

Persönlicher Erfahrungsbericht
PROMOS 2018/2019

Gasthochschule / Institution: University of Tokyo

Stadt, Land: Tokyo, Japan

Fakultät (KIT): Physik

Aufenthaltsdauer: 7 Monate

Unterbringung: privat

Für den Aufenthalt nützliche Links:

<https://tokyocheapo.com/>

<https://japanhike.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.jma.go.jp/en/quake/>

Belegte Kurse (ggf.): N/A

1 Freemoving for a research project/thesis

First off I want to remark that my stay in Tokyo was designated for a research project for my master thesis. I was part of the Institute of Solid State Physics (School of Science) at the Kashiwa Campus, roughly 1h from Tokyo Downtown. Therefore I cannot give insights into the life at Hongo campus, lectures, grading or student housing.

Maybe you will stumble over the misconception that the University of Tokyo as a whole is a partner university of KIT. A direct cooperation however is only possible with the School of Engineering.¹ In case you want to attend a different graduate school, you cannot apply to exchange programs, have to organize everything on your own and consider funding of possible tuition fees.

Since there are already very good and detailed reports about the exchanges to the School of Engineering and the offered courses, I want to lay my focus on organizing an exchange to a graduate school the KIT has no direct cooperation with. I also want to go over the first steps in Japan to set you up in your new home in order for you to quickly start enjoying.

2 In Germany

After having decided, that you want to go to the University of Tokyo but are not eligible for an exchange program, seek out professors in your faculty that share your research interest and have connections to, or even collaborations with, the University of Tokyo. You should start with this one year before your desired period abroad. A direct dialog with the work group you want to be part of is the easiest way and should in my opinion be the first step to organizing your stay. Bureaucracy can be a lot easier with support from the japanese side. In fact the Certificate of Eligibility, that is required for your visa application, needs to be issued in Japan by your inviting supporter. From my experience the japanese are very guest friendly, so even if you think that something is a pretty long shot, ask. Most likely you will get more more help with the organization than you think.

The name of your position is important: a ‘visiting student’ needs a ‘student’ visa and therefore officially enrol in a student program at UTokyo, a ‘research intern’ can stay in Japan for either 6 months or 12 months with a ‘cultural activities’ visa. The ‘cultural activities’ visa is designed for activities such as learning japanese or tea culture but is also frequently used for unpaid internships.

¹<https://www.intl.kit.edu/ostudent/6608.php>

If your supervisor in Japan doesn't have the time to issue a Certificate of Eligibility for you, you can ask for an invitation letter and prepare the visa application from the German side (the Japanese embassy in Munich can provide you with a list of necessary documents). You should start with this as soon as possible though, because the documents will be sent to Japan and back and this can take months.

After receiving an invitation from UTokyo, you can search for scholarships. The 'DAAD PROMOS' scholarship can fund your thesis/research project or internship. Note that scholarships like 'Baden-Württemberg Stipendium' only support exchanges to partner universities. If you want to stay for at least 12 months, you should take a look at the 'DAAD Jahresstipendium' and if you are a bachelor student, the 'RISE worldwide' program might be a fit for you. Tuition fees can be paid with the help of 'Auslands BAföG'. The Japanese JASSO scholarship might also be an option for you.

You should try to find a place to stay before coming to Japan. At least secure something for the first few months. I can recommend the share houses by the Sunset Capital Cooperation. They have a share house called THE ROOF in Nodashi, Noda, roughly 30 mins. from the Kashiwa campus² and a similar share house near the Haneda Airport.

3 In Japan

With the right visa for Japan in your passport you will get a residence card upon landing in Japan which serves as your ID. Therefore it is best if you already have a Japanese address. The next step for you should be getting cash and a 'PASMO' or 'SUICA' card. 7-Eleven convenience stores have ATMs that accept foreign credit cards for a small fee (200 Yen), independent of the withdrawn amount. The 'PASMO' and 'SUICA' serve as prepaid cards for train rides. You can buy and charge them with your credit card (sometimes) and with cash at the machines in every station.

