



NEWCASTLES OF THE WORLD SECRETARIAT

**INDUSTRIAL WORK PLACEMENT:
CASE STUDY**

Shinshiro, “Newcastle”, Japan



shaping your dreams



SHINSHIRO



**Northumbria
University
NEWCASTLE**

Contents

Part One – Case Study	
1. SYNOPSIS: CASE STUDY	3
1.1 Comments by Partners	4
1.2 Newcastles of the World: Secretariat’s Role	4
1.3 OSG Corporation’s Role	4
2. PERSONAL BACKGROUND	5
3. OSG: WORK PLACEMENT.....	5
3.1 Formalities	6
3.2 Communication in Meetings.....	7
3.3 Teamwork	7
3.4 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic	8
4. VISITING SHINSHIRO AND SHINSHIRO CITY HALL	8
5. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	9
5.1 Personal and Intercultural Skills	9
5.2 Overcoming the Language Barrier	10
5.3 Employability Skills	10
6. OUTCOMES	10
7. RECOMMENDATION	11
Contact details.....	12
Part Two - Survival Guide to Japan	13
GENERAL TIPS	14
WORK PLACEMENT	16
PRACTISING JAPANESE.....	17
WELLBEING	19

1. SYNOPSIS: CASE STUDY

This case study tells the story of a university student's international work placement in Shinshiro, "Newcastle", Japan, facilitated by the Newcastles of the World Secretariat. The aim of the Newcastles alliance is to foster friendship, to enjoy each other's culture and heritage, and to collaborate on practical projects. The Secretariat is based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Chris Brownhill, mechanical engineering undergraduate at Northumbria University had a successful placement (October 2019 to August 2020) with OSG Corporation; henceforth, known as OSG. The placement was at OSG's Design Centre in Toyokawa which is located close to Shinshiro. OSG holds the leading position in the Japanese cutting tool market as well as a top ranking position globally through being the world's largest manufacturer of round cutting tools. It has a production, sales and technical network spanning thirty countries.

Caroline Theobald CBE, Newcastles of the World Secretariat Trustee approached OSG during Shinshiro's 20th anniversary Newcastles of the World 2018 conference to ask whether the business would consider taking a university student on placement. OSG was very interested and already experienced in providing work placements for international students. On returning to Newcastle upon Tyne, Caroline Theobald consulted with her colleagues at Northumbria University.

In collaboration, the Newcastles of the World Secretariat worked with Mr Daiki Nakamura, (Marketing Manager at OSG) and Mr Ryoji Hozumi (Mayor of Shinshiro) and his international team at the City Council, together with Northumbria University to make the placement possible. Chris Brownhill describes how there was mutual benefit to both himself and OSG via the placement. It was a 'win-win' situation. The quotations are by Chris unless otherwise attributed.

We have included a strong focus on skills development throughout the case study, including employability skills. Part One focuses on the work placement. Part Two includes Chris's "Survival Guide to Japan: Common Problems and Solutions". The value of skills development through his successful international work placement links Part One and Part Two.

We hope that the case study will encourage students and employers to participate in and offer international work placements across the Newcastles. We agreed to create the case study after Chris completed his degree. He graduated in 2021 with a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) Mechanical Engineering with First Class Honours.

“This was an amazing challenge, a once in a lifetime chance, learning new skills through working in Japan. It’s an amazing opportunity that Newcastles of the World has provided.”

Chris Brownhill, Bachelor of Engineering (Hons), Northumbria University

1.1 Comments by Partners

“Chris has acted as a trailblazer for other students from the Newcastles, showing that he was able to accommodate the language issue and other challenges.”

Mr Daiki Nakamura, Marketing Manager, OSG

“I think Chris has changed a lot from being able to have this experience. His presence has helped and stimulated OSG and citizens of Shinshiro. Cultural exchange is very important. Many other students with bright futures could follow his path to experience Japanese industries, cultures and Japanese hospitalities.”

Mr Ryoji Hozumi, Former Mayor, Shinshiro City Council

“A placement year in industry is an invaluable experience. It allows students the opportunity to develop new technical skills, make connections, apply theoretical knowledge in the real world and gain first-hand experience of the recruitment and selection process. At Northumbria University, we fully appreciate the huge importance of experiential learning on our students’ employability outcomes and would welcome placement opportunities from other Newcastles around the world.”

