

Graduate School of Law, Doshisha University (Japan)

1. Overall impression

I had an amazing time in Kyoto. The people are incredibly kind and especially at university they take care of you very well. The culture is very different from Western and Swiss culture, which is fascinating but can sometimes also lead to challenging situations.

A lot of Japanese cannot or are afraid to speak English and this language-barrier takes some getting used to. Try to learn and profit from this unique cultural experience as much as possible and always say yes if someone invites you to something, it is usually worth it. I learnt something new everyday. Enjoy!

2. Making preparations

(e.g. administrative matters, finding information)

It is quite a long, tedious process to get admitted to Doshisha and to apply for the Visa, so hang in there!

3. Contacts/Responsibilities

(e.g. important contact persons at the Partner University and Faculty)

Miss Miki Ashida was assigned as a contact person to the Double Degree Students. She can and will help you with almost everything, from getting a bank account to signing your rent agreement.

Also, Nancy, PhD-student from El Salvador has been very helpful and kind to me. She has lived in Kyoto for several years and is fluent in Japanese but also knows what it is like to be a foreign student in Japan.

She certainly would be glad to meet you!

4. Housing / Finding accomodation

There are dormitories near university. Some of them are offered by Doshisha and they are very cheap. However, my friends who lived there complained that the common spaces were rarely cleaned and very dirty.

I lived in a more expensive dormitory, Dormitory Kamogawa Koen, which is very close to the university. I had my own bathroom and breakfast and dinner is included. Of course, you can also rent an apartment.

5. Arrival

If you have a lot of luggage, I suggest you book the MK Shuttle. You can do that online or directly at Kansai Airport. They bring you directly from the Airport to your home address. It costs about 40 Fr.

I suggest you inquire how the internet is provided in your accommodation, because I had to buy a router first.

I suggest you download the Maps.me for Kyoto before leaving, which you can also consult offline, in case you do not have internet when you arrive.

6. Telephone

(e.g. costs, carriers)

I suggest you use Sakura Mobile, which is specifically directed at expats and very easy to use. You can order the SIM card online, it arrives rather quickly and you get 3 GB of internet per month for 30-40 Fr.

Other phone providers might require a contract duration of 2 years. Another possibility is buying a pocket-wifi.

7. Bank account

You will open a bank account with Miss Ashida in the first week in Japan. You will need it, because you will probably work as a Teaching Assistant (TA) and they will transfer your salary to this account.

Otherwise, I just use my Swiss bank account because transferring money from Switzerland to Japan is very complicated and costs money. Often stores and restaurants only accept cash.

8. Transport (e.g. from Switzerland, to the University)

You will probably fly to Kansai International Airport, which is a few hours away from Kyoto. The fastest way to get to Kyoto is probably taking the train, but if you have a lot of luggage and do not know the area, I suggest you take the MK Shuttle Bus.

9. General information about the Partner Faculty and student life

As an international student, the Japanese students and professors will be very interested in you. You will be invited to a lot of dinners and "nomihodai" (all-you-can-drink), so enjoy!

With your friends, you will probably spend a lot of time doing karaoke and in summer drink and eat near Kamogawa river. Also, there are so many different, beautiful cafes in Kyoto! Make sure to enjoy all the different kinds of Japanese food and restaurants, for instance sugari ramen!

10. Teaching and studying at the Partner Faculty

(e.g. program structure, methodology, exams, etc.)

The classes are a lot smaller than at UZH. Depending on what courses you take, you might even be alone with the professors. I profited a lot from these small classes, because it is mostly discussion based and often the topics can be arranged according to your interests. You will often have to prepare for these discussions.

In return, you probably will not have any exams. The grade will be based on your attendance, participation and maybe a short paper or presentation. You may also take political science courses. You will be assigned a study room, where you have your own place to study.

The university offers Japanese language classes, where you will learn the basics and meet international students.

11. City

(e.g. cultural activities, sports, discounts, nightlife, must-sees, short trips, etc.)

Kyoto has culturally a lot to offer, so spend as much time sightseeing as possible. Especially the leaf-changing in autumn (momiji) and cherry blossom season (sakura) are breathtakingly beautiful and there will be light-ups all around the city. On weekends and in the holidays, go travelling around Japan: I recommend Tokyo, Osaka, Hiroshima with Miyajima, Hakone and Koyasan.

Get a bicycle as soon as possible. Kyoto is flat and it is very easy to get around by bike. Also, public transportation is expensive, if you use it everyday. I took up Judo at a dojo near university. This is a great way to make Japanese friends.