In the next few days you should register your accommodation in the city hall. Now again, I cannot speak for Tokyo, but in Noda I was very glad to have a Japanese translator with me. Offices are generally not places where you go a long way with your English. Even if you have to go to the immigration office, you will be surprised that there is at most one English speaking officer who can help you. So if your Japanese is not sufficient and you have a difficult situation, I suggest you bring someone who can help you with translations. I also got myself a prepaid phone contract with AEON mobile (500 Yen/m. for 2GB). AEON malls can be found everywhere in Tokyo. However bring

²<https://www.hituji.jp/comret/info/chiba/noda/the-roof-kashiwa-kita>

some time: I spent more than 5 hours with a japanese customer service that had to try several SIM cards. Only in Japan: After more than 5 hours of communicating in english, my rudimentary japanese or with hand and feet and signing a contract (of which I still don't know the contents), I received a full 2 minutes of apologies from everyone for the inconvenience and a huge bag of sweets :-)

Now that you have set yourself up, it is time to discover the diversity of Tokyo! Just check out the different districts for yourself to find your own favourite! Tokyo has something for everyone. However don't forget to catch the last train or subway. Depending on how long your way home is, you might need to leave by 11 p.m.. Yes, Tokyo is a city that actually sleeps. Rumour has it that the cab company lobby is preventing Tokyo to offer nightliners in order to stay a profitable business. Cabs can get very expensive very quickly, so try to avoid them if you can.

Tokyo and the Tokyo area also have a lot to offer activity-wise. Here is a list of sports activities and where I would recommend to do them:

- **Bouldering/Climbing:** Bouldering and climbing are very popular in Japan and climbing gyms can be found nearly everywhere. I haven't tried many but my general feeling is that they can be very crowded, especially on weekends. Try to avoid peak times. The rules in some gyms will only allow one climber per wall even if the walls are wide and two routes far away from each other. Suck it up, queue up.
- **Skiing/Snowboarding:** In Honshu, the area around Nagano is full with skiing resorts. Hakuba may be the most famous one. Special tip: Akakura ski resort in Niigata prefecture. You can stay in the LAMP guesthouse.³ It is ridiculously cheap, has a shuttle service, a bar, restaurant, rental service and awesome staff and guests.
- **Surfing:** Even though it is not a surfing mekka, Japan gets occasionally hit by some nice swell. You have to carefully choose your spot depending on the conditions though. Check wind and wave conditions online.⁴ For a NE swell I can recommend the long beach stretch between Oarai and Kashima in the Ibaraki prefecture. There are also very famous (even world famous) point breaks in Chiba prefecture. I avoided them however due to crowds. Also check out Kamakura and Enoshima in Kanagawa prefecture and bring your surfboard and wetsuit. They are very chilled villages with sightseeing opportunities and can have good

³<https://lamp-guesthouse.com/>

⁴<https://de.magicseaweed.com/Japan-Surf-Forecast/61/>

conditions due to their sheltered location when other more exposed breaks are dumped.

- Hiking: If you are interested in hiking the highest mountains in Japan, check out the website I linked on the first page.⁵ This is by far the best hiking guide I could find for Japan's alps. Very close to Tokyo is Tsukuba mountain. It is a relatively easy hike through native forest that takes 2h to the top. If the sky is clear you can see Mt. Fuji from the top. Tokyo people will recommend you to climb Takao-san. However I would rather call this a stroll that you take with hundreds of other people. If you prefer to enjoy nature in silence, don't go there.
- Gym: Gyms in Japan could really need improvement. They are usually very overpriced for the equipment they offer. I think this article⁶ sums it up nicely: A lot of rules, expensive and not 24/7 available. But if you are lucky and have a good gym nearby this can be a great way to meet new people. The membership in a gym in Japan is more like a club membership. So Japanese people might actually come over to get to know you and chat which rarely happens on other occasions.

⁵<https://japanhike.wordpress.com/>

⁶<https://japantoday.com/category/features/lifestyle/finding-a-half-decent-gym-in-japan-a-survival-guide>