

Universität zu Köln  
Abteilung 93 - Internationale Mobilität  
PROMOS Stipendienprogramm  
Albertus-Magnus-Platz  
D-50923 Köln

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## Project Report

Dear Ms. van Ravenstein,

I am pleased to submit my report on the PROMOS scholarship that supported my semester abroad at the University of Tokyo. This report outlines my academic activities and personal experiences during my stay in Japan.

Preparing for my semester abroad involved extensive planning in terms of academic course selection, accommodation arrangements and financial considerations. I had the idea of going to Tokyo as early as 2022, which allowed me to get an early overview of the to-dos and necessary preparations. The application process for the University of Tokyo then required extensive coordination to meet deadlines and administrative requirements, particularly in relation to the health checks needed to enter the country. The university required further statements of motivation, similar to those I had submitted to the University of Cologne.

During my stay in the city, I lived in a university residence, the Mejirodai International Village, which provided an excellent opportunity to interact with students from all over the world, from Uzbekistan to Luxembourg and Singapore. The central location allowed easy access to the university within 30 minutes and enabled me to enrich myself with the colourful lifestyle of Shibuya, Shinjuku and Ikebukuro. I would recommend the MIV to anyone considering studying at UTokyo. It is a modern, clean and well organised facility. The rules can be strict, but the management team is very welcoming and always at the reception to help with any problems.

At the University of Tokyo, I was enrolled in the Graduate School of Economics, where I took courses in development economics that perfectly complemented my finance studies in Cologne, such as "Empirical Microeconomics" and "Interdisciplinary Issues in Development Economics". The courses were interactive, highly applicable to real-world issues and really motivated me to delve deeper into the intersection of economics and sociology. I also took two courses at the Graduate School of Public Policy, which broadened my understanding of politics and international relations. There, I participated in two capstone consulting projects on impact investing and geopolitical strategies for Asian companies. A highlight was a visit to Bain & Company's Tokyo office. The consultants gave us valuable feedback throughout the geopolitics course, strengthening valuable skills for my future career such as critical thinking, structuring and presentation skills. The impact investing project, on the other hand, focused on strategies for working with smallholder farmers in Indonesia to ensure sustainable food security. Here I was able to apply my passion for sustainable finance in a policy-making environment.

Between classes, in the evenings and on weekends, I explored the city and surrounding areas such as Nikko, Kamakura and Yokohama with international students from diverse backgrounds. Exploring

Tokyo's cultural heritage, from historical sites to contemporary art and culinary experiences, added a unique dimension to my stay. In particular, I came to appreciate the philosophy of Ikigai and the serenity and wisdom of the elderly in Japan. As well as travelling around the Tokyo metropolitan area, I visited Osaka, Kyoto and even Seoul in South Korea. Seeing all these unique cities and cultures has shaped my understanding of East Asian social and economic development, from Japanese societies that sometimes feel isolated from the rest of the world because of their uniqueness, to Korea with so much pressure to navigate the conflicts and geopolitics of Northeast Asia.

In terms of the cost of living, I would describe it as a mixed picture. Compared to Germany, eating out is relatively cheap due to the current weakness of the yen. Supermarket prices are similar to my home country, while activities can be expensive depending on how popular they are, for example if you want to see sumo wrestlers. The scholarship, combined with the comparatively cheap accommodation, made this stay possible. I would not underestimate the budget, simply because there is so much to do in Tokyo and of course everything has a price. Therefore, I would highly recommend future students considering an exchange at the University of Tokyo to plan a budget and have a buffer to explore Japan. I would also strongly consider getting involved in capstone projects, if offered, to get the most out of the academic experience. Understanding the local business culture, networking with peers and companies, and exploring Tokyo through the academic and professional environment will greatly enrich the time abroad. In addition, early preparation for administrative processes, including visa applications and accommodation arrangements, is essential to ensure a smooth transition. Depending on the graduate school you wish to attend, there may be a variety of specific requirements, such as the health screening mentioned above or a mandatory academic supervisor.

In conclusion, my semester in Tokyo was a transformative experience that broadened my academic knowledge, professional skills and cultural awareness. I am deeply grateful for the support of the PROMOS scholarship, which made this invaluable opportunity possible.

Kind regards,

Mark Palm