course I had my worries about the disaster and its effects but I have learnt so much about all the efforts being



made to keep everyone safe. This place is absolutely beautiful!

Life goes on here and one of the biggest hurdles the people here have now is to show the world that it's safe to come and enjoy Fukushima's bountiful nature and hot springs! I feel privileged to be in some

Contact us

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