



# Report for the SJCC Alexandre Prestele

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## Preface

Since I was a child, the foreign, the distant, the different have always been a source of fascination to me, because they offer innumerable opportunities to make discoveries and to experience new things. Somehow and for inexplicable reasons the country of the rising sun started to exert a mysterious attraction power over me and it became a sort of charismatic entity – one that could be endlessly explored – that would stay at my side until now.

This kind of primal interest in Japan has been reinforced by encounters with Japanese people or people that worked in Japan; people who all gave me in their ways insights into the Japanese culture. At last I have been soaking up every kind of information coming from Japan like a sponge. Being a child and a teenager it started with pop-culture but then, little by little, more things came along; history, philosophy or literature and more pop-culture.

My joy was great when I found out about the Scholarship of the Scholarship Fund of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce. It represents a unique opportunity to spend a year in Japan under great conditions and to make experiences that will never be forgotten.

This report aims to describe some of these experiences from March 2008 to October 2009 and to give useful leads to future scholarship holders. The first two parts are thought as a small guide for the new scholarship holder and summarize the most important issues that are to be taken care of before leaving for and after arriving in Japan. In the third section I will talk about my experience learning Japanese at *KAI* Japanese Language School, looking for an internship and my working experience at the Science and Technology in Society (STS) *forum*. In the next part I will give a micro-introduction to Japanese literature. Finally, a collection of helpful links can be found at the end of this report.

Before starting however, I would like to express my deepest thankfulness to Mr. Dudler and his two associates from the Scholarship Fund for their generosity and to all people that have been supporting me.<sup>1</sup>

Alexandre Prestele

Tokyo the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2010

<sup>1</sup> All photographs © by A.Prestele

# Before Leaving

First of all some things need to be dealt with before you leave for Japan:

1. Formulating a plan
2. Choosing a school
3. Getting a visa or not
4. Finding an accommodation
5. Getting a flight ticket

## Formulating a Plan

One needs to formulate a sort of vision, a master plan for his/her Japan year. A great advantage of the scholarship issued by the SJCC is its flexibility.

Basically it is up to you to plan your escapade to Japan. Some, like Gregory Glanzmann or Emiko Alexejew, decided to start with their internship and to do their language training afterwards. Most of the scholarship holders however, start with the language training and continue with the internship. Some organize their place as interns before they leave Switzerland, whereas others find an internship onsite. There is not one single best way of how to plan your Japan year. It depends on your individual situation and objectives. I decided to squeeze my year in between my bachelor's and master's degree.

I majored in International Affairs at the University of St. Gallen in March 2008 and left for Japan at the end of the same month. Because I did not have a solid background

in Japanese and because I really wanted to learn this language in a thorough way, I decided to study for six months first and to do one or two internships during the following six or nine months. Due to the fact that I had to finish my bachelor's thesis right before my departure for Japan, I did not have the time to look for internships in Switzerland and I left without any certitude regarding my practical training. I thought that I would have plenty of time to look for internship opportunities until September 2008, in Japan.

I found an internship at the STS *forum* starting from January 2009 and decided to bridge the gap between September 2008 and January 2009 by continuing my language training. I started my internship only on a part-time basis, so that I could go on with my language studies in the mornings.

Finally you should contact Mr. Dudler at least nine months before your departure, so that you can go to Basel for the final interview around five months prior to your take-off. Gathering all the necessary documents for the application takes some time. Additionally you might need more time if you wish to enter Japan holding a visa. Count between four and five months until you get it. I contacted Mr. Dudler for the first time in April 2007. After sending him my application dossier I met him in September of the same year for the interview.

<b>Initial Plan: Winter 2007</b>		
April-September 2008	October 2008-June 2009	
<b>Language Training</b>	<b>Internship</b>	
6 Months	9 Months	
<b>Modified Plan: Winter 2008</b>		
April-December 2008	January-March 2009	April-October 2009
<b>Language Training</b>	<b>Language Training &amp; Part-Time Internship</b>	<b>Full-Time Internship</b>
9 Months	3 Months	7 Months

## Choosing a School

There seems to be as many language schools as restaurants in Tokyo. In order to choose an appropriate school I went through a few reports of former scholarship holders and ended up with two options. *KAI* or *Naganuma*. I browsed the Internet for other reviews on said schools and they were excellent in most of the cases. I finally opted for *KAI* for no particular reasons I think. At some point you just have to make a choice. Retrospectively I reckon that the high application costs at *Naganuma* (50'000 Yen) deterred me from applying there. At *KAI* they were just 20'000 Yen and I got a 10'000 Yen discount because I knew somebody who studied there before. So if you choose *KAI*, do not hesitate to mention my name too.

