Your stay abroad

What was it like to study at [the university] (including choice of courses, academic level, social life at campus)?
It was a welcoming challenge – both regarding the academic- and the social life. I went with a fellow ITU student, and it was nice to have a person to share the experiences with. All courses at FUN were in Japanese, which we didn’t know prior to coming to the university, needless to say that it came as bit of a surprise to us. We have since learned that the exchange program is quite new to the university, and that they have plans to make it a lot more accessible for exchange students in the near future. That being said, the professors have been very helpful. The first month was spend trying out different lectures we found interesting and that made most sense to us, which weren’t the ones we had planned to follow in the first place. But the courses we ended up taking were the best fit – both in relation to our study program at ITU, and because the professors in these course were comfortable talking English and translating to us. There were similar challenges regarding the social life. Many students don’t speak English at all, but again people are very welcoming and kind, and everybody try as best they can. We have had Japanese lessons twice a week and further studied by ourselves, so after the first few months we became able to understand, read, and speak basic Japanese, which surely helped us a lot – but it still didn’t lead to very deep conversations.

What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?
It’s a difficult question for me to answer, because I really had no idea what to expect, seen as we were the first students from ITU (and also from any Nordic country) to study at FUN, but in general I have been happy with my stay. There were several reasons why I chose to go to Japan, but mainly I went because I have always found the culture fascinating. They have the world’s best cuisine, a crazy
pop culture, and I have never met a Japanese person, who wasn’t kind and polite. I knew it wasn’t going to be easy studying in Hakodate, and I was up for the challenge regarding cultural differences, but still the differences were often bigger then I had expected.

The fact that Japan historically has been a quite closed country to outside influences, and that they have had success doing things their own way for many years becomes clear when you realize how little English most people speak, even though they are often interested in European- and American culture. I bet you’ll have a completely different experience if you study in more modern cities like Tokyo, Osaka or Kyoto where people are better at English, then in “smaller” cities such as Hakodate.

Besides studying and living in Hakodate, I have had time to visit Tokyo, Seoul, Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe and experienced a lot of different culture, which has been very nice!

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?

I wouldn’t have been without this stay, as it has given me a lot on a personal level, and I have had time to really focus on academic work and personal interests. Because the exchange program is new to FUN, we have found ourselves in many unexpected situations, which we have had to deal with. I find that these unfamiliar situations demand responsibility from you, and help you to make better decisions in future personal- or work related situations, where there’s more than one way of doing things.

If you’re really keen on the social aspect and broadening your international network, I would consider another exchange program, but if you’re up for the challenge, I say go for it. But again I want to emphasize that we were two ITU students at FUN, and I can’t say what my experience would have been if I was on my own for half a year. There weren’t a lot of other exchange students but a few, and of course you also interact and have fun with them.

Arranging your stay

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

Seen as we were the first ITU students at FUN, the first contact was between FUN and ITU’s Eva Maria Steensig Hauerslev, who did a lot of work for us in the beginning. After the initial contact, we became more involved ourselves. This entailed filling out forms from ITU and FUN, vaccines and visa related applications. We also chose our supervisor at FUN, who has been a great help for us throughout our stay, and the university assisted us with finding accommodations in Hakodate. I also spend time applying for scholarships during the months leading up to the trip.

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

Eva was a great help prior to the trip, and our supervisor at FUN has helped us throughout our stay. Regarding the scholarships I used legathåndbogen.dk, which is a really handy tool that helps you plan, execute, and structure the application process.

How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?

As mentioned above, the university provided accommodation options for us from which we chose the one that we thought would suit us the best. I should mention that the apartment was completely empty when we arrived, which meant we had to go buy everything we needed, from forks to a fridge to a bed (futon). We hadn’t received any information that this was the case, so it was a bit surprising. Besides that, the apartment was fine and in walking distance from the university.
Expenses and Financing

Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad

Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?
Yes, and I recommend looking at legathåndbogen.dk, where it is easy to make sense of the different scholarships and to see which ones suit your situation the best. If you’re going to Japan, there is e.g. the Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation.

Recommendations for other students:
If you’re heading to Japan, I definitely recommend that you start learning Japanese before leaving, and maybe know hiragana and katakana a bit. Also, know that not everybody is comfortable speaking English, which can be a challenge, but none the less a fun one, and people are very kind and forgiving, so no shame in going with body language, google translate, and short, basic Japanese sentences to get your intentions across.