

Summer
Semester
2024

SEMESTER
ABROAD

**HIROSHIMA
UNIVERSITY**

experience report





PREPARATION

Surprisingly, the entire preparation process went more smoothly than I had expected. After a helpful and highly professional consultation with our international office coordinator and the advisors responsible for course recognition, I received my acceptance letter from Viadrina without any issues. Shortly after, I was contacted by the Hiroshima University International Office. From there, I completed my online application, gathering all the necessary documents such as my CV, Letter of Intent, and a Letter of Recommendation from one of my professors. It wasn't long before I received my Confirmation of Admission from Hiroshima University, along with the Certificate of Eligibility (CoE), which is required for applying for a student visa

At the time of my application, the process at the Japanese Embassy in Berlin was refreshingly simple — no appointments were necessary. You just show up during their opening hours, hand in the required documents (which are listed on their website), and submit your visa application. To my surprise, I received my visa in less than a week, and the service was completely free of charge.

If you're going to Japan for the spring semester, packing becomes much easier since the summer there is HOT. I'd suggest leaving most of your wardrobe behind and shopping at UNIQLO once you're in Japan. Also, flights can be expensive, but here's a tip: if you're looking to save money, consider flying with Air China.

Once you have your visa and Certificate of Admission, the Hiroshima University International Office will assist you with student housing on campus, courses, insurance, and more. They are incredibly competent, friendly, and efficient, making the entire process of preparing to study abroad as smooth as it could be.





STUDYING AT HIROSHIMA

During my semester abroad, I studied Peace, Conflict and Coexistence Studies as part of my Bachelor's program in Integrated Global Studies (IGS).

At Hiroshima University, all Bachelor's courses across faculties are open for registration, but graduate-level courses are not accessible to undergraduates, which is quite unfortunate. Graduate students, however, are allowed to register for undergraduate courses. While you can enroll in any course of interest, it's important to note that whether these courses will be recognized at Viadrina depends on your specific study program.

One major benefit of the experience is the buddy program. You'll be paired with a student assistant who helps guide you through both the academic and administrative processes — a truly valuable resource that I highly recommend taking advantage of!

Japanese universities operate on a schedule that feels more like school, with classes held daily and mandatory attendance. The academic semester is split into two blocks, each lasting roughly seven weeks, followed by exams. Unlike Viadrina, where courses are 45 minutes long, classes in Japan are 90 minutes. A double lesson stretches to a full three hours — definitely something to keep in mind when planning your schedule. That said, from what I've observed, the academic standards in the undergraduate programs seem to be slightly less demanding than those in Germany, so juggling multiple courses is manageable. I took over ten courses during my semester abroad and found it completely feasible.





For those interested in learning Japanese (or other languages), Hiroshima University offers plenty of language courses as well. This can be a great opportunity to dive deeper into the culture while learning a new language.

Hiroshima University offers a wide range of extracurricular activities, from sports clubs to theater, dance, and various social gatherings. Making friends, meeting new people, and experiencing local culture will come naturally. The vibrant campus life ensures that there's always something happening, making it easy to build connections and truly experience Japan beyond the classroom.

The professors were incredibly understanding, motivated, and respectful, while my fellow students were always interested to connect with international students like me.

ACCOMMODATION

I chose to stay at the more expensive student housing option directly on campus, the Phoenix International Center Mirai Crea. Beyond being just a residence, Mirai Crea also serves as a dynamic coworking space, complete with meeting rooms, a study area, and even a cozy café - The matcha waffles are a MUST HAVE. The monthly rent is about 54,000¥, which currently converts to around 330€ for a single room — electricity, water, and other utilities included. For that price, you get your own private space, complete with a bathroom, kitchen, balcony, and bedroom. The rooms are furnished with essentials: a wardrobe, bed, desk, refrigerator, microwave, shoe cabinet, and — crucially — an A.C., which is a lifesaver during Japan's summer months.