I contacted the school by e-mail and explained them that I wanted to study there for six months. The person that was responsible for my application, Ms. Saito, was very helpful. After having filled out the application form for the school and the visa (see next section) and having attached all necessary documents, I soon had to do a placement test consisting of some grammar and *kanji* exercises and an interview over the phone.

## Visa?

To visa or not to visa: that is the question. Basically – as a Swiss citizen – you can stay in Japan up to six months holding just a simple tourist visa.

When you enter Japan without any special visa, you will be registered as temporary visitor and be allowed to stay for a period of three months. These can be extended for an additional three months at the Tokyo regional immigration bureau in *Shinagawa*.<sup>12</sup>

There are three major benefits holding a tourist visa:

1. You do not have to fill out tons of papers and you can enter Japan easily, which

leaves you more time for organizing your internship from Switzerland.

2. You do not need a re-entry permit if you leave the country.
3. You are eligible to get a Japan Rail and Air Pass, the most economical ways to travel in Japan.

But the tourist visa ranks lowest on the hierarchy of the visas. This means that it will be more difficult for you to open a bank account and that you will have difficulties getting a long-term contract at a phone company.<sup>13</sup> Moreover you might want to stay in Japan for more than a year, say 15 months for example. Finally holding a visa, which allows you to stay in Japan for a protracted period of time just gives you more security and makes you a more credible individual towards the authorities.

Following that logic, I chose to apply for a pre-college student visa. I just did not want any problems opening a bank account. Furthermore such a visa enabled me to take on a part-time job, up to 28 hours a week. A part-time job is a good way to meet people, make new experiences and get extra pocket money for your stay. It definitively adds something to your Japan-experience and I strongly recommend it.

If you apply for a visa, you will get a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE), that proves that you are eligible for the visa in question. Note that it is much easier to apply for another visa, say a working visa, if you are already holding a CoE. This is how I got my pre-college student visa:

I contacted *KAI* and explained them why I wanted to get a pre-college student visa. They sent me a list of necessary documents to send them and a detailed explanation of the procedures to follow. After sending them all documents and after they carefully checked them, they transferred my visa application dossier to the immigration authorities in Tokyo. After accepting my application, they issued me the CoE. Once I had received the CoE by airmail, all I needed to do was going

<sup>12</sup> The easiest way to get there is to take the *Yamanote* line to *Shinagawa* and then to take a bus that will take you directly in front of the immigration bureau. There are signs at *Shinagawa* Station indicating you the way to the bus stop.

<sup>13</sup> I will talk about the mobile phone issue and opening a bank account more extensively later.



to the Japanese Embassy in Bern – with the CoE – to get my pre-college student visa.

All in all, this took about five months. Count about one month to gather all necessary documents and three to four months until you get the CoE delivered to your home.

The pre-college student visa is valid for six months but you can extend it up to two years. If you hold such a visa and you wish to exit Japan temporarily, you will need to get a re-entry permit at the immigration office in *Shinagawa* before your departure, if you do not want to lose your visa. This will cost you 4000 Yen. It is valid for only one re-entry. You can choose to get a multiple re-entry permit for 6000 Yen which gives you the right to leave and re-enter Japan holding a visa, as many times as you want until your visa expires. Note that is the same for working visas.

My pre-college visa was valid until the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2009. In January I told the STS *forum* about my visa-situation and they helped me to change my status of residency from pre-college student visa to working visa (Specialist in Humanities/International Services). To my great surprise, this worked incredibly smoothly. In two weeks, I had my working visa and I was a happy man.

Both, my Japanese language school and my company helped me to get my visa, so do not hesitate, you too, to ask them for support.

### Finding an Accommodation

The simplest way is to get a room in a share house or an apartment via a company that provides furnished accommodation for foreigners. In that way, you will not have to pay the exorbitantly high move-in costs that you would have to with a normal Japanese real-estate company. They are about the equivalent of two to seven months rent! Moreover, the companies for foreigners allow you to move in and out flexibly, whereas you have to commit for at least two years if you go through a normal Japanese real-estate agent.

The most famous real-estate agent focusing on foreigners is undoubtedly *Sakura House*. I would not recommend them though. Many people staying there felt that they were paying too much for what they were getting. I put a

list of alternative companies at the end of this report.

I stayed in a guesthouse from the company *Bamboo House*. The house was conveniently located in *Sasazuka*, a residential area close to *Shinjuku* and *Shibuya*. The house itself was quite shabby but the room was all right and I spent a lovely time with the other tenants, who were mostly Japanese. The drawbacks were that there was no warm water in the kitchen and only one burner.

