

Fall 2016 Study Abroad

Hitotsubashi University of International Corporate Strategy, Tokyo, Japan

Summary of my Experience

My study abroad at Hitotsubashi was truly a great experience that I would recommend to anyone interested in the international aspect of law, or even just looking for a new experience in their law school career. Tokyo can be an overwhelming experience for anyone when they first arrive. The subway system looks impossible to make sense of, there is very little open space, and you are in a place with an entirely different language that you may or may not be able to speak, but when you get down to it Tokyo is not much different from other big cities, like San Francisco. It did not take me long to get adjusted to Tokyo, and I came to really enjoy being in the city almost every day. I came to this program with knowing basically no Japanese, but even then I was able to get around without too much trouble; the language barrier was not too much of a problem in everyday life.

The classes at Hitotsubashi were a little different from what I expected, not in the subject, but in the atmosphere of the class. First, the classes were not at the main Hitotsubashi campus in Kunitachi. The classes were at the campus in Kanda, in the heart of downtown Tokyo. When I came to the program I expected the classes to be larger classes and more lecture style classes, but that was not true at all. Because the International Corporate Strategy department is separate from the rest of Hitotsubashi the classes were very small. The largest class I was in was around 10 people. The classes were made almost entirely for the study abroad students, with a couple classes being virtually only us in the class. I found this was because the program was made for working people to attend classes at night, and not many of them wanted, or were able, to take classes in English. This made for a very one on one type atmosphere with a lot of discussion every class. How interesting, and how much we learned, from every class was based on how prepared we as a whole chose to be every day. We took six classes every week, which sounds like a lot, but the classes themselves were only one day a week for an hour and

fifteen minutes, with anywhere from one to three classes in a day. In addition we only had four days of class a week, having Friday off every week. However, the classes were only half of the work we did every week.

A unique part of this study abroad program is you get to take part in an internship while studying in Tokyo. The internship is usually two days a week adding up to 10 hours a week. The internship alone would make this program worth it; I interned at Sojitz, one of the major trading companies in Japan, and I experienced and learned a lot about international business and Japanese business practices that I would not have been able to learn otherwise. When you are given your internship it is not just a blind choice, you are able to give suggestions about the type of law you are interested in, whether you want to work at a firm or a company, and if you know exactly where you want to work the school will attempt to place you there.

Even with the classes and the internship there was still a lot of time to go around and explore Tokyo and meet people. I lived at the Hitotsubashi campus dorms and I could not recommend it enough. I was able to meet many people from countries all around the world in the dorms because it is a combination of Japanese students and international students. The dorms are far from where I took classes, taking about an hour and ten minute train ride to make it to class, but it was a small tradeoff for the experiences you get from living in the dorms. Because the dorms are for any Hitotsubashi student, not just the law faculty, I was able to meet people of many different backgrounds and had a lot of fun whether it was exploring the city with them or just having parties in the dorms. The internship also gave me another avenue to make connections with Japanese and foreign lawyers working in Tokyo. During my time there I was invited to after work and weekend gatherings and parties. During my time there I also had time to explore other places in Japan, on the long weekends due to national holidays, such as Kyoto and Osaka.

Again, my experience with the Hitotsubashi study abroad was great, and I am already planning my next trip back to Japan after I take the Bar in order to catch up with the people I met during the four months.

## Reflections on my semester at Hitotsubashi: Fall 2015

### I. Hitotsubashi ICS Course Work

The most obvious part of any study abroad program would be the academic courses. The subject matter varied, with the exception of two of the courses (Comparative Corporate Governance and Japanese Business Law) which tended to overlap on many of the subjects. My favorite course – Japanese Securities Law- was one taught by a native Japanese professor who has spent several years studying and clerking in the United States. Most of the courses were taught by the same professor, something I didn't enjoy as much. However, the other two courses taught by different professors were really great. They allowed me a varied legal perspective than what I otherwise experienced at law school.

