

Linguistics and Culture in Japan
2023
Michael Flynn August 29, 2023

I'm going to write a fairly detailed report this year because this is the last year I will take this program, and I am leaving an elaborate infrastructure behind. I hope someone at Carleton will be able to utilize this in the near future. The College has had an association with Doshisha University in Kyoto since not long after WWII. I have a photograph of President Nason taken in the courtyard of Amherst Guest House at Doshisha in 1968. Many Carleton faculty have held visiting positions at the university, and we have been a participant in the Associated Kyoto Program at Doshisha I believe since its founding.

My program has been going since 2012. I took it every other year (except during the pandemic) and loaned the infrastructure to other departments in the "off years". In total, 136 Carleton students have spent a term in Japan in this program. For many of these students, it was a positive life-changing experience.

Japan is an ideal place for off-campus study. Compared to the US, it is safe. Things like grocery stores and restaurants pretty much work as one might expect. The spectacular public transportation system allows students to easily go just about everywhere in the country. Doshisha University has a new dormitory that comfortably accommodates our students for the first eight weeks of the program, for an attractive price. The University makes classrooms available. For the last few weeks of the program this year, we had a particular person in the Office of International Students who was dedicated to our program.

At the same time, there are many differences that invite and reward study and further thought. Government, religion, television, child-rearing, the role of women, the attitude toward foreigners, the way people interact with each other, the food, sport, the way people dress, and of course the language are all different from what students are used to in the US. As you will see below, our program highlights some of these differences.

We begin with a three or four day orientation in Tokyo. The students stay at the Sunroute Plaza Hotel Shinjuku. This is a business hotel, meaning that rooms are small and prices are moderate. The hotel is located in Shinjuku, perhaps the most crowded and lively of all the neighborhoods in Tokyo. This can be quite intimidating to students at first, which we don't mind. (We return to the same neighborhood during week six, and they will realize how much they have learned in the meantime.) The hotel is three blocks from Shinjuku Station, the busiest train station in the world, serving 3.4 million passengers daily.

During this orientation, we teach the students things that will help them get more comfortable in this new environment. We set up phones, get them transportation cards, teach them how to use the trains and subways. 40 million people use the many train and subway lines in the city every day. We send students in small groups to specific places, such as "Go the Mitsukoshi Department Store in Ginza and have your picture taken by the famous Mitsukoshi Lion." We tell them do's and don'ts in shrines and temples, and take them to the Meiji Shrine. We tell them some history of Tokyo, and something about important places, including Kabuki-cho, which is a short walk from where they are staying.

We then travel to Kyoto by shinkansen (bullet train). As I mentioned, Doshisha University is our host, and they have a new dormitory. It is close to the University, has single rooms for the students and a nice kitchen that they can use. So we do not do homestays, which are expensive and sometimes ineffective (or worse). Rather, we do something which fits better with our goals of introducing students to Japanese culture: we recruit Doshisha University students to become affiliated with our program, and we arrange for activities for American and Japanese students to share.

Housing has always been the most time-consuming and difficult to arrange, for both students and the leader, because housing in Kyoto is challenging in general. But this problem has been solved. In addition to the dormitory, we now have an excellent relationship with a landlord, Keigo Nakamura, who owns a new apartment building and a cluster of small houses on the trendy east side. The leader stays in a very nice apartment for a very attractive price, and the students stay in the cluster of houses during the last two weeks of the program, also at a discounted price.

In addition to having a prominent and cooperative Japanese university host, and excellent housing for students and faculty leader both in Tokyo and Kyoto, we have a number of relationships that greatly enhance the program.

Yukari Sakamoto, author *Food, Sake, Tokyo* and a well-known expert on Japanese cuisine, is our food-consultant. Her English is perfect (she was born in Minnesota) and she is enthusiastic about introducing our students to ins and outs of food and its preparation in Japan.

Yoshihiro Takishita has spent decades restoring old farmhouses, called *minkas*, in the hills above Kamakura. He graciously invited us to spend an afternoon at his remarkable group of historical buildings, featuring carefully preserved artifacts from centuries ago. His English is perfect, and he happily gives a lively tour of the grounds.

Hillary Pedersen is an American (from Seattle) who is married to the head priest at a well-known Buddhist temple, Shunko-in, which is part of the famous Myoshinji temple complex in western Kyoto. She invites us to spend an afternoon at the temple. She gives a very informative lecture on the nature of Buddhism, and then gives us an insider's tour of the temple. Since she is an American, we can ask her questions about the temple, its functioning and organization, that we'd be reluctant to ask of a Japanese person. This outing was particularly popular among our students this year.

Colas Hauspie is our travel agent with Japan Travel in Tokyo. He arranges for group dinners, meetings rooms, and he also gets us good seats to the May Sumo Tournament in Tokyo during our excursion there. This was also a popular excursion for many of the students. They are now sumo fans.

Finally, Natsue Hashimoto is our special assistant in Kyoto. Natsue was the "person in charge" of the Carleton program for Doshisha University from 2014 to 2017. We have kept in touch over the years, and Natsue has even visited Northfield. She now lives in the east-side neighborhood in Kyoto where the leader and the students stay (during the last two weeks). She is extremely well-connected, and enthusiastic about helping with our program in any way she can. For example, she sometimes helps out at a very small (six-seat) restaurant known for Kyoto home-cooking. She made an arrangement for our students to have dinner there.

The program director teaches two courses, though I think for some directors this has been only one. I teach a course on the history and culture of Japan, in which, among many other things, I have a two-hour discussion of the events leading up to and subsequent to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It's important that Americans understand better what happened there and why. I also teach a course on the nature (i.e. history, linguistics, neuroscience) of the Japanese writing system, probably the most complicated such system in the world. I hire two Doshisha faculty to teach a course on the syntax and phonology of Japanese.

I think any Carleton faculty member taking the seminar would find abundant resources at Doshisha to supplement their course offerings in just about any discipline.

I am aware that some of my colleagues at Carleton have objected to the fact that we encourage but do not require, nor do we teach, proficiency in the Japanese language. I believe these objections are misplaced, and I have written about this. I'd be happy to share that with anyone who is interested. I'm also happy to elaborate on the items mentioned here or other aspects of the program.

In a nutshell, Carleton has a very strong program in an ideal and important place for off-campus study. We have an infrastructure that is the envy of every other institution that has inquired about it. It is all set up and ready to go. It seems like a real shame to just walk away.

Mike Flynn