

Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce  
Scholarship Program  
Midterm Report



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## SUMMARY

→Should you not have much time, the most relevant information is placed at page 11;

The primary purpose of this midterm report is to help the holders of Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (henceforth, SJCC) Scholarship decide about the details of their Japanese Year as well to encourage the potential candidates to make use of this possibility and apply for this scholarship. It is directly oriented toward the reader, presenting very practical and direct approach. The secondary objective is to summarize six months the author has spent so far in Japan, highlighting the most important events. It is also of pivotal importance to draw attention to practical tips, derived from personal experience, that might help others plan and conduct Japanese Year more efficiently.

This report consists of five main chapters, which focus on simultaneously illustrating my experiences as well as providing handful information regarding living in Japan. The first chapter describes the general motivation for undertaking the Japanese Year. Second and third parts present insights into effective planning and settling down in Japan. Chapter four introduces in more detail the first six months of author's stay in Japan, firstly at the internship with AIESEC in Kobe and then at a Kyoto Japanese Language School (henceforth, KJLS). Final section illustrates handful tips that will undoubtedly be helpful for people interested in living in Japan.

Finally, the hope of author is that this report presents useful insights for general public at large, but especially for:

- Potential SJCC Scholarship applicants, searching for a motivation
- Scholarship recipients, searching for further information
- People interested in living in Kyoto or studying at KJLS
- Non-Swiss citizens
- People interested in alternative approaches to planning a Japanese Year
- Vegetarians
- People who want to get the fullest of their Japanese Year, whilst staying at the budget

# CHAPTER I

## WHO AND WHY

### Foreword

First and foremost, I would like to thank once again Mr. Paul Dudler and whole SJCC for supporting me to live that Japanese dream. As a token of my gratitude, I intend to write this report as a very direct form of communication between me, the person who has been conducting the Japanese Year, and you, the potential or current recipient. I apologize in advance for a maybe excessively personal way of writing, but I trust in this way I will be able to convey all the useful information more effectively. Before writing more specifically about my experiences in Japan, I believe some bio data about me could give you a chance to find some similarities between the two of us:

- My name is Daniel Kaluza
- At the moment of writing I am 24 years old
- Swiss resident, but a Polish citizen (ergo European Union passport, but not a Swiss citizen)
- I have just graduated from University of St. Gallen, Master of Arts in Strategy and International Management
- Fully pledged lacto-ovo vegetarian (i.e. no fish, meat or chicken ingredients, milk and egg is all right)
- Focused on entrepreneurship, planning to do my own business in/with Japan (most probably import/export activities)
- Spoke *some* Japanese at the time of application (circa 300 kanji, casual conversation)
- In love with Japan

I hope this report will be useful for anybody interested in SJCC scholarship, but the more similarities you can find between my description and yourself, the more valuable information you are likely to find in this report.

### Why Japan



Why? Because it is the most different place you can imagine on earth. Many countries have their unique characteristics, but I do not think any of them compare to Japan. It has been my childhood fascination; it started immaturely as a typical anime and manga obsession (which, frankly, continues to this day), to evolve into decision to connect my future career with Japan as an entrepreneur. I have participated in 2009 in a six-months-long student exchange with Keio University, Tokyo, and at that time my fascination in Japan has only increased. On the personal side, I consider Japan as

simply the most beautiful place out of 62 countries I had a chance to traveled to; on the professional side, I believe foreigners can have great chance to grow in Japan. Finally, even though Japan is in the continuous economic stagnation since 90s, it is a place full of opportunities. Finally, when speaking about my Japanese dreams many times I have heard the question: Daniel, why not China? China is growing, China is booming, China is... but China *is not* Japan. I believe that as long as you follow your passion, you will make best out of any situation.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **PLAN IT WELL AND REAP THE BENEFITS MOST ARE MISSING**

#### **Planning of the Japanese Year**

I think other reports extensively describe the process of application for a scholarship and the preparation, so I prefer to focus as much as possible on providing some new valuable information. My process of planning the Japanese Year followed the subsequent order:

#### **Started preparations for scholarship 01/03/2011**

I learned about the scholarship from a friend at the University; made research about the fund, read reports, interviewed previous recipients; prepared for the application process and interview.

#### **Received the acceptance 26/05/2011**

I researched in more detail the language schools; extensively examined the employment possibilities (cannot stress it enough: the more time you spend on research, the better results will you get!); prepared visa-wise; participated in the Boston Career Forum (a three day employment convention with over 200 Japanese companies) where I interviewed with few pre-selected companies.

