

IT University Travel Report

Dear Student, this is a template – the aim is to inspire other students who may wish to follow in your footsteps. You are free to give your report the shape you want and to go beyond the questions, as long as you cover the information asked for below. You are also very welcome to include pictures and contact information – but you need not. Remember that the report will be made available on the intranet.

Host University: Kyoto University, Graduate School of Informatics

Study Programme at IT University: MSc SDT-Design Track

Exchange Agreement or Study Abroad: Exchange Agreement

Courses studied abroad: Computer Vision, Speech Processing, Computational Learning Theory, Conversational Informatics

Exchange Period: Autumn 2017-18

Your stay abroad

What was it like to study at Kyoto university (including choice of courses, academic level, social life at campus)?

Choice of courses: There were limited number of classes offered in English but enough to choose from and have options to change to to make a full semester load.

Academic level: The academic level was decent for a Design-track student with no prior focused education on computer science or mathematics. For Advanced-computing track students the academic level may seem too easy. Most of the coursework was to write reports that either summarised lecture content, answer assignment questions based on lecture content or write reports on related topics. Assignments varied by course. Some courses were taught by multiple professors, and an assignment was given following each professor's group of lectures. Another course, Conversational Informatics, had no regular assignments or final exam, but a final written report due at the end of the semester. Computer Vision had weekly assignments that had to be answered and completed during class.

Social life at campus: The clubs or social organizations at Kyoto University are called "circles" and bring students together who enjoy the same sport, music, interests or activity.

Based on feedback from friends, students first contacted the circle via email to find out meeting times and locations. It took some time to receive replies from emails sent in English.

Once or twice a semester there are school festivals where each circle hosts a booth and there are booths and stalls that serve Japanese food and snacks or host games on campus. There are sports teams who hand out flyers advertising when they play their games. I attended a Kyoto University American football game, which was one of my favourite memories.

There is a student lounge called Kizuna who organises monthly events free to the first handful of international students who sign up for each event. The events range from activity workshops like calligraphy and origami to day trips to other regions with onsen.

The research lab who hosted my exchange had a “welcome party” and an “end of year party” where the lab members and professors all dined out at an izakaya, where you eat small plates of food and drink drinks. These events were where most of my interaction with local students came from and were very enjoyable every time. In general, it was difficult to meet and get to know local students, especially with a language barrier (I didn’t speak much Japanese).

What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?

My motivations were to challenge myself personally and academically. Spending a semester that was new from a cultural standpoint where I also didn’t speak the language would meet the personal challenges. Kyoto University’s Graduate School of Informatics also offered courses like Speech Processing, Computer vision, Computational Learning Theory that complimented my venture towards a specialisation in Machine Learning. The stay met all my expectations. I learned a lot about navigating through a new country and culture, and I also challenged myself academically with mathematics-heavy courses, which I know will be relevant for my future studies and career.

Please describe what you got out of your stay, both personally and academically, and how do you expect it to contribute to your further studies?

Personally, I gained perspective from learning about and understanding the local values and way of life. It was eye-opening to experience first hand how a country can achieve a harmonious way of living and inspire extreme dedication and hard work in their constituents. My favourite memories come from interacting with the Japanese students and members of the host research lab. They were very welcoming and being able to make connections with locals who grew up in quite a different culture did make the world feel smaller. I enjoyed attending and experiencing Japanese traditions and festivals, like celebrating the full moon festival in October at various temples and the Wakakusa fire festival in Nara in January. It was fun to learn about what beliefs and superstitions they held as well as the different gods that they worship at their beautiful temples. I also loved being able to experience the

surrounding nature. I challenged myself personally on a very long and rainy hike on part of the Kumano Kodo trail.

Academically, I gained more fundamental mathematical knowledge that would be relevant to computer science/machine learning areas, for example learning about vectors for computer vision. More importantly, I learned how to learn more technical and mathematical content, given my non computer science background. Although I received exposure to more technical and mathematical subjects, the courses did not give feedback on submitted assignments. Therefore, it was difficult to know how I was doing during the semester.

I believe that the personal and academic gains from my exchange semester at Kyoto University developed adaptability to new situations, environments and cultures. I learned how to approach learning new mathematical and technical topics and ultimately increased my confidence. Adaptability and continuous self-learning are definitely key to a career in data science and machine learning as research in new technology and AI are constantly being developed and released.

Arranging your stay

Please give a short description of the process of arranging your stay:

Once I received the nomination from ITU, I had to find a professor to be my supervisor at Kyoto University during my exchange. I emailed him and he accepted. Then I had to find courses that would transfer over to ITU.

I completed an application for Kyoto University with the selected courses, which went through an internal approval process in Kyoto. Once the department approved my stay, the university sent me a copy of the approval and used it to apply for a Certificate of Eligibility. Once the certificate of eligibility was approved, it was mailed to my address. I submitted the Certificate of Eligibility along with a completed student visa application to the Japanese embassy in Copenhagen. I also submitted some face photos. It took approximately 6 weeks to receive the certificate of eligibility and roughly 1.5 weeks for the student visa to be approved. Luckily, I just supplied requested info to the lab secretary of the host research lab and the university completed most of the work for the certificate of eligibility.

What resources did you find helpful in planning your stay and which people did you use (if any)?

The lab secretary at my host research lab was very responsive and coordinated most of the administrative needs.

This is the link to the different research labs within the Graduate School of Informatics, from which I chose a supervising professor and host lab: <http://www.i.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/introduction/labs.html>.

This is the link to the course descriptions and syllabuses: <http://www.i.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/education/syllabus.html>.

How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?

I applied for a dorm/international housing through the Kyoto University housing application. I received a link to the application system a few months before departure and was notified of the result 1 month before arrival.

Expenses and Financing**Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad**

The majority of my expenses went to paying for travel expenses getting to and from Japan and to paying housing at the dormitory/international house and its utilities, i.e. the electricity bill. Biking is the best way to get around, otherwise you can take the bus and trains with an ICOCA travel card. There are one-day bus passes that save you some money if you take more than 2 bus trips a day. I bought a bicycle from the bike store EIRAN for about 10,000JPY and returned it to the store for 5000JPY back. This is a deal EIRAN offers for students who stay for 6-months.

Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?

I applied to scholarships at Oticon, and the ITU Travel Pool. I also applied to Inge Mogensens Legat. For international students I recommend applying to international organizations like Oticon and the ITU Travel Pool, unless you can write an outstanding application in Danish.

Recommendations for other students:

If you want to rent a car or drive in Japan, I recommend getting a translation of your drivers license in Denmark before leaving and bringing it to Japan.