Alternatively you might consider taking a room in a host-family. I am sure that this must be a nice experience too and it is certainly a good by to practice Japanese.

### Booking a Flight

Getting an airplane ticket is not a big deal. I guess you knew that. Notwithstanding that, you should make sure to choose an airline that allows you to change the date of your return flight at minimal costs. Even if you get a return ticket, which is valid for a year, you will have to choose a return date within the next nine months of your departure. Maybe you would like to go home after ten months or take a little break after, say, six months.

I got a return ticket with Air France: Departure 20<sup>th</sup> of March, return 6<sup>th</sup> of July. After two months, I called them in order to change my flight to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September. I went back to Switzerland for two weeks and got another return ticket that was valid for a year, this time with British Airways. My return flight was scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> of May but I postponed it to a more convenient date. Both airlines allowed me to change my return flights one time for free, without any additional charges. This allowed me to stay pretty flexible.

Having drafted my plan, chosen my language school, gotten my visa and airplane ticket I was finally ready to venture forth to Japan.

## Finally There

You made it! You are finally in Japan. In this part I will discuss the most basic practical

issues such as opening a bank account, transportation and so forth.



### Getting a Mobile Phone

You should get one as quickly as possible so that people can reach you and that you can get in touch with people in emergencies. Furthermore you cannot open a bank account without a mobile phone in most of the cases.

There are three major providers in Japan:

1. Docomo
2. AU/KDDI
3. Softbank (former Vodaphone)

Docomo is the most expensive, whereas Softbank is the cheapest. But Docomo has a much better network connection.

You will have to choose between getting a pre-paid phone or a contractual one. If you are not planning to phone a lot, Softbank has clearly the best pre-paid option. You can charge your phone with 3000 Yen and then get unlimited sms/e-mail for just 300 Yen. You will not be able to receive E-mails form abroad though. Note that in Japan, almost everybody is sending e-mails and not sms.

If you plan to make phone calls on a regular basis you should definitively get a contractual phone. The contract is valid for a year and you can only open it if you have a bank account. However, in most of the cases, you can open a bank account only if you have a mobile phone. Do you see the problem?

If you have nice Japanese friends the easiest way is to go to a provider with them because it will take you a long time to get your phone and it is somehow complicated if you do not speak Japanese. If possible ask your friend if he or she is willing to sign the contract under

his or her name. In that way you can get a contractual mobile phone without having a bank account.

That is what I did. My friend signed the contract, I chose the phone and I paid her the phone bills every month. We chose Docomo because my friend could get a special family discount as her whole family had Docomo phones. This is a special case I guess. Most foreigners would recommend Softbank because it is the cheapest deal, both pre-paid and on a contractual basis.

### The Alien Registration Card

Another thing you should do quickly is getting your Alien Registration Card (ARC). All foreigners staying in Japan over 90 days have to get one.

In order to get it, you simply need to go to the city ward office (*kuyakusho*, 区役所) of your ward (*ku*, 区).

You will need your passport and two photographs with a special format. It is not going to work with photos that you took in Switzerland. You can find photo-booths at almost every station. Make sure to choose the correct format (45 x 35 mm).

It takes about two to three weeks to get the card but you will be issued a paper that proves that you are going to get one. Do not try to open a bank account only having this temporary piece of paper: It does not work. You need to have the plastic card to open it!

The ARC is quite important. It is your major piece of identification, proves that your visa is valid and exempts you from carrying your passport with you. Always have your ARC by your side, since you are required by the Japanese law to do so. Should you be stopped by a grim policeman and asked for your papers (rather unlikely, but you never know), and not have your ARC, you could be arrested.

If you lose it, well, that does not matter. Simply go to your ward office and get a new one, for free.

### Opening a Bank Account

In order to open a bank account in Japan you need three things:

1. An Alien Registration Card

## 2. A phone

Depending on your visa, patience and luck and from clerk to clerk.

### Entering as a temporary visitor

Opening a bank account in Japan with a tourist visa seems something of an odyssey. If you have read reports from past scholarship holders I am sure that you know what I mean. Sometimes it seems to work smoothly and easily without any complications and sometimes the scholarship holder in question found him/herself without a bank account for three months. The lesson to be drawn here is: Be intractable and patient.

