

2023/2024 Japanese Language Program for Specialists in a Cultural and Academic Field - Long Term



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I was very fortunate to participate in the 2023 Japanese Language Program for Specialists in Cultural and Academic Fields. For years I had been trying to improve my Japanese for research, but most study abroad programs for good reason are directed at undergraduate and graduate students, and it was hard to find a program that enabled language training in Japanese as a professor.

My main motivation to apply was to obtain Japanese language training which would enable a new research project on Japanese immigration to Peru. I'm a historian primarily of Chinese immigration, speak Mandarin, and have spent a lot of time in China and Taiwan. In contrast, I knew very little about Japanese history and culture and my Japanese was very shaky at the start. This meant that the program was a unique opportunity for me to gain a new set of skills and explore a new country.

The Japan Foundation Japan Language Institute Kansai was an incredibly stimulating and international environment. My classmates were from five different countries, and other groups came from overseas to learn Japanese or from other parts of Japan to learn about Japanese pedagogy. I was almost always the only American at the center and was thus incredibly fortunate to have made friends and learn about different parts of the world. My classmates worked on different projects relating to Japan and Japanese culture, from Japanese religion and literature to Japanese archery (kyudo) and virtual Youtubers. I learned so much from my classmates over the course of the five months we were in the program.





The amenities were set up in a way to enable us to spend most of our time studying and conducting research. We each stayed in single rooms with an ensuite bathroom, and the building contained a karaoke room, a gym, a computer room, a kitchen, and a dining hall. Every other floor had a laundry room and a kitchenette. Free rental bicycles

made it easy to get around the town, for example to coffee shops and malls in Rinku Town and Sennan, or to gyms and swimming pools. Room and board were included, along with a small allowance for eating meals outside. During the week, I stopped carrying my wallet because I hardly ever needed it. The staff was incredible, incredibly attentive and kind, and as time went on and my Japanese developed it was great to be able to have conversations with them and get to know them better. Finally, the Tajiri International Club took awesome care of us, giving us tours of the town and regularly organizing activities for us. Though it would have been nice to be a little closer to Osaka, I really enjoyed Tajiri and the people, it was much easier to speak Japanese than in the larger cities and being in a relatively quiet town made it much easier to avoid distractions and focus on our studies.

I placed into the intermediate Japanese class – though it did not strictly align with JLPT levels, most of the vocabulary and grammar we learned were at the N3 level. Intermediate Japanese class and a presentation class were required. Other optional classes included kanji-based vocabulary, a conversation class, interview, academic writing, and a class



on understanding Japanese culture. Presentations were a major component of the program, and we gave a presentation once every two or three weeks on average to get us to feel comfortable speaking Japanese in front of an audience and asking questions. Since our program was small, our classes usually consisted of two or three students, and each of us received lots and lots of individual attention. There were also optional individual tutorials where we could look over primary and secondary materials with Japan Foundation teachers –

these tutorials were incredibly helpful for our research.

I can't say enough wonderful things about the teachers. They were incredibly patient and kind, and willing to pivot quickly to support our language learning and unique needs. Although they weren't scholars or specialists, our tutors quickly learned lots about each of our topics to suggest potential avenues for research and better correct our essays and presentation drafts. And their enthusiasm for the language was infectious, keeping us motivated to study though what could sometimes feel like a long five months.

In addition to language training, the program also supported our research. This support began with the staff at the Japan Foundation's library, who put in inter-library loan requests for materials and wrote letters of introduction to other university libraries. They also walked us through Japanese library search engines and provided helpful advice on where to find materials related to our projects. Helpful optional classes walked us through different phases of the research process, for example on writing letters of introduction to Japanese academics and on designing PowerPoint slides. These classes were particularly helpful for MA and PhD students who were beginning their projects in earnest, but it was still great to compare notes between the American academy and its Japanese counterpart.



Program activities were great both for setting us up for research and for getting to know Japan. Early in the program we had a one-day trip to the Kansai branch of the National Diet Library where we received library cards and began collecting materials. It's crazy to me that only a few weeks into the program we were already conducting research, but we had been so well prepared beforehand that I didn't have any issues either there or in the National Diet Library in Tokyo. Later in the program, we also visited the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. The scholars there were incredibly generous and welcoming, and invited us all to apply for future fellowships. Other activities included a day trip to

Sakai (just south of Osaka), a trip to beautiful Koyasan, and a trip to Kyoto to see a Noh performance.

The program gave us a little over two weeks to conduct research, most of which I spent at the

National Diet Library in Tokyo and at the Japanese Overseas Migration Museum in Yokohama. We received a small allowance from the Japan Foundation for travel and were able to stay in the Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute Urawa in Saitama for free during our research period. I was blown away by the number of materials I was able to find at these two institutions. On the advice of my teachers, I also visited a migration-centered research library in Wakayama. Though I am at the beginning of my research on this project, I came away feeling encouraged that there would be a lot for me to see on a subsequent research trip to Japan.

The program culminated in a fifteen-minute research presentation which was open to staff at the Japan Foundation and members of the community. As my research progressed, I focused on a 1940 anti-Japanese riot in Lima, Peru, which enabled me to work with a wealth of primary sources including newspapers, memoirs, and recordings of oral histories which are preserved in the National Diet Library in Tokyo.

Though the language program and research certainly kept us busy, as much as I could, I used the time at the center to travel and see Japan. On weekdays, I went with classmates sometimes to Osaka to go to a restaurant or see

a concert. On as many weekends as I could, I traveled. I made it to 17 prefectures over the course of the program, as far south as Okinawa and as far north as Hokkaido. This included walking part of two pilgrimage paths, the Kumano Kodo and the Shikoku Henro. Everywhere



I went I was fortunate to meet friendly people, talk for hours, make friends, and exchange Instagrams, and talking to strangers was incredibly helpful for my spoken Japanese. So as not to fall behind in my studies, this involved a lot of studying on trains, buses, and planes, and sometimes afforded precious little sleep, but it was totally worth it.

In sum, I'm profoundly grateful to have participated in the Japan Foundation Japanese



Language Program for Specialists and am confident that it will enable years of research on Japanese migration overseas and increased contact with Japanese and Nikkei communities.