#### **Secured full time employment at Rakuten (starting 01/10/2012!) on 11/10/2011**

I passed the interview with few companies, but decided to focus on Rakuten; after two face-to-face and three Skype interviews, received the full-time employment offer at the most prestigious e-commerce company in Japan.

#### **Started first internship by AIESEC 27/02/2012; Started language school 01/04/2012; Scheduled to start full time employment 01/10/2012**

Described more in Chapter III.

In short, I strongly believe that the more time you prepare and plan your Japanese Year, the better results you will get. You should start as soon as possible and think of different potential plans, as well as make some backup planning. Finding a language school is a lesser issue, but few tips on the process:

- Think of cities you would like to live in (small vs. big town): remember that most working opportunities will be in Tokyo, so you have to decide if you want to spend both language school in Tokyo (opportunity to get better, deeper relationships with friends/business network) or in different cities (opportunity to see more of Japan). I recommend the latter – Japan has a lot to offer, and just staying in Tokyo will limit your vision of the country
- Get the list of available language schools from the website: read what they offer, compare pricing and overall package
- Read extensively through reports on the website: if you have any questions about experiences at specific schools, contact the writers. We all feel an amazing thankfulness towards the SJCC fund, so I am sure everybody will be willing to help you

Getting the job in Japan is more difficult. Most of the SJCC scholarship recipients tend to firstly go to the language school and search for an employment whilst being in Japan. Though I believe you should keep it as an option, I am convinced that finding an internship a priori is definitely better. Many Japanese companies (especially big, listed corporations) employ at most twice a year: in April and October (after the graduation of the local universities). The process of finding an employment is usually **very** long in Japan – local students usually secure it a year before graduation. Searching for something just few months before desired employment date is possible, but seriously limits your options. Some general tips on searching for the employment:

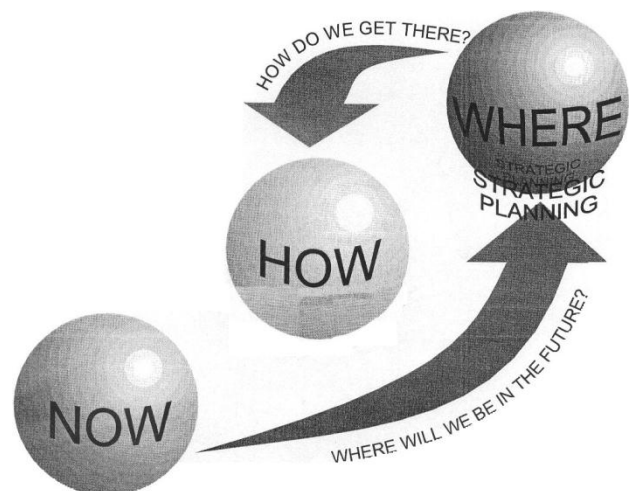
- Decide your career path: you can of course find employment just for the sake of being in Japan, but respect your time and search for something that will help you grow more. If you are a student, I recommend using your University's career center to discuss the profession that will match your skills/interests

- Realistically evaluate your Japanese skills and match it with potential companies: search, search and again search! To find companies, check the companies previously employing SJCC scholarship recipients and do an **extensive** Google search. Every minute you spend here will save a lot of your time in the future
- Contact whomever can help you: use your network for contacts in/about Japan; use LinkedIn to search for positions; after you read the information on the company website, write to HR departments (Japanese are very polite and they will almost always address your questions; that also shows them your interest in the company)
- Do it slowly over a long period of time: your results will be much better than just rushing with it few days/weeks before leaving for Japan
- Search for career events: if you can find Japanese companies it would be great, but do not forget that many international companies have their offices in Japan (safest bet if your Japanese is not fluent)

You can really make the Japanese Year as effective as you wish. In my talk with professionals in Japan and previous scholarship recipients I have heard countless times that with my weak Japanese and lack of experience it will be extremely difficult to find *any* employment, and I should settle for the first thing I find. Although I believe it is difficult, I am also convinced that if you plan it in advance you can overcome most of the obstacles and 'impossibilities'. Therefore, without raising your expectations, I will just tell you that: believe in yourself, because absolutely anything you want is in your reach.

