

Nihon University, Autumn 2017/Spring 2018

From September 2017 to March 2018 I was enrolled as an exchange student at Nihon University in Tokyo. I undertook the Japanese Language and Japan Studies Programme which is a course offered by Nihon University exclusively to students of its partnership universities.

Nihon University (or Nichidai, colloquially) is one of the largest universities in Japan by total enrolment, and boasts a variety of departments and campuses within central Tokyo as well as further afield. The opportunity to live as a student in the centre of a city with such magnitude was certainly a special experience. The teaching programme also made good use of its location, with regular study trips to world-famous sights including Tsukiji fish market, Harajuku and Meiji-Jingu Shrine.

Together with other exchange students, we were provided with accommodation in a Japanese dormitory, complete with a dorm manager who made clear rules concerning how we were to separate our rubbish, and what type of guests were permitted or not. We were also provided with Japanese-style breakfast and dinner nearly every day, which was a real treat for me, although some of the fish dishes did not sit so well with the other exchange students.

My first dormitory was located towards the East side of Tokyo, close to the incredibly tall Tokyo Skytree, and a short train journey from Tokyo Disneyland and DisneySea. Due to a change in management, we were moved to a different dormitory for the second semester - this time located near the bustling city of Ikebukuro, which is particularly popular with Japanese high school students.

The structure of the classes offered by Nichidai allowed for rapid and immersive learning of both Japanese language and culture. Every morning I took the compulsory language lessons which covered all aspects of communication, from reading and writing (including learning of kanji, the famously difficult characters derived from Chinese), to speaking and listening - including the use of the appropriate style of speech which is dependent upon the relative social status of your partner.

There was also a compulsory afternoon class offered in English, which looked deeply into both positive and negative aspects of Japanese culture. As well as classroom based learning, this course offered special study trips including a day trip to Hakone, a mountainous region famous for its natural hot springs, as well as a trip to see Kabuki, a traditional style of Japanese theatre which is utterly unique. I also took further optional afternoon classes taught mainly in Japanese. Perhaps the most difficult of these was the inquiry class, which involved open-ended research on a topic of my choice, and culminated in me giving a 30 minute presentation (in Japanese) on present-day Buddhism in Japan.

One of the real highlights of the course was the presence of Japanese student volunteers from the university, who would regularly come to our classes and study trips. Not only did they

provide an excellent opportunity to practice conversational Japanese, many genuine friendships were made and weekends were often spent together sampling izakayas and performing karaoke.

My time on the JLSP course has been unforgettable, and I would like to deeply thank Nihon University and the Pembroke International Programmes department. As I myself have roots in Japan, it was a fantastic opportunity to explore my heritage, and I also was able to explore Osaka and Kyoto with my Japanese family over the Christmas break.