

Sarah Jane Edwards (Research)

THE REASONS WHY I CHOOSE JAPAN OVER OTHER COUNTRIES TO STUDY

The Masters of International Relations program at GSAPS, Waseda University has a global reputation for excellence. I've had a long interest in Japan and this interest combined with the excellent reputation is why I chose to complete Masters through a MEXT scholarship at Waseda University.

My interest in Japan first started when I went on High School Rotary Exchange to Yukuhashi City in Fukuoka Prefecture. After this life changing experience I focused on learning more about Japanese language and culture. The year after exchange I started my undergraduate degree at Murdoch University in Perth where I majored in Japanese and Finance. I then went on exchange for one year to Konan University in Kobe. After graduating I began Honours in Japanese at the Australian National University. I wanted to build on my Japanese language skills, so in 2005 I applied for a MEXT scholarship. I am honoured to have been selected as a recipient.

THE BEST EXPERIENCES IN JAPAN

I had many amazing experiences in Japan, but the best experiences were the people. I stayed with Nakatsui-san for three months in 2017 who was host mother. We kept in contact and over the years and Nakatsui-san showed me many aspects of Japan and insights into the culture that I wouldn't have seen without her. We went to hot springs with a view of Mt Fuji, tea ceremony and her friend's country house. Nakatsui-san acted as a mentor and when I was accepted into a PhD program at Tokyo University, Nakatsui-san attended the entrance ceremony in lieu of my parents. I was very proud that Nakatsui-san could see me succeed in my goal. Sadly due to an unexpected death in my immediate family I was not able to complete the program.

In November 2017, Nakatsui-san and her friend came to visit me in Perth. I was happy to show them Western Australia. We toured places such as the Pinnacles, Pemberton, and Margaret River. It was great to show them my home state.

I met Shibuki-san through the Tokyo University program. She was matched with me to help me with my Japanese reading comprehension. We met at many coffee shops around Tokyo and became friends. With Shibuki-san's help I was able to pass the English to Japanese translation component of the Tokyo University entrance exam.

In Japan most professors at post graduate level have a number of students and sometimes an assistant lecturer or research assistant. Often all of the members will meet weekly and give research presentations; this is called 'zemi' in Japanese. While I was at Waseda University my supervisor was Professor Kuroda. Professor Kuroda is very passionate about his work and I enjoyed being in his zemi.



Studied at Tokyo University and Waseda University from 2006 to 2010

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HOW HAS THE EXPERIENCE IN JAPAN SHAPED ME AND CHANGED MY LIFE

My time in Japan has developed my skills in a number of fields. The Waseda University Masters program taught me project management, research skills and how to analyse data. Through living in Japan and participating in teamwork with international students at university, I developed my cross-cultural communication skills. Through university I also developed excellent presentation skills both in Japanese and English. I have given several presentations at international conferences. All these skills have been useful in my work. For example, from 2012-2014 I negotiated with stakeholders on behalf of ACT Government Education Department.

My masters gave me the ability to learn new skills within a short amount of time under pressure. I have applied these skills in my work. I have worked in both federal and state government as a public servant. One day I would like to use my Japanese language skills in my work.

ADVICE TO PROSPECTIVE MEXT SCHOLARS

I encourage prospective MEXT scholars to take every chance to visit Japan and learn about the local culture. Seek out opportunities to travel to Japan, for example the AJYCE short term Rotary exchange program to Japan. Organise a language exchange partner or attend a language group. The more you practice your Japanese the better your chance at getting the scholarship and the more fulfilling your time will be in Japan. While in Japan, the most important advice I have is to make Japanese friends. It can be hard at first, but try joining a university club or join up with a buddy-pairing program at your university. When I was at Tokyo University, international students could apply to be paired with a host family or a language partner/mentor.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR YOU!

- ◆ Take a cushion with you to Japan that you can use at the library. It was common among my friends to take a nap between study sessions.
- ◆ Study like your life depended on it. It's amazing how much you can achieve with the right motivation and a good friendship support group.
- ◆ Study smart using technology: Use learning apps and web tools like 'kikai and rikai.com'.
- ◆ When looking for a professor, ask questions like:
 - * What are your current research interests?
 - * How many English native speakers have graduated?
 - * What can I contribute to your research lab?

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