### Timing and the composition

Firstly, few very basic tips about the timing. Japanese school terms are slightly different than European ones. Language schools I have encountered start their semester twice a year: in April and October. **Very importantly**, you have to apply for your school of choice much in advance (generally at least 5 months!) In my case, the deadline was 15<sup>th</sup> Nov for a school that starts on 1<sup>st</sup> April – which once more highlights the 'plan well in advance' advice that I am giving you. Regarding the applying for a job, you should bear in mind that Japanese apply for corporate positions a year in advance before their employment. That does not have to be necessarily the case with your employer, but the best advice I can give you is to simply check the employment policies of the company you want to apply to. Again, if the information is not on their website, I am pretty convinced contacting HR will help you to answer your doubts.



Secondly, as I mentioned already few times in this report, you should be aware the scholarship is very flexible with the composition of your Japanese Year. There are two main formal conditions: you have to spend at least a year in Japan, out of which at least 3 months is a language school. I believe that every report I have read so far about the Japanese Year started with a language school and then followed by an employment. Whilst this common approach has many advantages and I do not attempt to discredit it, I would just like you to think a little more flexibly. Since we all go to Japan to become more fluent in the language, I would like to suggest another approach, in my opinion the more efficient one: first go to Japan (preferably to work, but even traveling would be a great experience) and then follow it up with the standardized version. The advantage is very straightforward: no matter how much you study in advance, nothing is comparable to an experience of actually being in a country, surrounded by Japanese speakers and immersed in the culture. Considering that level of your classes during your 3-6 months at language school is going to be decided based on a single test, this way you could have an opportunity to tremendously improve your entrance exam result, and hence greatly increase efficiency of your language studies.

## CHAPTER III

### SAVE YOURSELF A TROUBLE BY ORGANIZING IT

#### Getting there & Visa issues

I believe those information are basically the same in most of the reports, so I will not get into much of detail here. There are some important points to note about getting there and managing your visa, though.

First of all, if you are on the budget, I recommend the website [www.orbitz.com](http://www.orbitz.com) for finding cheaper flights. Generally, flight tickets are cheaper in the middle of the week (Tue-Thu) rather than on weekends, so be sure to check different dates. You should also check different departure and arrival options – major and generally cheapest hubs to departure from Europe are Frankfurt, Munich, Paris and London. If you have just some spare time, however, I recommend that you *do not* go directly to Japan – you can often easily design very cheap Asian itineraries for a price similar to a direct flight to Japan. It requires some time and planning, but it gives you an opportunity to discover an Asia, of which Japan is distinct yet integral part, and gives you a better perspective into Japanese culture in overall terms.

Second of all, as you might read from other reports, it can get a little complicated with the visa. Many nationalities (among others, Swiss and Polish) can enter Japan for 90 days without a visa, just by getting the passport stamped on the airport (Tourist Visa). Generally it means that you cannot be in Japan continuously for more than 90 days – you can, however, leave for Korea, be back the same day and spend additional 90 days in Japan. You cannot use this method continually - all together you can spend up to 180 days in Japan within a year. You should note, however, that at that time you cannot perform any **paid** employment. Nonetheless, usually you can still participate in an internship if it is unpaid (which was case for me). If you start your studies, you are most likely going to need a



College Student Visa - and if you are already in Japan this is where the business gets a little tricky. Theoretically, my language school informed me that changing the visa status would not be possible in Japan, so at that time I considered going to a Japanese embassy in Seoul, Korea, and changing my visa status there. Although it is nominally possible, it seems it is a very risky procedure, and you might be forced to go back to your own country to change your visa if it fails. What happened in my case, then? I was polite, but persistent, and I managed to get my language school to support me at the immigration office for changing my visa status *whilst* in Japan. Please note that I do not guarantee you will be allowed to do that, but if you secure a support of your language school whilst you are still planning your Japanese Year, you might save yourself some time, money and make your year more efficient. Lastly, in order to start working full

time you will need to change your visa again. In my case, I managed to do it once more whilst being in Japan.

To sum up about visa changing: it is not easy, but it is possible. As always, the best way is to directly communicate with interested parties – call Japanese embassy in your country, discuss the possibilities with the language school, message previous scholarship recipients who will inform you about their experiences. There are many other visa options which I am not enough knowledgeable about, but you can inquire about them at your embassy. Everything is manageable, if you put some effort into planning it.

## **Administrative: Alien Registration, cell phone, bank account, apartment**

In this section I will briefly touch on administrative issues. Firstly, in order to do anything in Japan you will need to obtain your Alien Registration Card. This small document will open many of doors for you, starting bank account and getting cell phone among others. Once you start a language school, they will assist you in all those administrative issues.

