

## **My Impressions of Wakayama**

My name is Helen Stewart and I am currently a fourth year student study a Science and Arts Double Degree with majors in Physics and Japanese at Curtin University. Curtin University is the largest university in Western Australia and is located in Western Australia's capital, Perth.

This semester, I have had the privilege of being able to study on exchange at Wakayama University. I have now been in Wakayama for 2 months and going on exchange here has provided me with countless new experiences. The people in Wakayama are have been really friendly and welcoming to me so I have really been able to enjoy my life here.

In my first few weeks at Wakayama University, I noticed many differences from my home university. One of the first things that struck me was the difference in administration of student enrolments. As a large university with over 50,000 students, Curtin administers all of its enrolments on a computer database. Wakayama University however accepts all student enrolments directly on paper. This was one of the first things that made me realise the complete difference in scale between the two universities. With less than 5000 students, processes such as enrolment can be done a lot more personally at Wakayama University.

The first time I visited the Wakayama University campus, I noticed that the water in the toilets were slightly brown. When I tried to flush the toilet, the water didn't change colour which really confused me. It took me over two weeks to notice the signs in the toilets explaining that the toilet water was actually treated grey water. Grey water is a category of water given to all waste waters other than sewage, for example the water to wash the dishes in or water left over from baths and showers.

The amount of energy required to treat grey water back to a perfectly fresh water is extremely high. It can be treated to a safe level without using an exorbitant amount of energy. Such a simple idea had never occurred to me when I was in Australia. Noticing this made me realise that not only the culture and landscape vary in different countries, but also the technologies adopted.

I think adopting this idea in Australia would relieve a lot of pressure on our drought strained water supplies. According to the Western Australian Water Corporation, over 40% of Perth's water supply is currently provided through desalination [1]. The only barrier to use of grey water is peoples' perceptions of it as 'dirty'. Since toilet water is not going to be reused regardless, there is no need for us to pollute drinking quality water by using it in toilets.

My overall impression of Wakayama however is that they are not as conscious of water consumption as in Perth. There is a common custom called 'uchiage' which involves hosing water on the pavement in front of hotels and restaurants as to cool down and cleanse the entrance

area. Whilst this is undertaken as a means of cooling shops through evaporating the water and actually acts as a form of energy conservation, if this custom was practised in Australia it would be seen as incredibly wasteful. In fact, spraying water on the pavement is not allowed in New South Wales, Victoria, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. I have also noticed that people are not really conscious about the length of time they spend in the shower. The Western Australian Water Corporation advises that people keep their showers to a length of just 4 minutes [2]. Despite this, I feel like I have experienced more rain in Wakayama in two months than I would in a whole year in Perth. The environmental concern here is not a lack of water supply, but the amount of energy required to treat waste water produced through excessive water consumption. On the issue of waste disposal, Australia is an extremely spacious country and the majority of non-recyclable waste goes into land fill. It is possible that these landfill sites could lead to environmental problems in the future.

Both Wakayama and Curtin University are using innovative methods to conserve the environment. I think both universities could learn from each others methods of caring for the environment. After all, universities should act as the centres of innovation in our respective societies.

I have also found it interesting how university lifestyle in Japan is both more relaxed and more intense than that at Australian Universities at the same time. Ever since learning about the prevalence of club activities in Japanese school and university life I had always wanted to join a club myself during my exchange. I joined the Wakayama University Mixed Chorus Club. What Curtin University would call 'clubs' in English would be closer to the Japanese idea of a social 'circles'. The word 'bukatsu', roughly translated as 'club activities' describes a much more serious and dedicated club with regular practices to hone respective skills.

The choir at Wakayama University is completely run and organised by its members, the students. Its members commit to over ten hours of practise a week, not to mention preparation time that the third year students who are most active in running the club put in. I have been so inspired by the dedication and professionalism that the students put in to their club activities which are not compulsory. I'm sure singing with such a wonderful group of people whilst looking at the beautiful mountain scenery is something I can only do in Wakayama. When I return to Western Australia I'm sure I will have a lot of interesting stories that will surprise everyone and make them want to visit Japan!

## References

1. Western Australian Water Corporation. Desalination. Perth (Australia); 2013. <http://www.watercorporation.com.au/water-supply-and-services/solutions-to-perths-water-supply/desalination>.
2. Western Australian Water Corporation. Water Saving Tips for the Bathroom. Perth (Australia); 2016. <http://www.watercorporation.com.au/save-water/water-saving-tips?pid=res-sw-np-wst>