Nicola Cooney, Placement Co-ordinator, Northumbria University

1.2 Newcastles of the World: Secretariat’s Role

This is the first international work placement that the Newcastles of the World Secretariat has facilitated. It involved brokering the opportunity with OSG. We liaised with Northumbria University staff, who promoted the work placement. We met with Chris together with Shinshiro’s International Team when they were visiting Newcastle Upon Tyne. During the placement it was also helpful to continue communications via Zoom meetings, to discuss progress.

1.3 OSG Corporation’s Role

OSG took full responsibility for the placement by making arrangements for the work programme, providing accommodation, as well as handling all associated legal matters regarding Chris’s stay in Japan. The company also provided a pastoral role, giving effective support.

2. PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Chris describes himself as having been a shy and reserved child, who studied engineering at school and then college. Keen on computers, exercise and DIY, he had a great interest in Japan and desire to visit there, viewing it as a completely different world. Whilst at University he became more self confident, wanting to take on challenges, and was very keen to secure this placement, with the challenges, experiences and opportunities it would provide.

3. OSG: WORK PLACEMENT



Following an online interview with OSG and a tense wait to hear the result, Chris was very happy to be offered the work placement. OSG applied for his visa and Chris visited the Japanese Embassy in London to make the official request. He describes his expectations as challenge-oriented and thought that even encountering difficult situations would make for a good learning experience. Using language apps, he was developing his Japanese language skills and looking forward to embarking on a new adventure.

On arrival, OSG organised a welcome party for Chris. The HR Staff, Mai Narutani and his supervisor, Oji Kawaguchi, introduced him to everyone and showed him some of the other factories and the dormitory where he was to spend a lot of the following eleven months. Whilst Chris wasn't expected to

speak Japanese at work, he began to use the Japanese that he had learnt so far, which helped in building relationships.

“For the first few weeks I probably had the biggest range of tasks and was shown around many parts of the company. I received training on different areas of work and the use of key equipment. This helped me to gain a good understanding and also see which areas I could do well in.”

The placement was focused on tool design. Chris began with a specific work programme and was also given many freedoms in his work time to choose and develop his own projects. He started to learn programming, designed to make the process of tooling simulations faster. This went well and he was able to share the benefits of his learning with his Japanese colleagues, making suggestions on programming and design.

“As I learnt to handle a lot of the work myself, with assistance from my team, I produced tools I had designed, modelled, and simulated myself. I learnt about how adaptive the work I made had to be as there are many changes made throughout the process to produce the best possible results. This led to me finding certain parts of the work that were taking up a lot of time but were very simple to do, and so I started to learn more about a particular type of programming, and made my first program that then cut out hours of working time each week.

“It was because of the freedom I was allowed in my work that I could develop so many skills and produce the amount of work I did to benefit the company. It was incredible to have my work and skills validated in such a way by such a successful company.”

"Chris created many 3D models of new products for analysis, where the results were very useful in the development of new products. He also created software using python which many people still use to help them work more efficiently."