When you look for a cell phone, Japan is very restrictive in this matter so you need your Alien Registration Card for that. You will have two options: prepaid and contract. This can get very costly, so I strongly recommend opening a prepaid account with Softbank, where you just need to paid 3000 yen every 2 months or so. Calling is extremely expensive, but with the advanced Japanese technology sending the text message is totally free – take advantage of it to cut on save on your budget! I have yet another advice for people who do not like writing on their cell device – register your cell phone email account within your usual email provider; thanks to that you can type quickly on your laptop, and the message will be send from your ‘mobile email’ address. Quick and efficient! As I mentioned previously, you cannot get the cell phone without the Alien Registration Card. Living in Japan without the phone can be very troublesome, but here you have some options too. You can use your phone on roaming (usually extremely expensive and you have to check your device for compatibility with Japanese network – there is no GSM service here!). You can also rent a cell phone; the service is usually available at the airports. However, there is also third, less known and somewhat tricky option. If you have some good Japanese friends (or foreigners with the Alien Registration Card), you can ask them to buy the prepaid phone for you. They do not bear a risk of being charged for your calls, but if you use this method you should be respectful of someone’s help and register your phone in your name as soon as you get your own Alien Registration Card.

To open the bank account, again, you need the Registration Card. Generally, you will also need your own official stamp (easy to make anywhere in Japan). However, also in this case there are exceptions. Some banks (especially in Tokyo) will make you an account with just a sign. Shinsei Bank generally has higher fees, but it is also quite easy to get their account without a stamp. I managed to get my bank account at Sumitomo Banking Corporation (one of the three biggest banks in Japan) in Kyoto without having a stamp, too, even though I was continuously assured by both my language school staff and employees of banks I encountered, that you *do need* a stamp. As always, a little polite persistence will help you achieve the theoretically unachievable in Japan.

Lastly, some advice on finding your accommodation. Landlords in Japan are generally very foreigner-unfriendly, so it can get troublesome at times, especially if you think of renting something on your own. Considering that you start with a language school, your safest bet will be an accommodation provided by them. Homestay will give you an opportunity to talk with your host, but at a price of a strongly limited freedom. There are usually dorms available too. I changed from living in a friend, through homestay, student dorm to a shared house, and I describe further my housing adventures in the next section. If you plan in living in Tokyo, there are plenty of opportunities to live independently from your language school or employer. You should check offers of Sakura house, Oak house, Borderless house, among others. Final budget tip here: the further the place from the station, the cheaper it tends to get!

## CHAPTER IV

### WHAT HAVE I LEARNED IN SIX MONTHS

Living in Japan has been my dream and I do my best to get most out of it. In this section I will share with you my experiences from the first six months here.

#### **AIESEC Internship in Kobe**

AIESEC is the biggest student organization in the world with plenty of internship offers in Japan. I recommend you check them on the internet and contact the local committee at your University for more information (most likely you do have one). To cut the long story short, you have two options to get to Japan with them, let us call them 'push' and 'pull'. To 'push' yourself on the Japanese market, you need to contact your AIESEC local committee, check the possibilities and organize your internship to Japan. You can do it either as an AIESEC member, or just as a person interested in a one-time internship with them. The other, less common but much more efficient (as you might have realized already, this word means worlds to me) way is to 'pull' yourself there – i.e. find representatives of that organization in Japan and directly ask about opportunities they have. This was, obviously, the method I have used. I have found online the contact emails to representatives of that organization in 10 different cities in Japan and discussed what I could do there. In my case, I was helping the local committee in Kobe with their international operations and sales from 27/02/2012 to 5/04/2012.



How did this internship look in practice? Firstly, I have lived with a Japanese person, so I had an opportunity to constantly train my language skills. Secondly, by staying with AIESEC I was already welcomed as a part of their community and subsequently invited to all the events such as traveling and drinking parties. For two weekends I also had a chance to stay with families of other committee members – it was an unforgettable experience to see the Japanese culture really from the inside. Thirdly, the professional opportunities I got were just unparalleled: together with other members I went to companies to sell our products. Generally, if you work in a Japanese company, in order to speak to a client you need a lot of training – in AIESEC they allowed me to try that almost instantly.

In summary, I had a chance to tremendously improve my language, even if that was just over a month, I could be an integral part of a Japanese culture, and I had an excellent opportunity to see the local business environment. Go AIESEC!