According to Japan's bank policy, foreigners holding visas that do not allow them to stay over six months cannot open a bank account. However, former scholarship holders managed to open bank accounts only being tourists. In that case you need to explain your situation to the clerk, in English, Japanese or with signs and convince him that you are going to stay in Japan for an extended period of time. Here it might be helpful to take some documents with you that prove that you are going to stay for a year; for example the tentative agreement and the excerpts of regulations of the SJCC. It might also be helpful to go to the bank with a Japanese friend that will support you linguistically. If you are not successful at one branch office, just try another one, as the severity with which the regulations are applied seems to vary from branch to branch and from clerk to clerk.

### Entering with a visa that allows you to stay for more than six months

This is a judicious option because you preventively minimize the hassle of running around from branch office to branch office and the stress of not being sure to be able to open a bank account. As mentioned before, this was one of the reasons why I chose to get a pre-college student visa.

After getting a mobile phone and my ARC I went to *Shibuya* to open a bank account at *Shinsei Bank*. One of my classmates recommended it to me for four reasons:

1. The staff speaks English and all the documents come in English.

2. You do not need to put a minimum amount of money on your account in order to open it. You can open it with 0 Yen, which is very convenient.
3. The procedures are fast and simple and you do not need a Seal (*Inkan/Hanko*). It took me only about 20 minutes to open a bank account!
4. You can withdraw your money 24 hours on 24 at 7/11 convenient stores for free. You can withdraw money at other convenient stores, bank or post-office ATMs but depending on the time, you are going to be charged around 200 Yen. However, they will be automatically reimbursed at the end of the month.

*Shinsei Bank* have a free hotline with English speaking personal that you can contact whenever you have a problem and you can consult your bank account via the Internet in an uncomplicated way.

### The Seal Issue

The Japanese seals are called *inkan* or *hanko* although *inkan* is the more common term. They are used to prove one's identity much like the signature in the West. Do you really need them or not? Well, I got an *inkan* with my family name in *hiragana*. I did not use it one single time during my stay.

However, I heard several stories from people getting into trouble not having a seal. Somebody told me, that he had troubles when he wanted to use his credit card. Shop assistants would meticulously check if his signature corresponded exactly to the one on his credit card. In some cases he could not pay because he – as most of us – failed to reproduce a perfect copy of his signature. Another person told me that she needed an *inkan* to open a bank account.

In my opinion, you do not need to have one, except if you want to bring back a nice and exotic souvenir.

### Getting around in Tokyo & Japan

This part is thought as a basic navigation guide for different means of transport in Tokyo and Japan.



## Basic navigation

Tokyo's core, which consists of 23 wards, stretches itself over 600 square kilometres and counts more than eight million inhabitants. Shinjuku station was registered in the Guinness World Records as the world's busiest station in terms of number of passengers. Over 3.5 million people per day took a train in Shinjuku in 2007.

Tokyo is an urban maze that looks like an architectural patchwork that never seems to sleep. It is a sort of organic entity that re-invents itself everyday. The famous Japanese architect *Ashihara Yoshinobu* called it in that respect the amoeba city.

It is not always easy to orient oneself correctly in such a labyrinth. Especially because the streets – except for the big ones – have no names and are not systematically numbered like in Europe. Tokyo has got a totally different system of classification; one that is messy, not chronological and literally defies any sense of rationality. Here are some basics:

As mentioned before, Tokyo's core consists of 23 wards (*ku*, 区). Each *ku* has of approximately ten neighbourhoods or *kinjo* (近所). These are referred to by proper names rather than numbers. Now, each *kinjo* is subdivided in four to six “mini-neighbourhoods”, which are separated in 30 to 50 blocks. Those mini-neighbourhoods are called *chôme* (丁目). Each block is individually numbered. Do not worry if you find block 45 next to block 23, which is next to block twelve. This is normal for Tokyo. Note that small *kinjo* are not subdivided in *chôme*.

Last but not least, each block counts a few houses or buildings, which are separately numbered. Confused? Well let us look at a typical address in Tokyo:

3F, Kudanshita Tokyu Shin Sakura Bldg.  
1-3-3, Kudan-Kita Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo

First you got the floor number of the place and then the name of the building. Then you got the famous triple-number. The first number refers to the *chôme*, the second to the block in that *chôme* and the third to the number of the building in the block. Then you got the name of the *kinjo*, here “*Kudan-Kita*”.

Finally the address finishes with the *ku*. Got it?



In order to help you navigate, you should get a city atlas or a smart phone. I recommend *Kodansha's "Tokyo City Atlas: A Bilingual Guide"*. You can find it in big bookstores like [\*Kinokuniya in Shinjuku\*](#) (6F).

The orientation in Tokyo is basically visual. It is like walking through a forest. Instead of remembering a certain stone or tree you will have to remember a convenience store or vending machine.