### II. Working at a Japanese Law Firm

During my semester in at Hitotsubashi, I spent two days a week working at Mori, Hamada, Matsumoto's (MHM) Tokyo office. While I was only there for 10 hours a week, I spent some time outside of work hours interacting with my supervisory sensei (attorney), my shima sensei (attorney in my office), other associates both working full time with MHM and on secondment from their home institutions, and various members of the staff. I truly loved my experience. Perhaps because my future law firm paired me with an attorney they work closely with (so they had some expectation of both the work I would get and the type of attorney's I would interact with), I was more integrated with the attorney's than I otherwise might have been. Nonetheless, I felt immediately like a part of the working antitrust group, with assignments coming in frequently and frequent interaction with the antitrust partners when I needed.

My working time at MHM was not as easy going or laid back as some of the other internships. I was constantly given assignments, with particularly strict deadlines. In fact, after

spending my morning meeting individuals around the office and having lunch with my shima on my first day, I was immediately taken to a meeting where two of the older associates explained a case I was to be working on and the legal analysis that was needed from me.

The next three weeks were spent crafting a comparative legal analysis for a particular antitrust case. I found that my work was entirely focused on legal research and writing. For every new task I was assigned, my sensei would sit down and explain to me a particular client's case, discuss how this was an issue of first impression for the Japanese Federal Trade Commission, and then I would be tasked with looking at how American or European courts have dealt with this issue in the past. Moreover, my sensei tended to give me very tight deadlines on very nuanced cases.

Certainly, one of the highlights of my time in Japan was getting to know these attorneys on a more personal level and integrating myself into the experience of working in Japan.

### III. Travelling Japan

One of the best experiences while in Tokyo was travelling throughout Japan with other exchange students in my program. We were lucky enough to all plan a trip to Osaka and Kyoto, exploring all the temples, culture, and history of Japan. It was easier than expected to travel through Japan. Trains and busses run very frequently and are rather efficient. The high speed rail, however, is prohibitively expensive and thus the most economical way to travel was through busses.

While my cohorts and I spent as much time as we could exploring Japan, many of the weekends were spent exploring Tokyo itself. A semester was not enough to see everything there was to see. Even though I was living in the center of Tokyo, I still felt like there was so much

more to explore. Having the opportunity to explore such a different environment like Tokyo was truly amazing.

#### IV. Challenges and Advice

One of the major difficulties was the language barrier. Very few Japanese speak English (or if they do, they certainly don't speak it aloud), making every day tasks rather difficult.

Nonetheless, having the whole exchange group together made the experience fun. Even speaking just a bit of Japanese was enough to get around.

Contrary to popular thought, housing in Tokyo was much cheaper than San Francisco. Living in the center of Tokyo (Akasaka), in a fully furnished very large one-bedroom apartment cost 2,000 USD per month (all utilities and internet included). I would suggest that students use Airbnb to find housing (the earlier the better). Because laws differ in Japan, you can book for the entirety of the semester through Airbnb. Also, because many of those who list on Airbnb Japan are foreigners, you can get a lot of advice and help through those who you lease from! The school offers housing for 60 dollars/month (NO, that's not a typo- it really is that cheap); however, its approximately a 1 hour to 1 hour 30-minute commute to the city center. Also, because the metro stops running at midnight, it makes staying out in Tokyo difficult. As such, many of our friends slept at our place when we went out in Tokyo. If you're travelling to Tokyo without another Hastings student around, staying in the dorms Hitotsubashi might be beneficial because you can meet more people; however, as it is a dormitory, it can be more of an undergraduate environment.

I would highly recommend booking travel plans early! Before I knew it, the semester was over and I wished I traveled more through Japan. Because Japan is so large (it really is quite a large island), there is a ton to see! I found that I was extremely happy booking flights early in the

year because it incentivized me to break out of my routine and see more of Japan. Also, for students who are concerned about travelling in Japan alone, I would not be concerned at all. As a female, I found it extremely safe in Japan and I found traveling very easy.