Oji Kawaguchi, Supervisor, OSG

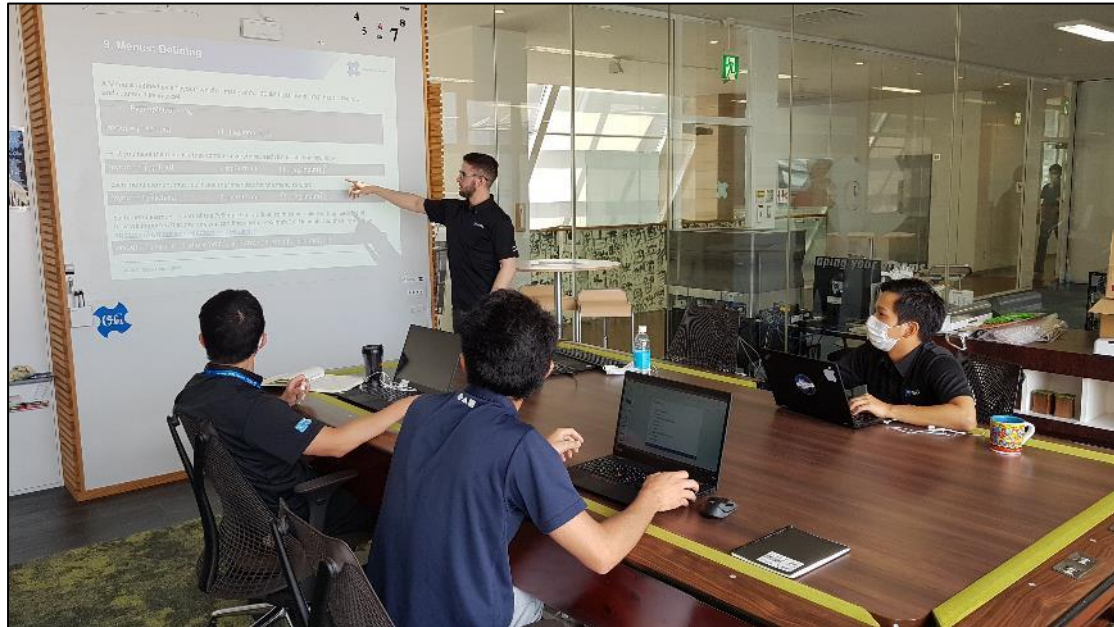
3.1 Formalities

“Japan has many formalities compared to most countries, especially in the workplace. There are correct and incorrect ways to do many things from greetings to how to talk to different people in the company hierarchy. However, being a foreigner means that many of the expectations are waived for you, mostly at the beginning, but even after that, if you make a mistake it is still seen as a more humorous thing considering how friendly everyone is in the company, and you are still supported for trying as someone who did not grow up with the customs.

“When I first arrived I said “Ohayo” for good morning which is only used for very early morning and I hadn’t used the polite attachment “gozaimasu”, and I got a big laugh from the entire department. Another time I said “Yoroshiku” instead of “Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu”, when meeting one of the teams

responsible for interacting with Newcastles of The World, which equated to saying “Yo” instead of ‘Nice to meet you’.”

3.2 Communication in Meetings



“Meetings were held in Japanese. My language skills didn’t progress too well as a result of not studying as much as I could have done. This made meetings difficult in terms of understanding the spoken language. However, meetings were very good for keeping myself on track, maintaining work progress, and collaborating with team members, to help them with their tasks. Meetings played a big role in promoting work between departments and teams, which was very prevalent. My supervisor and I regularly visited multiple departments for information and to work on projects.”

3.3 Teamwork

Chris said there was a strong emphasis on effective team working both during the working day and during social occasions.

“Teamwork runs very smoothly. There is a range of project working groups and the employees move quite seamlessly between these groups. Trust is apparent between everyone. We worked in groups of varying sizes; everyone is co-operative.

“There was a welcome party for me, with amazing cuisine. A whole design centre party was organised with food and bingo. People of all ages play sports together.”

3.4 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Chris explained that when Covid-19 began to spread in Japan many facilities closed of their own volition to help prevent the spread.

“Everyone in the workplace wears a mask, has been careful and a collective effort has been made to prevent the spread. It also helps that Japan is very clean, physical contact is fairly low and people have a much bigger personal bubble. There have been no cases of Covid-19 at OSG.”

4. VISITING SHINSHIRO AND SHINSHIRO CITY HALL



The Newcastle of the World Secretariat and Shinshiro International Team met with Chris before and during his placement.

“Shinshiro was one of my favourite places to visit in Japan. When you want to see rural Japan with all its traditions, this is the best place to visit to get away from busy cities. Shinshiro’s scenery is amazing and the people are incredibly welcoming and interested to meet you. The lakes and rivers run crystal clear and the mountains are vast, because it’s so different it really solidifies the feeling of Japan being a different world.

“One of my visits to Shinshiro was to the City Hall to meet Mr Ryoji Hozumi, the former Mayor, and his staff, who work with Newcastle of the World. At first, I was expecting to be joining in on the meeting as a listener. However, after being greeted by multiple staff and city officials, I sat next to the former Mayor at the head of the conference, as he said: ‘We would now like to begin the meeting by welcoming Chris to Japan’. It was a big surprise to me and

almost overwhelming that all of these people had come to welcome me and to talk about what the exchange means for the future.

“We had a Skype call with David Faulkner and Zélie Guérin of the Newcastles of the World Secretariat. We all spoke about ourselves and our roles and what the exchange meant for the Newcastles alliance. A surprising part of the experience was afterwards we had a small welcome party and the Shinshiro staff had made me a cake with my face on it.”



5. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Personal and Intercultural Skills

Chris emphasised the value of developing understanding of differences between cultures through his experiences, as well as the importance of having an independence-based mentality. He was proactive both at work and in his leisure time, gaining new cultural experiences through his interactions with colleagues. He also learnt about cultural differences through his travels and familiarising with the immediate environment and further afield in Japan.

