

Education Abroad Returnees of the Month April 2018

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2nd year, Pre-Global Studies

UVA Exchange: Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo, Japan, Fall 2017

As an incoming first year Chandler enrolled in one of the inaugural cohorts of the [Forums Curriculum](#), which offers opportunities to explore critical questions of our time by tailoring groups of courses around a central theme/topic/problem. In his Forum, [Mobility and Community](#), students were strongly encouraged to spend fall of second year in Spain, Japan, South Korea, or Italy.



Most interesting class and why? Did you take classes in connection to your major or electives?

Global Network. Taught by Professor Greg Dvorak, this class answered a simple question in a complex way. The guiding question of the class was “how am I personally related to the Pacific Islands?” He unpacked this seemingly simple question through the lenses of Colonialism, Orientalism, Militarism, Otherization, and more. This class covered too much ground to be able to encapsulate succinctly, so I’d like to leave you with one of my favorite anecdotes from this class - did you know that the hula dance in Hawaii was originally a seafaring map, with gestures and movements in the dance corresponding to navigational cues? I’ve got plenty more fun facts and stories from this class, seek me out.

I hope to major in Global Development Studies and Public Policy so I definitely chose my classes to fit these interests, but I was choosing from a rather limited pool of classes. Luckily, the classes in English were all housed within Hitotsubashi University’s Global Education Program and most had a global topic: Global Business & Persons, Global Network, International Organizations, etc.

How was education abroad different than anticipated?

From an ideological perspective, I think the biggest surprise was how I’ve changed more returning to America and processing my experience abroad than I did when I was actually in Japan. Change happens in the rear-view mirror. In terms of what I was surprised by on a small-scale, there were many minor surprises: Japanese fruit is ludicrously expensive, Japan has a strong fetishization for American fashion and culture in general, Nepalese restaurants are everywhere in Tokyo, and while Tokyo is the world’s largest city (with a larger population than Australia), it still feels like a small town in many places if you get off the main metro lines.

Number one way the experience contributed to your growth

Main lesson I've learned is "wherever I am, I'll be there." Through 6 months abroad, I've realized that I can't escape myself, and that my problems and, on the corollary, my talents will always be there with me.

On another note, UVA is an intense environment to say the least and spending half a year away from that helped to show me that the stress I felt first year was because I was so inundated in UVA culture without any escape valve. Through my time abroad, I have been able to cultivate a space within my mind as an escape from the competition environment. When I've stressed over major applications or deadlines or club commitments, I close my mind and put myself at Tama Lake in Tokyo or at Arashiyama monkey park in Kyoto and I realize that I have a calm place of reflection. Essentially, since returning to Grounds, I have grown as I have become more intentional and less-stressed with my involvements because these stressors are self-imposed, and I have the choice to allow them to stress me or to be grateful that I am investing so deeply in myself and in my involvements.



Favorite local hangout, and why?

Oooh easy one – a local Nepalese restaurant. If you're ever in Kodaira, Tokyo, you owe it to yourself to visit Namaste Nepal. This spot has it all – all-you can eat naan, mango lassi, amazing butter chicken curry, friendly Nepalese owners, Japanese-style singing and warm toilets, constant stream of Japanese dubs of American TV shows, and all this for – wait for it – less than \$8. Bam!

Most interesting/delicious cuisine tried

Most delicious meal was not a traditional Japanese food at all. While I love sushi, ramen, gyudon, and all the other staple dishes, nothing beats a good burger. Specifically, the Kobe beef burger from Wanto Burger in Kobe, Japan. Kobe is known for its beef, and for good reason. The wanto burger is a Kobe beef patty topped with garlic mayonnaise, caramelized onions, and seared slices of A1 Kobe beef. All of this meaty scrumptiousness nestled within a toasted bun makes for, in my opinion, the world's greatest burger. If you want American cuisine done right, go to Japan.

Most meaningful experience abroad

Oh boy, this is a tough question to give a single answer to, so I won't even try. Some of my favorite memories: being interviewed on Japanese TV during Halloween, climbing Mt. Fuji on my first day in Japan, swimming in shark-filled beaches at Kamakura (whoops), and attending Hakone Ekiden. If you want to see what these experiences looked like, I have a collection of microfilms made by myself and the other three UVA students who were on the same exchange program with me: Gabriel Aguto, Keelyn McCabe, and Blaise Sevier. The link to those microfilms is here: <https://runningjapanfilm.com/microfilms/>.

Sum up the experience in three words:

Beautifully ephemeral, sadly.

Anything else to add?

Anytime you try to ask someone who recently returned from study abroad, try to steer away from the question “how was [insert country here]” and towards a question that allows them the space to reflect and digest their experience instead of leading to the reheated microwaved corn casserole of an answer that I typically give to this question. To get what I mean, try to answer this - “how would you sum up the last six months of your life?” This question is undoubtedly going to lead to a lot of reduction in depth and overgeneralization. One of the best questions I have received about my experience was “what one seemingly insignificant thing have you missed dearly since your time abroad?” This gave me space to reflect and it forced me to remember a lot of the minutia about Japan that I don’t typically think about. Essentially, I would recommend diving deeper past the surface level if the relationship is fit for that, and if you can’t think of anything, you can’t go wrong with “what is one story you want to share but no one has given you a chance to share yet?”



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