Each floor is equipped with free-to-use washing machines, dryers, and vacuum cleaners, making daily chores less of a hassle. However, things like cutlery, pots, and pans aren't provided. You can either borrow them at the reception desk or grab some at a nearby store. As mentioned in the preparation section, all accommodations are applied for through the Hiroshima University International Office. Be sure to apply early, as these spots get snapped up quickly.

In terms of convenience, the campus offers a lot. You'll find 24/7 kiosks like 7/11 and Lawson, along with a shopping mall, restaurants, bars, cafés, and several student dining halls. Whether you want to grab a quick snack or enjoy a night out with friends, there are plenty of options both on and off campus to explore.





EVERYDAY LIFE

In my opinion, the cost of accommodation in Japan is quite manageable and comparable to what I'm used to in Frankfurt. However, the overall cost of living can differ significantly from Germany. Most groceries are notably more expensive — I'd estimate anywhere between 40% to 100% more when comparing products directly. That being said, dining out is surprisingly affordable, which led me to indulge in takeout almost daily during the second half of my stay. Pro tip: There's an excellent Indian restaurant right near the campus that quickly became one of my go-to spots.

During my semester abroad, I was fortunate to receive both the PROMOS scholarship and the Deutschlandstipendium. Combined with the Kindergeld, I had over €1,000 a month, leaving me with around €700 after paying rent. Don't worry — you don't need that much to live comfortably. I'd estimate that between €400 and €500 a month after rent would be sufficient for a healthy, balanced student lifestyle, including some travel and going out, depending on your personal spending habits.

I also worked during my semester abroad, not because I had to, but because I wanted to gain the experience. A student visa allows you to work up to 28 hours per week, though I didn't come close to that while balancing my studies. If you're looking for a bit of extra income, this is a great option, and the international office will gladly assist you with the work permit application.





Hiroshima University has three campuses; mine was located in the rural town of Saijo, about 30 minutes by train from the main city of Hiroshima. There are frequent buses from campus to Saijo station, where you can catch a direct train to Hiroshima city. The total cost for the journey is 870¥ one way (280¥ for the bus and 590¥ for the train). Unfortunately, there are no subscription or monthly tickets available at a reduced rate, but you can use a prepaid electronic card for convenience. A heads-up: buses in Japan often require exact change, as they don't provide it onboard.

EXPLORING HIROSHIMA & JAPAN

Hiroshima may not initially feel like a bustling metropolis, but it is home to over a million people and offers everything you'd expect from big city life — clubs, restaurants, theaters, events, cafés, parks, and rooftop bars.

The city is, of course, tragically famous for the events of August 6th, 1945. Yet aside from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial and Peace Park, you wouldn't immediately sense the weight of that history while walking around the vibrant city today.

While studies should always remain a priority, don't forget — you're in Japan. Make the most of it! The country has so much to offer, so take the opportunity to travel and explore. With some clever scheduling, you can free up a day or two; I managed to have Fridays off, giving me extended weekends for exploring. Additionally, holidays are the perfect time to venture out. Since I studied in Japan during the spring, I was fortunate to witness the breathtaking cherry blossoms, known as sakura. This stunning sight is not to be missed!

During my stay, I visited coastal spots like Miyajima, Kure, and islands around Hiroshima like Ōkunoshima aka Rabbit Island. I also traveled to Okayama, Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, and beyond.

For a true escape, I highly recommend Okinawa — if you're looking for a slice of Caribbean heaven within Japan, this is it. Traveling is easy, especially by Shinkansen (high-speed train), which is fast, smooth, and reliable. If you prefer flying, Peach Airlines is a good, budget-friendly option.





A TIME COMING TO AN END

My semester abroad at Hiroshima University was an incredibly enriching experience, both academically and personally. From navigating a different education system and exploring new academic perspectives, to immersing myself in Japanese culture and forming lasting connections, I can say this journey has broadened my horizons in ways I hadn't anticipated.

If you're considering studying abroad, especially in Hiroshima Japan, I can only encourage you to take the leap — it's an experience that will stay with you for a lifetime.

To Japan, Hiroshima and it's citizens I full heartedly say: Arigato Gozaimasu.