## Train & Subway

Tokyo has got the most extensive rapid transit system of the world in a single metropolitan area. Nonetheless, it is quite easy to get around by train and subway.

Almost all stations have directions written in English. The easiest way to get around is to buy a SUICA or PASMO card. You can charge them with money and the amount will be automatically deduced when you pass them on the card-reader at the ticket-gates. PASMO and SUICA work for buses as well. You can get them at almost all stations at special vending machines, which can be found next to the normal ticket machines. They cost 500 Yen.

The discount offer for train or subway tickets in Tokyo is fairly meagre. But one good way to save money is to get a commuter pass. This pass enables you to ride a certain trajec-



tory – one that you choose yourself – for a flat rate for as many times as you want for one, two or three months. You can convert your PASMO or SUICA card to a commuter pass by inputting the desired stations at the vending machine.



## Bus

You will not need it so much but sometimes it is quicker to take a bus, because you would have to make significant detours taking a train. Moreover, riding a bus allows you to take a glimpse at Tokyo out of the bus windows. There are two different fee-systems depending on the bus company that you use.

The first one is a fixed-price system. You pay a fixed amount of money when you enter the bus and you get out wherever you want.

The second one functions by distance. When you enter the bus, you will have to take a ticket with a number on it. There is a display at the front of the bus with numbers and different prices below them. When you get out, check the number of your ticket and the price that matches it on the display.

## Take a Ride

You might think: What?! Using a bicycle in Tokyo?! This is sheer folly. The streets are packed with cars, people and scooters and on top of that the driving direction is inverted to ours. Furthermore, why should you ride a bicycle in a mega-city?

Well I thought the same when I arrived but as a bicycle adept, I could not resist to get one and it proved to be a good investment. Riding a bicycle is cheaper and faster than riding a train. It allows you to be outside and to dis-

cover streets and all sorts of places that you would not have seen otherwise. It prevents you from being sandwiched in trains during rush hours and it is good for your health. It makes you more mobile and places more accessible.

A bike is cheap and easy to get. Check websites such as [gaijinpot](#), [metropolis](#) or [craigslist Tokyo](#) for second-hand bikes. I found mine on [gaijinpot](#) for 4000 Yen. Alternatively you can buy a new one for 10'000 Yen, for example at [Don Quixote](#) (ドンキホーテ).

All bicycles in Tokyo have got a registration number. It is imperative that you get one too as well as a certificate that proves that you are the owner of your bike. Otherwise you might get into trouble. Your bike might be confiscated and you will have to pay a fee and possibly spend one hour or more at a police station. I got stopped a couple of times and I was happy to have such a number.

If you buy a new bike the registration certificate will be given to you at the bike shop. Just fill in your name, address, phone number and birthday. If you buy a second-hand bike, make sure that the owner brings his or her registration certificate along. Go with him or her to the next bike shop and change the certificate to your name. That is what I did and I never got into trouble.

When you park your bike, make sure to park it at a place where parking is allowed or lock it to a bar or any other appropriate device. Otherwise your bike may be confiscated and you will have to pay 3000 Yen. This does not happen really often though. You can park your bike at any place if you do not leave it there for a long time. Good places to park it without having to fear confiscation are convenient stores, super-markets and pachinko parlours.

Finally you can ride either on sidewalks or roads and in any direction you like. Cyclists in Tokyo ride on the left and right hand side.

## Traveling in Japan

If you have time, you should definitely travel in Japan. There are many different places to see and just staying in Tokyo will not make you discover Japan. It will only show you one aspect of it.

If you have a tourist visa, you should get a Japan Rail Pass. It is the most efficient and cheapest way to travel long distances. It is valid for almost all *shinkansen* and all trains and ferries from the Japan Railways Group (JR).

If you do not have a tourist visa, you cannot get such a delightful Japan Rail Pass. In that case, a cheap way of travelling is taking the night bus. The company [123Bus](#) provides very advantageous offers for destinations such as Osaka and Kyoto. Alternatively you can get a *seishun 18* Ticket. Those tickets cost 11'500 Yen, allow you to travel for five days all over Japan using local and rapid trains from JR and can be shared with other persons. It is really a cheap way of travelling but not a fast one. Tokyo/Kyoto takes eight hours and you will have to change trains three times. Consider the Japan Air Pass too!

## Personal Experience

After having given you practical hints I would like to talk a little bit more about my own experiences at school and at work.

### Learning Japanese at Kai Japanese Language School

*KAI* seems to be one of Tokyo's most popular Japanese language schools. Boa Lingua recommends it for example and you can find *KAI* advertisements in local newspapers and magazines.