“I found this a very different work environment. Everyone is busy, but calm. For me, it was a sink or swim situation, very good for personal development.

“It’s rare to be able to learn this much about how you naturally react to new situations or recognise your strengths and weaknesses this quickly. An international placement really helps develop your personal skills.”

5.2 Overcoming the Language Barrier

“While I slacked off on my language studies, I found that I was developing other skills: one was to interpret conversations based on very limited information, and another to break down what you want to say into its fundamentals. Both of these together led me to be able to predict many times what my co-workers were going to say to me, many times to their surprise, and then for me to reply with the exact information they needed in an understandable manner. This was a particularly useful skill I developed in Japan. I found that I gained a better understanding of what someone was talking about, as I subconsciously made assumptions on where they might be taking their point.

“Learning the language can be very effective if you put in the work while living in Japan. However, there are difficult parts of the learning process, including that most people will speak very quickly, making it hard to interpret at first. Also, many language learning apps and courses will use an overly formal version of Japanese that is never used in person, like using “anata”, the formal way of saying “you”. This is almost never used and is seen as strange to use in most situations. However, in Japan, there is a government-funded initiative to provide free Japanese lessons to foreigners on a weekly basis, which was an incredible help to my time in Japan. I attended classes once a week until it was decided to close them because of the pandemic.”

5.3 Employability Skills

As well as developing skills and experience in his chosen field of engineering, Chris took full advantage of the opportunity given to him by OSG to develop employability skills: professional skills to deploy in the world of work. These are exemplified across the case study. They range from Chris working effectively in a team, working well on his own, delivering tasks as requested, being proactive with a focus on supporting continuous improvement, project management and problem-solving. Equally, they include coaching and helping other team members, delivering effective presentations, developing a customer-focused approach, being receptive to different training opportunities and taking every opportunity to further develop his interpersonal skills in the international environment of OSG.

6. OUTCOMES

As Chris is about to embark on his career he said that the experience has increased his confidence, increased his sense of independence and shown him how skills can be developed in a different cultural environment. He would feel confident to work in another country again.

Chris has learnt from OSG’s great focus on customer service and continuous improvement, as well as their positive approach in nurturing an adaptable workforce, to support and coach each other.

“I feel that this has opened doors as I consider my future, working in engineering and using the range of skills developed, giving a jump start to my career.”

He describes it as an amazing time, experiencing both work and Japanese culture.

“I furthered my university studies through my work placement. During my spare time from work, I experienced Japan’s amazing sights, culture and cuisine, which has been a dream for a long time.”

Mr Daiki Nakamura, Marketing Manager, OSG said:

“It all started from the encounter with the Newcastles of the World conference 2018, Shinshiro. We attended as volunteers, “Yellow T-Shirts MORIAGE TAI” throughout the conference. It was challenging and a good opportunity for some of the OSG staff to speak English and to provide hospitality to guests from overseas. Having Chris here has brought tremendous experience for OSG employees and brought us encouragement in overcoming challenges in communicating with him.”

Zélie Guérin, Project Director, Newcastles of the World said:

“On Chris’s final day at OSG we had a farewell link-up by Skype with Chris, Mr Daiki Nakamura, Marketing Manager, the OSG HR team, the former Mayor of Shinshiro and his international team. Chris gave an excellent presentation, speaking first in Japanese, then in English, telling us about his placement, how much he had enjoyed it, the opportunities, experiences and skills development it brought. For many years, it has been Chris’s dream to live and work in Japan. His curiosity, drive and proactive approach combined to achieve this goal. Helping to shape his future, it is tremendous that the work placement has provided Chris with a firm foundation to enter the competitive world of work at a global level.”

7. RECOMMENDATION

“This type of internship should be done as much as possible. I would encourage others to take up this opportunity if they get the chance. I feel very thankful and would like to give special thanks to the HR team at OSG. The challenge has many rewards. I gained a completely different perspective. Japan is completely different to any other country I’ve been in. Having an international placement helps to mix the best part of all cultures together. Everyone is interested to learn about different cultures. Japan is becoming much more multi-cultural and everyone benefits.”