#### **Kyoto Japanese Language School**

I had hard time to choose where I want to study the language; I knew my employment will be in Tokyo, so it made sense to stay there in order to start building networks and get into deeper friendships. This was also, however, an excellent chance to understand more of Japan. The country has a lot to offer, so I truly recommend you take this opportunity and discover it. I decided therefore to discover Kyoto with KJLS, on the term from 05/04/2012 to 28/09/2012.





I have settled for Kyoto for many reasons: it is surrounded by mountains, which I greatly enjoy (I hike here almost every weekend), it is an old Japanese capital (I am fascinated by history), and I have fallen in love with this city whilst traveling here three years ago. Kyoto is, in my opinion, absolutely the most fascinating place in Japan. It is overflowing with traditional Japanese culture: you can see Geishas walking in Gion district, there are many workshops (I participated in making Japanese traditional sweets, traditional paper and tea ceremony), and the number of temples and shrines is just outstanding. I believe the temples and

shrines here have a very special atmosphere – this is why almost every day I either studied or read a book in one of them, or just went for a walk. Obviously you can get all the information from the tourist office, but I recommend that you do not settle just for tourist traps such as Golden Temple and Kiyomizudera. They are amazing, but they do not compare to my favorite Fushimi Inari, for example. Other than that, Kyoto is an extremely bike-friendly city, as opposed to Tokyo. For six months here, I have ridden a bus or metro maybe three times, and my bike meter computer shows that I made approx. 2000 km by bike. Much of that being separate trips outside of the city, which points to yet another advantage of Kyoto – it is surrounded by amazing spots; biking distance to Lake Biwako is 30 km, Nara is 60 km, Osaka is 80 km, Kobe is 100 km, for example. Finally, if you are lucky enough to be here during spring season, Sakura in Kyoto is considered as one of the most exquisite experiences one might have in a lifetime. I am in love with this city and I recommend you live here too. However, considering how incredible Japan is, I am pretty convinced that you will be happy wherever you decide to live.

As for the language school, I have made an extensive research about many of them, and I do not think they differ a lot. The two leading, awfully similarly sounding schools in Kyoto are Kyoto Institute of Culture and Language and KJLS. I have chosen KJLS mainly because of its central location in Kyoto. The teachers and the staff are extremely helpful, not only in the classroom, and I cannot even count how many times they assisted me with my inquiries. School has many events and other students are very open too. On the negative side, you have to remember that Japanese teaching methods might differ from what you are used to. I was often very stressed about the inefficient, in my opinion, way of conducting the class. Once you get used to following and accepting that teachers ‘do know better what is good for you’, you can learn a lot.

Interestingly, I started in Kyoto by living in a host family provided by the school. It was very tough to find someone willing to take me, since I am a vegetarian and Japanese have only very blurred idea of this concept. Finally, I was accepted at Matsuoka-san’s. Her place was very close to my school (5 min walking). However, I was not satisfied by the experience. The fee was almost double as compared to a student dorm, yet the whole ‘host family’ consisted solely of Matsuoka-san. She was helpful in preparing dinners and correcting the Japanese mistakes, on the positive side. On the negative, however, she took three students for the homestay and I had the feeling that she is trying just to get our fees and save money on anything she provides. We had conflicts on some lines, e.g. I was not allowed to have my food in the fridge (not really an option for a vegetarian who can hardly eat outside), I did not feel a proper privacy, and you had to agree in everything with the opinion of your host mother. Having my freedom totally stifled and not seeing a chance to really progress with my Japanese, after just 10 days I moved to live in a student dorm. It was cheaper, I made many friends and enjoyed freedom I could not imagine at Matsuoka-san’s. What is my recommendation about your accommodation? No tips this time, but just one advice: think of your objectives. Homestay will give you maybe better opportunity to train the language, but limit your living a lot as well.



What about the free time? Long time ago I decided that I would spend every weekend traveling, and I am pretty consistent with this resolution. I have visited many incredible places in Japan and had many adventures. For example, I climbed Mt. Fuji from the seaside (as in the pictures: 15 hours, starting at midnight at the beach where filled the bottle with sea water, biking for 50 km until the elevation of 2400 m., then climbing without sleep and finally emptying the bottle at the top), or I hitchhiked through golden week from Kyoto to Kumamoto in Kyushu, staying every night in a tent in the most random places like

parks (all together circa 1000 km, 10 cars and 7 days). During summer holidays I have traveled for 7 weeks through Malaysia-Indonesia-India-Bangladesh. On the weekdays, I participated in events organized at the university clubs or met up with friends (many useful tips on that in the next section). Finally, although it was a tough mission, I managed to stay a vegetarian in this fish-obsessed country (believe me, it is ingredient of almost every food); if you are vegetarian, first Kanji you learn should be the ones for different kind of meat and fish, you will have to be careful about what you buy and you will need to cook more by yourself, but if you really want it, it is manageable.