The school is located in *Shin-Ôkubo*, the Korean town. Do not expect ultra modern facilities unless you want to be disappointed. The building is quite old, the chairs and desks are small and the insulation of the staircase is so bad that one feels like being outside. The classrooms and the reception are, of course, well insulated. On the other hand, *KAI* had just equipped itself with new apple computers when I started my studies there. But all those things do not say much about the quality of the lessons and the way of teaching at *KAI*.

I studied Japanese for nine months and all in all I was pretty satisfied with both, the school and my progress. There are eight general

course levels plus an additional business Japanese level. The classes are exclusively held in Japanese and at all levels you will have at least two teachers. Classes are split in different modules, which are as follows:

1. Grammar
2. Listening
3. Reading
4. *Kanji*
5. Culture

Note that those modules might change in higher levels. Starting from level four there will be an additional conversation module for example. The general course consists of four 50 minutes lessons per day, from Monday to Friday and one term lasts three months. Most of the classes count about ten students.

I started from level one and went up until level four, which is something like intermediate. At the beginning the focus of the lessons was on grammar and *kanji* rather than on conversation. But the higher the level gets, the more you will have to talk and work in an independent manner. The first levels – by contrast – are more based on routine exercises and endlessly repeating different grammatical patterns. This might be a little bit dry at the beginning, but I think that it is almost always like that when you are learning a new language.

One thing that is very nice at *KAI* is *Maeda House*. *KAI* itself produced this book, which comes in three volumes. Basically it is a sort of *manga*. The set is a host family, the Mae-das, and their guests, which all come from different countries. The book is divided in a lot of small episodes. The interesting thing is that all the different characters represent an archetypical, Japanese way of behaviour with its matching style of speech. This is a good way to train your ear and to get used to different expression modes, tones, stresses etc., that are typical for Japan. I found that an innovative and fun means to get more comfortable with the language.

As I mentioned before, I started from scratch. If you can avoid that, avoid it. I felt that I was losing my time a little bit. Level one is just an introductory lesson, where you

will spend your time repeating *ohayou gozaimasu* and *konnichiwa*. If you have some Japanese knowledge you should try to get to level two straightaway. When I was in Switzerland, *KAI* told me that I could go to level two if I reviewed my Japanese. Since I was busy with my bachelor's thesis I could unfortunately not do that. So, if you have not practiced your Japanese for a while and if you are worse than intermediate, you should brush up your Japanese a little.

Finally I must say that the majority of the teachers were satisfying. They explained well and slowly and took the time to listen to one's questions.

I know some people that went to *Naganuma* Japanese School. In comparison *Naganuma* looks much stricter than *KAI*. There, rules are enforced more rigorously. In the breaks for example, staff members will kindly remind you that no other language than Japanese is to be spoken. The curriculum looks heavier too.

Of course the school matters because it sets you in a particular environment and because it will teach you using specific methods. But in the end it all depends on you. Just going to school and sitting there will not help your Japanese to improve. You have to be proactive and try to develop learning-routines that you can apply every day.

### Looking for an Internship

Ideally, you should make sure to get an internship while still in Switzerland. This will allow you not to be stressed out in Japan looking for one and on top of that you will be able to focus on other things, such as learning Japanese or discovering the culture. If you go to Japan already knowing that you have an internship, you just feel more confident I guess. I do not really know because I did not have one when I left. In retrospect, it was not that bad to look for an internship onsite as I could meet and talk to people directly.

I did a lot of networking at all sorts of different events and collected as many business cards as I could. Thereafter I was busy writing tons of cover letters, updating my CV and going to interviews. I got a couple of internship offers but they were not satisfactory to me. Either, the conditions were bad – the

companies would not even cover transportation or they would not help me to get a proper visa (note here that paid internships are unusual in Japan) – or there was something wrong with the timing and my Japanese skills.

In Tokyo there are many places that are good for networking; the Luncheons at the SCCIJ, the lectures at the Goethe Institute or the Japan Foundation, just to name a few. If possible, spend some time creating a business card. It is really a useful tool in Japan. Also feel free to contact Alumni of your university, other Swiss expats or ex-scholarship holders that are now living in Japan. Finally I was introduced to the *STS forum* by Mr. Moesner and got a place there as an intern.

Koji Omi, deputy and former minister of finance, has called this NPO into life. It is based in Tokyo and annually organizes a forum in Kyoto where scholars, business and media leaders from all over the world are invited to discuss the challenges of science and technology (for more information: [www.stsforum.org](http://www.stsforum.org)). In short, I chose to do an internship at the *STS forum* for three reasons:

1. I could completely identify with the purpose of the *STS forum*.
2. It is a very small NPO. We were just 12 people and it looked like there was going to be a lot of work to do. Great, I thought.
3. Last but not least, the conditions were excellent. I got 100'000 Yen per month – which is really good for Japan – and the transportation costs were covered too. On top of that, they helped me to get a working visa.

