

Aika Kobayashi

Name: Aika Kobayashi

Field of study in Japan: Law and International Relations

University in Japan: Hitotsubashi University

Field of study in Australia: Arts (Asian Studies)

Institute in Australia: University of Melbourne

Year started/finished study in Australia: February to November 2013

Length of stay in Australia: 2 semesters

Highest qualification: Bachelor

Current status: Student

Self-described description of current status: Studying in Japanese university and majoring in law and international relations.



Best thing about studying in Australia: It is difficult to choose! My top three are: going to Uluru with other Asian students, teaching Japanese to students from many different nationalities, and volunteering at a bilingual primary school.

What is the one thing you would change to make it easier for others to study in Australia: To start studying English at high school.

Aika Kobayashi never expected to study abroad but now volunteers to help people from developing countries living in Japan. With a new appreciation of the uniqueness of Japanese society, Aika agrees that studying in Australia has changed her life.

Before I got in to university I didn't expect to go abroad because my family is very domestic. Nobody went to study abroad! My parents are Japanese, my grandparents are Japanese, they are all so very Japanese so I am truly Japanese and I didn't expect to do it. I got the opportunity to go to Monash University for the first time on a short term program in the spring of 2011 at the end of my first year of university. It was an awesome experience!

After this short term program I went back to Japan and started to consider whether I should study abroad for a longer period of time. Eventually I realised that I wanted a bigger challenge than just a short term visit and decided to go study abroad when I was in the third year of my degree. I found programs offered by Hitotsubashi University for longer term exchanges and I applied for them. I took English exams which were really hard. It was very difficult to get the grades required to meet the level of the University of Melbourne but in the end I succeeded. I got permission from the board of the University and I went to Australia when I was in my fourth year.

At Hitotsubashi there are three options for studying abroad, Australia, the United States and the Netherlands. I chose Australia because it is very friendly to Japanese people and safe. Studying abroad is expensive but my parents said I could go as they thought Australia would be a safe place for me.

I was also very interested in the diversity in the society, the multiculturalism. In Australia there are so many nationalities especially from Asian countries who can speak English. And there are European people too. I thought it would be good for me to interact with European people and Asian people at the same time.

Studying abroad has meant an extra year at University. This was expensive for my family but they were very supportive of me. Japanese students can graduate within four years even though they study abroad but I decided on five years because I wanted to become a bureaucrat and needed to take the entrance exams.

Studying in Australia has changed my career goals. Before I went to Australia I wanted to work in Japan, but now I am interested in working internationally.

My overseas experiences have really changed the way I think about Japan too. Before I went to Australia I thought Japan was a tiny country and not many foreigners would know about it. But I was so surprised because there are so many things in Australia about Japan and so many students studying Japanese. I started to realise that Japan is such an influential country. When I was in Australia so many people told me how unique Japan was and how we should treasure it. It made a big impression and now I also think Japan is unique and wonderful.

Studying overseas made me realise how difficult it can be living in a foreign country. In the beginning of my exchange I had a really hard time because my English was not very good. I couldn't understand what was being talked about and it was really hard at times. After I came back from Australia I thought that I should do something for foreign people who are struggling with Japanese society. I started a part time job at JICA (Japan's international aid organisation) to help people from developing countries.

I would like to see more young people studying abroad. When I was in Australia there were so many Asian people speaking English very well. Normally in Japan students hesitate to speak English. It's a shame as Japanese people have the ability but don't have the opportunity to speak it. Studying overseas helps you to overcome hesitation as you have to speak it to live your life.

I think Australia is a good country for students to go to because it is safe and there is multiculturalism. But if I could improve it, I'd say that Australian people and Asian people are separated and there should be more done to bring these two groups together.