

To Wakayama University Exchange Applicants

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Australia and Japan are culturally very different, with both countries' unique cultures stemming from their respective histories. These differences can easily be seen by examining the daily lives of Japanese and Australian people. I, myself, having been living in Wakayama Prefecture, have experienced the cultural differences first-hand; particularly the payment methods in stores and public transport, and the existence - or lack thereof - of formal speech.

Similarly to many other countries, Australia is a cashless society, where transactions are primarily done using contactless payment methods, usually in the form of credit and debit cards. The convenience of being able to pay with the tap of your card or smartphone has led to the global popularisation of this particular payment method. It is because of the convenience, that public transport systems in Australia have also adopted the idea of a single transport card that allows people to ride public buses, trains and ferries. Japanese society, on the other hand, still heavily relies on cash as its primary method of payment. Their reluctance to transition into a cashless society is partially because of a growth in the distrust of banks in the 1990s, resulting in an influx of large amounts of cash being "stashed under the mattress". Although department stores and convenience stores provide an option of card payments, many smaller, local stores do not. As a result, there is a need for people to carry around large amounts of money, which can prove to be inconvenient to foreigners. To put this into perspective, A trip from Wakayama to Osaka with friends would require at least ¥10,000 (roughly AUD\$130) to accommodate for transport, food and entertainment. However, not only would you need to carry a large amount of money, but the fact that bus fares can only be paid with small change also needs to be considered. This would mean having to make sure that you have sufficient coins or ¥1000 notes to pay for the bus fares. As someone who grew up in a largely cashless society, getting used to the cash-oriented lifestyle of Wakayama took a lot of time.

The second major cultural difference is language. Unlike Japanese, English does not have specific formal speech (with the exception of fixed phrases in business emails and the like). Hierarchy has been a major part of Japan's society for a very long time and, as a result, has led to the clear distinction between senior and junior that is still visible in today's society. On the other hand, Australia started off as a colony of Great Britain,

where most of its population was made up of ex-convicts. Consequently, there are currently a lot of people who use a very casual form of speech. In other words, there is not a great distinction between “formal” and “informal” speech, especially in a place like Australia. Japanese can be divided into two categories: *tamego* (informal) and *teineitai* (formal). *Teineitai* can then be separated into five subcategories: *teineigo* (simple formal), *sonkeigo* (honorific), *kenjōgo* (humble) *teichōgo* (courteous) and *bikago* (elegant). For Japanese people, changing the formality is easy, but for an exchange student such as myself, it can be very confusing. If you were to use informal language with your boss, you would very likely be scolded. In a similar fashion, using formal language with a close friend would make you seem cold and distant. For someone who was raised in a society with no clear distinction between formal and informal, having to switch formalities every time I speak still proves to be difficult. Speaking informally is easy, but even after studying the language for almost a decade, bumping into a teacher or meeting someone for the first time can be mentally draining. Living in the Kansai region does not make it any easier, when you have to face not only the formalities in the language, but also the very-difficult-to-understand Kansai dialect. However, having come to Japan, I have come to understand the importance of formal language in Japanese culture, and have come to, slowly but surely, improve my Japanese skills in that aspect.

Australia and Japan’s cultural differences are rooted in its historical backgrounds. Living in a country different to your own is exactly the way to witness and experience these cultural differences. Understanding the differences would not only make living in said country much easier, but it is also a good way to broaden your perspectives of the world. Because it is such a good learning experience, if ever there is a chance, I highly recommend studying abroad in Japan.