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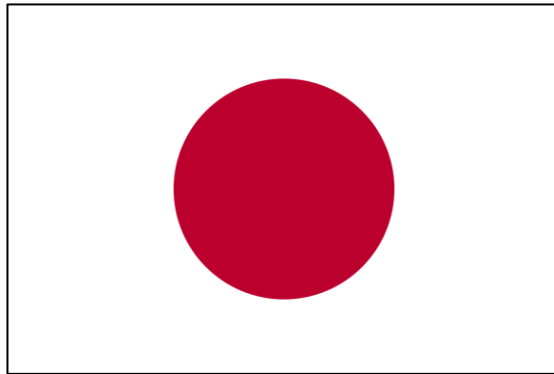
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Part Two - Survival Guide to Japan

Common Problems and Solutions

Chris Brownhill, Bachelor of Engineering
(Hons)



GENERAL TIPS

Mobile data

Before travelling to Japan, pre-ordering a pre-paid sim card can save you money and hassle. A monthly plan is one option; otherwise, you can order pre-paid sim cards cheaply on Japanese Amazon (amazon.co.jp). (I got 10GB of data for around £7). Some airports offer okay deals but it's mainly the stress of not knowing what a good deal is that you want to avoid.

Translator app

There are many translator apps available; many have an instant camera translation where you can point your camera at a word in Japanese and it will try to translate it. Having a live camera translator is incredibly useful in Japan especially when food shopping, as they don't have a simple alphabet. This makes it very difficult to manually type the characters in the app.

Restaurant menus and ordering food



You will find that a few restaurants will not have an English menu, and for some you can't use translation apps on the menu because of the font used. Some restaurants will have a display outside of what they serve, so you can take a picture and show them when ordering. Alternatively, you can also use the phrase "Osusume" which roughly means "recommendation".

Travel and Google maps



Be aware that Google maps don't always work too well in big cities like Tokyo, at least in busy areas from what I noticed. So, give yourself plenty of spare time when travelling and be proactive by asking a stranger for help. Almost everyone is incredibly helpful in Japan so it makes this part much easier.

Meetup app



The meetup app along with a few others is really useful when travelling to other countries. There are always events going on where anyone can join and

is always warmly welcomed. There are groups for different hobbies or situations and many international meetup events to help people join a community and learn about the country and culture.

WORK PLACEMENT

Ask Questions

Something you learn at work in Japan is that a lot of the instructions or information you are given are directly applicable to the task but don't necessarily account for any changes or problems that may occur. This may be because of a mutual understanding people have from growing up in Japan, where they may assume you already know some things you don't.

Solution: Ask about everything; at first it can be difficult in a new project or task but try to ask about details as much as possible. When you learn more about the tasks and know more about what to expect, you can prepare these questions for the next time.

Skill: It can be stressful at first, but you gain a much better understanding about the workings of the project, and learn how to focus your questions to exactly what information you need to complete a project.

Make your work adaptive

Depending on the environment you work in, you may have to change parts of your work based on missed or new information. In Engineering, this can happen a lot, as there can be many variables to change to get the best results. This can be very frustrating to have to redo chunks of your work multiple times, sometimes with tedious parts.

Solution: Make your work as adaptive as possible. This mainly relates to keeping your work organised but also to streamlining a process. This has the added benefit of making it easier to work on in future and easier to get your head around the task.

Skill: You naturally start to carry out your work in an adaptive and organised manner. This helps clear your head and allows you to think about the project in greater depth and have less stress.

PRACTISING JAPANESE

Annoying is better than boring



After being in Japan for a while, sometimes anxiety can build up without you realising it. You start avoiding things like talking to co-workers or higher-ups, because you don't want to waste their time or make them uncomfortable if their English isn't good.

Solution: Being a foreign visitor in the countryside in Japan gives you some privileges, such as many people being interested in you and your culture. Some of these people may not want to start a conversation but are still interested. So, instead of avoiding conversations with people you may think are too busy, make an effort to start one. People will notice that you're not very talkative more than if you are too talkative in this environment. Many people want to get to know you and possibly practise their English.

Skill: Being proactive in making conversation at first can be difficult but you learn more about what subjects people like, what kind of ideals they have and the social hierarchy in your environment. Most importantly, it grows your social circle and more people will be happy to make plans or give and ask for help.

Locals being nervous to speak English

English is taught everywhere in Japan as standard. Most people are not fluent, but the ones that are may sometimes be uncomfortable using it; some

are eager to practise with a native speaker but aren't comfortable with approaching a native English speaker.

Solution: Just keep this in mind when travelling in Japan and don't let any apparent disinterest put you off from trying to make conversation.

Skill: You learn a lot more about overcoming the language barrier, about the area and the culture and it makes it much easier to build a friendship group, which is important when travelling alone.