### Working for the *STS forum*

Let me start with a conclusion. The *STS forum* is a rather special, maybe unique organization. Without wanting to go into too many details, I can say that it is a kind of hybrid-company, somewhere between a traditional Japanese one and a western-like one.

Out of the twelve-something employees, the majority were Japanese but the management-style was very informal and the hierarchy was pretty flat. Perhaps this comes from the fact that the Secretary-General, Ms. Yu Serizawa, has been brought up and studied in France.

People spoke not much and the focus seemed to be on the computer screens. Notwithstanding those circumstances, everybody was very friendly and helpful.

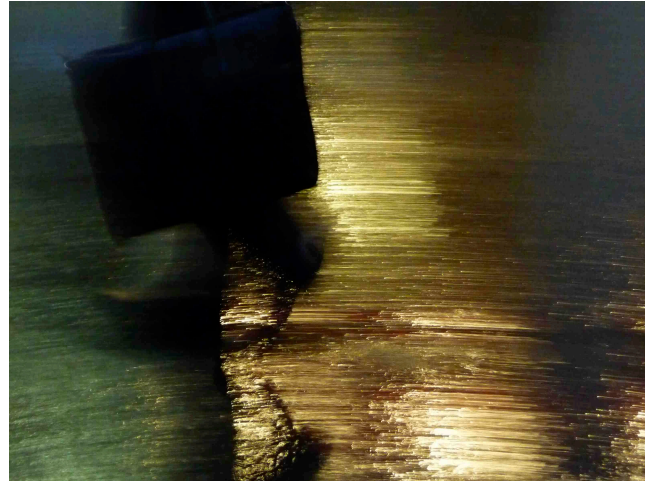
Also, most of the Japanese employees spoke English very well because of the international nature of the forum. In that regard, having an excellent command of English and a good one in French will be a great advantage for you. You will not be required to speak Japanese, but you will hear it all the time. It literally depends on you how much you will make use of it. I only used it for informal chats with my co-workers. Japanese is not indispensable but definitively a plus if you have advanced or proficient skills. In that case, you may be more independent and the array of possible jobs you will be asked to do deliver will be bigger.

The tasks at the STS *forum* seem all to be of organizational nature, pretty repetitive and mechanical. Proofreading letters, writing letters, creating excel-tables, printing envelopes etc. That sounds not really exciting but things got better from June, when I started to be a full-time intern.

From that time on, another employee and me replaced the person that had been responsible for the Ministerial Delegations. I got more responsibilities, more autonomy and people started to expect more from me, which was both, enjoyable and gratifying at the same time. The things I had to do were more versatile and I had to manage my time and set priorities myself. I had to work fast, precisely and think in a holistic way, bearing in mind all the processes and having information ready at any time. Given the fact that one does not get very well introduced to the way the STS *forum* works and that the workflows often stay nebulous, this was a good challenge.

Besides the trips to the embassies with Ms. Serizawa, the best time of the internship remains September – the month preceding the forum – and the forum itself. Get ready to go home by taxi after the last trains!

The forum lasts only three days but the whole team will move to the International Conference Centre in Kyoto one week prior to the event in order to prepare onsite. There, I interacted much more with my colleagues and it was just great to meet the participants and to escort ministers and ambassadors.



All in all I found it an exciting and enriching internship, although I would have liked to take on more responsibilities and to get more varied tasks. Nonetheless, I could learn a lot and I feel that I could definitively improve my organizational and computer literacy skills.

I would like to note here that you might be disappointed if you expect this internship to be helpful for networking. You will not get introduced to people and you will not have a lot to do with your co-workers outside of work.

This is what I experienced. For other accounts describing internships at the STS *forum*, I recommend you to have a look at the reports of following persons:

- Fraziska Bünzli
- Emiko Alexejew
- Nina Schneider
- Caroline Merier



# Japanese Literature

Each country has its geographical and architectural landmarks that give it a distinct character; seas, mountains or monuments for example. They are an integral part of the country and serve as a symbolic representation of it. They all become an indispensable component of the culture in question. Imagine Mecca without the Kabala, Egypt without the Nil or the Pyramids of Giza.

