

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Arts and Social Sciences/Psychology
Host University	Kyoto University
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY15/16 Semester 2

2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?
- What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?
- Advice on module registration and module mapping

Classes at Kyoto University are seminar-style. There is only one session of about 1 and a half hours per week for each module. Exchange students take classes under special programmes catered specially for us. Kyoto University has programmes like Kyoto University International Education Programme (KUINEP) and General Exchange Programme. I was under KUINEP in which all classes are conducted in English. KUINEP students have to take a minimum of 6 modules, of which at least 2 must be modules listed under the KUINEP programme. Besides KUINEP modules, there are some modules taught in English under the Liberal Arts Department as well as Japanese Language modules. Japanese Language modules are split according to sections like Grammar, Listening, Conversation, Kanji and so on. This means that Japanese Grammar is one module and Japanese Conversation is another module, for instance.

Although taking 6 modules would be considered overloading in NUS, the workload and number of hours spent in classes is relatively light as there is only one class per week for each module. Japanese students do always sign up for these classes in English so the content of the lessons are generally simplified in consideration of their English comprehension abilities, making it easy for exchange students from English-speaking countries to excel. However, the number of Japanese students in each class is very minimal due to English being a barrier so there were little opportunities to mix around with the locals. Moreover, many Japanese students drop out of the classes halfway because of the difficulty in understanding English. I tried to attend a class conducted in Japanese during the "trial period" in order to be able to meet more local students but unfortunately, at JLPT N3 level, I was still unable to comprehend much of the lesson. The lecturer spoke with a slight Kansai accent which did not make it any easier for me. In the end, I found opportunities to interact with the locals through their clubs and societies.

Do map your modules early by emailing the personnel-in-charge of the department which you would like to map the module to. Note that it is difficult to map Japanese Language modules back to NUS because of so many differences. Follow instructions given during the orientation briefing at your partner university at the start of the semester. Keep a diary to remind yourself of important deadlines as it would be overwhelming considering you will have many other non-academic admin matters to attend to as an exchange student.

SEP Report

Please list the courses that you took during SEP. (Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)

Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
	Japanese Intellectual History	2	JS3214	Intellectual and Cultural History of Early Modern Japan	4
	Educational Psychology	2	PL37XX	Psychology dummy code module	4
	Comparative Psychology	2	PL37XX	Psychology dummy code module	4
	Mental Illness and Health Care	2	PL37XX	Psychology dummy code module	4
	Sociology	2	SC2XXX	Sociology dummy code module	4
	Linguistic Anthropology	2	SC2XXX	Sociology dummy code module	4
	Japanese Grammar	2		N.A	
	Japanese Conversation	2		N.A	
	Japanese Listening	2		N.A	

2. Accommodation

What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?

Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?

Do you have any other suggestions?

I stayed at Yoshida International House located on the main campus of Kyoto University. I highly recommend staying in the International Houses. If you cannot cycle like me, it will be best to stay in Yoshida as transport via train/bus will be expensive on a daily basis and takes a lot of time (staying in Yoshida means your classrooms are just downstairs in the same block most of the time). Furthermore, staying in campus means easy access to the university cafeterias which offer a wide array delicious and value-for-money food with no additives or preservatives! If you can cycle, Shugakuin is a good option but they have limited places. Of course, rental differs based on convenience so Yoshida is about thrice the price of Shugakuin but if you stay at Shugakuin and take public transport, the costs will add up to be the same. It is very common to cycle as a means of transport in Kyoto. There are a lot rental bike shops around Kyoto University which you can rent bicycles from. Unfortunately, I am unable to advise on this since I can't cycle.

My experience in Yoshida International House has been wonderful. I have a room of my own with a private bathroom, kitchen area and balcony. Although the place is smaller compared to the Shugakuin equivalent, the place is newer. I recommend having a private bathroom as other exchange students

SEP Report

might not be considerate users of shared bathrooms based on accounts I've heard. Rooms at Yoshida face opposite sides. My room faced the campus itself while the other side faces Yoshida Dormitory. Yoshida Dormitory is a residence for local students and it is infamous as the dormitory for somewhat deviant or unconventional students. Friends who had rooms facing the dormitory complained about loud band instruments being played late at night. However, rest assured that Yoshida Dormitory poses no threat to safety.

3. Activities during SEP

Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?

Do join the international exchange clubs like International Afternoon Tea (iAT) and Kyoto International eXchange Society (KIXS) where you can interact with both local and exchange students. It is also a good opportunity to improve your Japanese speaking skills and for the Japanese to improve their English. I joined iAT and met people who greatly improved their foreign language skills after frequently attending club sessions.

For activities in general, sports or arts circles and the like are generally unwilling to accept exchange students since we will only be here for a short period of time. This is because they have many competitions and concerts and have no resources and time to train students who will not be participating in the long run. However, clubs are much more relaxed so do feel free to attend the welcome teas and ask if you can join their activities!

4. Cost of Living

Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?

Please list travel expenses separately.

I spent about S\$5000. I travelled extensively so I spent a total of estimated S\$9000. However, there are times where I made payments via credit cards as well.

5. Challenges

Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?

As Kyoto is part of the Kansai region, there is slight difficulty in understanding the accent and dialect at times. However it is not a big cause of concern as I got used to the accent and the majority of the locals do not speak with heavy accents nor use dialect extensively. Elderly locals tend to speak in dialects so it is difficult to comprehend them but fortunately, I rarely had the opportunity to interact with them.

Taking trains was rather confusing. Firstly, some limited express trains require a train ticket as well as a

SEP Report

seat ticket. Under the seat ticket itself, there are two types: a reserved seat ticket (you are guaranteed a seat on the train) and a non-reserved seat ticket (seats are on first-come-first-served basis). Of course, the former would cost more. Secondly, major stations have many train lines running both within Kyoto city and to places out of Kyoto. Imagine all the MRT lines in Singapore with the addition of trains to Malaysia, Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia departing from a single train station! I relied heavily on transport apps like 乗換案内. They can be downloaded from Google Play store. The one I used is purely in Japanese but I'm sure there are English apps out there. In 乗換案内, the platform from which the train departs and also the arrival platform is stated. Within each train line, there might be different trains that travel at different speeds to cater to commuters travelling short and long distances. The faster trains (skips small stations and only stops at major stations or interchange stations) allow commuters to reach faraway destinations quickly while the usual trains (stops at every station) serve commuters whose destinations are nearby. Again, transport apps are extremely helpful and so is checking the electronic signboard at the platform itself. Lastly, do be careful of the train's destination or final stop as there are train lines with split routes or the train will break off halfway at a station and move on to different destinations. Some trains do not travel all the way to the terminal station as well. Please check with the train station staff when unsure!

6. Overall SEP Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.

My exchange experience has been nothing short of fruitful. On one hand, I learnt so much more about the lives of the locals, the everyday mannerisms and attitudes of society. I observed how university life was like for the local students at my host university. I got to meet many local as well as fellow exchange students with whom I am still in contact. I learnt how to take public transport in Japan which is one thing that posed a major challenge to me. Besides going to school, I travelled extensively around Japan during the weekends and holidays. Although I did not cover the places in detail, I have been to a total of about 12 prefectures and cities during my exchange. My travels have been extremely enriching for me, broadening my mind and field of knowledge. Most importantly, I have learnt independence and to manage things by myself. The experiences that I have had at Kyoto University will stay with me as wonderful memories for a long time to come. I will never forget the heartwarming people I have met, the breathtaking sceneries I saw and of course all the delicious Japanese food!

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Make the best out of your time during SEP so that you will gain a fruitful experience and memorable part of your university life which you can look back on with no regrets!