Practising Japanese with native speakers



An important thing to note is that Japan has a government-funded initiative to teach Japanese to foreigners, where someone only has to pay the registration fee to receive free Japanese language lessons.

When practising Japanese with native speakers, sometimes people will laugh, this is often because they appreciate that you are trying to learn their language, which they know is difficult. You get used to this fairly quickly and it can become a motivating factor.

Skill: This kind of well-intentioned laughter can help you to stop worrying about people's intention behind the laugh, almost as if it's standard in Japan. This overall improves your ability to remain composed in various situations.

WELLBEING

Overcoming depression, if it arises



When living in Japan for an extended period, mostly if you're further from the big cities, many people reach a point where they feel the culture shock settle in (For me this was around 2-3 months in). Many people who visit are expecting a giant change and it is, so the culture shock doesn't hit at first. But slowly, the smaller changes and surprises can build up and unless you're out travelling a lot, it can get a bit lonely and depressing.

Solution: Stay active and social with positive affirmation, one of the main causes for this is overthinking the bad things. For me, visiting Tokyo helped and pushing myself to approach groups and make my own fun. It was terrifying at first but completely made the experience for me.

Skill: From these drastically different situations, you gain a better understanding of yourself and how you naturally react to situations and learning to make your own fun in a sink or swim situation is much easier than doing it from scratch. Overall, it's an unbelievable skill to have.

Find a community

Moving to a new country can leave you fairly isolated, especially if you don't know the language. This can make things difficult as you learn about living in

a new place by yourself. Along with this, you may have friends at work but may not see them much outside of work.

Solution: The main solution is to join a group to socialise with. You can find groups that will welcome you in churches, sports, or bars, just to give some examples. Another way is to use meetup apps.

Skills: Becoming part of a new community is really good for understanding different people and cultures and generally improves your teamworking skills in the workplace.

Run towards anxiety

When you're away from your friends and family for so long it can be easy to fall into ruts. For example, avoiding speaking to some people at work because you may not wish to interrupt them can actually result from anxiety due to the language barrier. However, this sort of thing can build up and isolate you more from the group. Situations like this can be hard to recognise when you're not with close friends who might point them out.

Skill: By repeatedly doing things that may make you anxious you become better at seizing opportunities that come about, as you can more easily discern when you're avoiding something due to fear or for a good reason.

Celebrity status



A fairly big surprise when you arrive in Japan is how few foreigners there are. This can leave you feeling like all eyes are on you. Also, few Japanese people ever travel outside the country. This means that you're a novelty to many people.

I arrived in Japan a week before a typhoon, so my first visit to the supermarket was at a very busy time. As you shop, you realise that many people are looking at you. It can be very uncomfortable at first as you fumble around not knowing what some products are or how to prepare them.

However, you understand that this response is out of curiosity for different cultures, which can be rare to see. You get more used to people looking at you in different areas and many times in bigger cities people may approach you to learn about you and practise their English, which can be very comforting.

Skill: A big benefit to being looked at a lot, you become very comfortable and self-confident in most situations, because you stop worrying that people are judging you once you understand their perspective.

Accelerated learning



Living and working in Japan has many difficult challenges in many aspects. Overcoming challenges like the language barrier causes you to break things down to their core ideas and improve your listening and speaking skills, and intuition, every day. There are many parts of being in Japan that will challenge you in scenarios you would never encounter at home. This means you can better round yourself as a person and find your sticking points with a new perspective.

Some of the situations are almost sink or swim, increasing the pressure and the gratification for overcoming it. Along with this, you're living with an entirely different culture with different values and methods, giving a plethora of opportunities to learn different ways of doing basic things that can help you compare with your own methods and improve on both sides.

Seize the opportunity



Visiting Japan was probably the best self-improvement venture I've been on. You're always deciding whether to push through fears of doing something that might end in an embarrassing situation or whether to let yourself fall into a rut of not doing anything. You have to see every challenge as an opportunity to find areas you're lacking in. From being in such a different environment, you experience situations you never would at home and can become much more self-aware with this new perspective.

When in Japan it can be easy to leave planning trips till later when you consider how long you will be there. This often means things get forgotten, but Japan has too many festivals, events and places to go to, you have to seize every chance you get to see something new.

Being a foreign visitor in Japan, you are treated differently, but get more attention and are often excused from general rules, meaning you get chances to make mistakes; so, take advantage of the opportunity to make connections, don't get complacent and make the most of the time!