To sum up, living in Kyoto has been one of the best experiences in my life. I improved my language, had an opportunity to live in the probably the most beautiful city I know, traveled throughout Japan and Asia, and fallen in love with Japan even more.

## Heading towards the future

It is the second week of September 2012 when I write this report, and in two weeks I will finish my language school and move to Tokyo to start my full time employment at Rakuten. Although I am sad to leave Kyoto, I also look forward to the opportunities that open: working in corporation that was just chosen by Forbes as the world's 7<sup>th</sup> most innovative company, putting in practice my business Japanese, developing my professional skillset. Rakuten has been extremely helpful with all the procedures and administrative issues, they also invited me twice for a dinner to Tokyo (refunding all my travel and accommodation cost). I believe they are a perfect example of a Japanese company with a global mindset, full of entrepreneurial and innovative spirit. Although Japanese is useful, you can get employed there even if you do not speak a word in Japanese. Should you require any more information on them, please do not hesitate to contact me – I believe it is a great place to boost your career!

## CHAPTER V

### TIPS THAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EXCELLENT START IN JAPAN

Anybody on Japanese Year can surely speak about their experiences for more than it can be included in a midterm report. I hope that reading through my experiences you will be able to understand the reality of Japanese Year a little more and find solutions to some potential questions you might have. However, if you are short on time, this is the one chapter I suggest you focus the most on. In accordance with the spirit of this report, in this section I present the most practical and specific tips and advice that can help you with your experience in Japan.

#### 10 DOS

##### **RULE #1: Aim for the stars regarding your employment**

I have heard maybe 100 times that finding an internship in Japan is difficult and I should settle for anything that comes. Whilst you should be thankful for any possibilities, do not expect that a mediocre internship is best you can do; I got the full time employment offer in the area of my biggest interest, a year before commencement of the job, without saying a single word in Japanese on the interview.

→ **There are endless opportunities for employment – it is up to you how much time you will invest in the search.**

##### **RULE #2: Reconsider your Japanese year composition**

The requirement of SJCC Scholarship is to spend 1 year in Japan, of which at least 3 months is a language school – think of getting a small internship before language school, and your language learning will be greatly enhanced.

→ **Brainstorm through different options of your Japanese Year composition.**

##### **RULE #3: Study as much Japanese as you can a priori**

Obviously, the more you learn before your departure, the higher level of class you can get, and the quicker your Japanese will improve. If you can participate in Japanese classes, that is the best. If you want to study yourself, do not worry – you can achieve great skills in this way too. I recommend self-study book called *Genki*, but I can also suggest many materials depending on which skill you want to work on. If possible, try to befriend some Japanese people – preferably in person, but there are many pen-friends and Facebook possibilities, too.

→ **Investing in your Japanese before arrival will allow you to start studies at higher level, ergo master the language quicker.**

##### **RULE #4: Contact your local AIESEC committee for information about potential internships before your language school**

There are many possibilities to have an internship before you start a language school, which will greatly enhance your language learning. Out of various potential organizations, AIESEC has probably the biggest number of managerial jobs for people who do not speak fluent Japanese. Think also of some potential voluntary activities, homestay or work as a language teacher. Being a waitress/waiter at the hotel or a bar can give you an immense opportunity to use your Japanese in daily situations, and many hotels will accept you with just English!

→ **Use internship/ work to enhance your language skills whilst being in Japan before you start a language school.**

##### **RULE #5: Once in Japan, contact clubs and associations at nearby universities**

This is the opportunity that is greatly overlooked. Typically, after joining their language school students tend to keep together, sometimes participate in events organized by the school. However, there are plenty of Japanese students who are dying to meet foreigners. One of the best options to do it is to join university clubs and circles. To do it, get in contact with your language school about nearby universities and their 'club promotion days'. At that time all the clubs at given university have their stands outside, where you can freely inquire. Many of them are super welcome to foreigners and hardly ever have any rules about people outside of the university joining. *Use that loop.* Get the email addresses from as many as possible clubs of your interest and then just join their activities – enjoying doing what you like, and at the same time being surrounded by real-life Japanese language and culture.