Well, it is a little bit the same with a country's most famous authors; authors of national stature. They vividly reflect the mentality of the people of their country at a certain time because they embraced an awareness of the great questions of their age. Ultimately their literary works become a sort of autonomous sign, symbol or metaphor representing their culture and its identity. In that sense, reading Japanese literature might give you a glimpse at the Japanese culture and let you discover it from another angle.

To help you navigate in the realm of Japanese literature, I gathered a few of the most prominent authors of the land of the rising sun. They are the literary Mt. Fujis and cherry blossoms of Japan. In brackets I put their date

of birth and death as well as their most significant work. Good lecture.

**Kawabata Yasunari** (1899-1972, The Dancing Girl of Izu)

**Natsume Sôseki** (1867-1916, Botchan)

**Mori Ôgai** (1862-1922, The Dancing Girl)

**Akutagawa Ryûnosuke** (1892-1937, Rashômon, In a Bamboo Grove)

**Tanizaki Junichirô** (1886-1965, The Makioka Sisters)

**Shiga Naoya** (1883-1971, The Shopboy's God)

**Shimazaki Tôson** (1872-1943, The Broken Commandment)

**Mishima Yukio** (1925-1970, Confessions of a Mask)

**Dazai Osamu** (1909-1948, The Setting Sun)

**Edogawa Ranpo** (1894-1965, The Apparition)

**Murakami Haruki** (1949, Kafka on the Shore)

**Murakami Ryû** (1952, Coin locker Babiers)

**Oe Kenzaburo** (1935, A personal matter)



# Useful Links

This part brings together a few websites that I found quite handy during my stay in Japan.

## Culture and Leisure

### Tokyo Gigg Guide

<http://www.tokyogigguide.com/>

### Superfuture

<http://www.superfuture.com/>

### Pingmag

<http://pingmag.jp/>

### International Creative Network

<http://asoboo.com/>

### Superdeluxe

<http://www.super-deluxe.com/#LCDD%20+%20Friends>

### Tokyo Tourism Info

<http://www.tourism.metro.tokyo.jp/english/>

### Japan National Tourist Organization

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/>

### Tokyo Essentials

<http://www.tokyoessentials.com/>

### Tokyo Parks

<http://www.tokyo-park.or.jp/english/>

## Accommodation

### Sakura House

<http://www.sakura-house.com/>

### Bamboo House

<http://www.tokyo-accommodations.com/>

### Fontana

<http://www.fontana-apt.co.jp/home.html>

### Rent in Tokyo

<http://www.rentintokyo.com/>

### Leopalace 21

<http://en.leopalace21.com/>

### Ichii Corporation

<http://www.japt.co.jp/>

## Info and Intelligence

### Japan Today

<http://www.japantoday.com/>

### Metropolis

<http://metropolis.co.jp/default.asp>

### Seek Japan

<http://www.seekjapan.jp/>

### Gaijinpot

<http://www.gaijinpot.com/>

### Observing Japan

<http://www.observingjapan.com/>

### Japan Meteorological Agency

<http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/indexe.html>

## Transportation

### Hyperbia-timetable/Route-finder

<http://grace.hyperdia.com/cgi-english/hyperWeb.cgi>

### Japan Railways Group

<http://www.japanrail.com/>

### Japan Rail Pass

<http://www.japanrailpass.net/>

### 123Bus

<http://willerexpress.com/bus/pc/3/top/>

## Swiss Related Websites and International Relations

### Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan

<http://www.sccij.jp/>

### Swiss Club Japan

<http://www.swissclub.jp/>

### Institut Franco-Japonais

<http://www.institut.jp/fr>

### Goethe Institut

<http://www.goethe.de/ins/jp/tok/deindex.htm>

### Japan Foundation

<http://www.jpj.go.jp/e/>

### Immigration Bureau of Tokyo

<http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/english>

## Book Stores

### **Kinokuniya Shinjuku**

[http://maps.google.ch/maps?q=kinokuniya  
shinjuku map&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-  
US:official&client=firefox-  
a&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&hl=de&tab=wl](http://maps.google.ch/maps?q=kinokuniya%20shinjuku%20map&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&hl=de&tab=wl)

### **Tower Records Shibuya**

[http://maps.google.ch/maps?q=kinokuniya  
shinjuku map&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-  
US:official&client=firefox-  
a&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&hl=de&tab=wl](http://maps.google.ch/maps?q=kinokuniya%20shinjuku%20map&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&hl=de&tab=wl)

### **The Blue Parrot – Used English Books**

<http://www.blueparrottokyo.com/>

### **Good Day Books – Used English Books**

[http://www.gooddaybooks.com/gooddaybook  
s/contents/home/?language=english](http://www.gooddaybooks.com/gooddaybooks/contents/home/?language=english)