→ **Participating in university clubs gives you free opportunity to immerse yourself in real Japanese experience.**

## **RULE #6: Make extensive use of networking sites whilst in Japan**

It is easy to get lonely and separated from other people in Japan. Often people have no contact with external world outside their language school. In addition to using university clubs and finding a part time job, I recommend that you take advantage of the multitude of opportunities presented to you by networking sites. For professional contacts, you can use alumni databases of your university, or just mail people directly on LinkedIn (I have done it many times myself). In addition to that, be sure to check regularly such websites as Couchsurfing and Meetup – they organize numerous events where Japanese and foreigners mingle together, and are full of hungry-to-meet-a-foreigner Japanese.

**→Networking sites are a chance for you to meet more Japanese people, participate in interesting events and develop professionally.**

## **RULE #7: Save smartly on your budget**

There are many ways to save on your budget without an effort, and you might be already aware of some of them. If you buy your food at supermarket or convenience store, try to do it in the evening – you can often find stuff at half price. Be sure to check many different stores for ‘special’ products: I tend to get milk, bread and frozen vegetables from 100 yen Lawson Store, vegetables from a close vegetable store, and general food from three different supermarkets. Additionally, there are many second-handed stores all around Japan that sell almost anything at much lower prices (I bought there tents, shoes, books, electric fans, anime action figures and loads of electronics). Be smart about how you travel around the city: buses and metro work great, but in many places (especially anywhere but in Tokyo) moving by bike is cheaper, quicker and healthier. When you travel to other cities, try to use overnight buses rather than trains, you can sometimes save three times the price. Finally, when you find your apartment, try to look for places slightly further from the stations – they tend to be relatively cheaper.

**→There are many possibilities to save in Japan – take advantage of them.**

## **RULE #8: Find yourself a part-time job**

Besides obvious financial advantage of having a part-time job, it can also have a profound effect on your Japanese studies and understanding of Japan at large. Usually you will have an opportunity to speak with customers and put into a real-life situation lessons learned in class. You will also be exposed to practical Japanese, which can be very different from what you learn at school. Finally, it gives you an opportunity to once more interact with more Japanese people, ergo giving you a chance to forge some friendships and interestingly organize your time outside the school.

**→Part-time job has obvious financial advantages, but even more importantly it gives you a perfect opportunity to use your Japanese in practice and make some Japanese friends.**

## **RULE #9: Make it a rule to travel every weekend**

Japan is beautiful – make your best to discover it bit by bit! No matter what happens, make it a rule to discover it a little more every weekend. Plan a weekend out in different part of the country, bike to nearby city, hike the mountain you see from your window, go to a temple you read about in the guidebook, or just get yourself lost in the city. You can easily do your homework in the trains or buses, and you gain a chance to live fully the chance that was given to you. Also remember, that once you start working, you will have much less time to travel or follow your passions.

**→Spend every single weekend of your Japan Year traveling, and be sure you live that experience to the fullest.**

## **RULE #10: Be Gaijin. Be Japanese**

Probably the most important advice I can give about being in Japan. Never, absolutely never get angry in Japan – it will bring you nowhere. By being polite, smiling and helpful, you can successfully deal with almost any situation, be it at the shop or discussing with the police. However, and I cannot emphasize this point enough, you also have to use your foreign roots to your advantage: be persistent about what you want to achieve in any conversation. In most situations, it is very simple to make impossible possible in Japan, if you just politely continue to strive for your goal.

**→Adjust with the smiling and politeness level to the local people, but use your foreign persistence to your advantage – there will be hardly anything impossible to deal with in Japan.**

## 10 DON'TS

### **RULE #1: Do not expect someone will direct you**

Planning and conducting Japanese Year is not an easy task and do not take it lightly. SJCC members are willing to help you, but they will not make everything happen for you.

→ **Be responsible to take your fate in your own hands.**

### **RULE #2: Do not leave everything for the last moment**

Procrastination is a horrible habit and it has especially terrible repercussion if you leave everything for the last moment in preparing your Japanese Year. Remember, language schools require your application usually at least 6 months in advance.

→ **If you leave everything for the last moment, you might just miss some unavoidable deadlines and have serious problems with effectively conducting your Japanese Year.**

### **RULE #3: Do not be scared of Japanese economic depression**

In 2006 the GDP of Japan as a share of global GDP was 12%, whilst it is projected to fall to 3% in 2050. Furthermore, Japan is in a continuous economic stagnation since the Real Estate Bubble of 1990. However, Japan still is and will continue to be one of the world's economic super powers. It is a leader of many industries (High-tech, as the most obvious example) and many Japanese companies invest heavily abroad, so the growth possibilities are endless.

→ **Japan is an economic giant abundant with opportunities – if you seek them.**

### **RULE #4: Do not take culture differences lightly**

Whatever is your international experience, be prepared that Japan will be different than anything you have seen. I have lived in 10 different countries on four continents, yet nowhere have I felt as separated from the society as in Japan. You can expect to be here lonelier, more limited, sometimes unable to cope with the proper living in the society or to have normal exchanges with other people. Seeing all the kanji on the streets and understanding hardly nothing can be an overwhelming experience.

→ **Be aware of the immense cultural differences of Japan, but strive to get used and overcome them gradually.**

### **RULE #5: Do not expect 'yes' always means 'yes'**

Japanese are extremely polite, sometimes to the unthinkable, for a western person, level. If you ask for something, the answer 'no' is basically impossible to hear. You must be very, very careful about differentiating between 'yes, I am interested' and 'yes, it is interesting but...'

→ **Work hard to discover the real meaning behind the words, to avoid yourself frustration about Japanese seemingly not keeping their promises to you.**

### **RULE #6: Do not stop studying even for one day**

Learning language is not like any other task – you cannot cram it all just before an exam. Studying daily will give you advantage of taking things slowly, but improving gradually.

→ **Commit some fixed, absolutely unmovable time of your day to study Japanese, and your progress will be steady but always increasing.**

### **RULE #7: Do not get paranoid about Fukushima and radiation**

First and foremost, it is just my personal opinion, but for no reason get yourself paranoid by Fukushima panic. Whatever the radiation in Tokyo at the moment, you can be fairly sure it is lower than levels in many parts of the world (e.g. Seoul and Hong Kong). Surely, there was an issue with the Fukushima reactor, but as long as you do not live 50 km distance from it you can feel pretty safe.

→ **Do monitor the news for the development of the radiation in Japan, but do not get paranoid about non-existent dangers.**

### **RULE #8: Do not get friendly only with non-Japanese**

Getting foreign friends is surely easier, but certainly less rewarding in your language studies. There is a swarm of Japanese people who are dying to meet you and have the language and cultural exchange with you. Straightforward as it sounds, best I can recommend to you is to find yourself a Japanese boyfriend/girlfriend - you will have plenty of opportunities to practice your language skills and to understand the society from the inside.

**→ Do not take the easy way of befriending mostly the foreigners - there is plenty of (Japanese) fish in the sea too, and it will be much tastier experience!**

### **RULE #9: Do not lose hope if you are a vegetarian**

Not every meal in Japan includes meat – but almost everything is based on the fish. If you are a lacto-ovo vegetarian and you do not want to contribute to killing animals, this task is more difficult in Japan than in any country I have been to. Difficult - but not impossible. Firstly, you will have to cook much more often by yourself – additional advantage is saving money. Secondly, you need to learn the kanji for fish, chicken, meat and anything you cannot eat – when in doubt, always ask the sales person if the given food includes the ingredients you cannot eat. Thirdly, be extremely persistent when inquiring if the given food ‘is vegetarian’ – people here have only a very blurred idea of the concept. Often shrimp is not considered a meat, or a soup based 100% on fish oil is not thought to include meat.

**→ The task of staying vegetarian in Japan is not an easy one, but it is manageable, so stay true to your beliefs.**

### **RULE #10: Do not forget to contact me shall you have any other questions!**

I attempted to include in this report as much practical information about living in Japan as possible. Obviously, considering the limited scope of this work and its generalized character, I was not able to convey all of the useful information. On one hand, I feel extremely indebted to SJCC for offering me the scholarship, and helping you to perfect your Japanese Year would be one of the ways for me to repay this debt. On the other hand, I do believe I am pretty knowledgeable about living in Japan and I would love to help any other person who shares my fascination about that incredible country. Therefore remember: should you have any personal or organizational questions, should you want to inquire more about business and entrepreneurship in Japan (maybe even open something together?), or should you just want to learn more about my experiences – I am here for you.

**→ Feel absolutely free to contact me with any questions you might have!**



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*~Enjoy your Japanese Year; this is going to be one of the best experiences in your life~*