

1. NII International Internship Program

The National Institute of Informatics is one of the top research institutes around the world (<http://research.webometrics.info/en/world>) and possibility to participate in the NII International Internship Program was very interesting and motivating opportunity. The NII is located in the centre of Tokyo beside the current Imperial Palace and was created in April 2000 for the purpose of advancing the study of informatics.

There are many research topics within the internship program call with different length of stay. Most of supervisors prefer longer period of stay according to my and colleagues' experiences but it is tightly connected with the visa problem. If there is no previous contact with the supervisor then it is reasonable to contact him via mediator to express the interest. Fortunately, the NII is not classical and conservative Japanese company but following of traditional Japanese manners can help to avoid many problems or embarrassing situations.

Supervisors and research teams are very friendly and helpful with every problem and organization of research work depends on every supervisor. Most of them organize regular research meetings to control the work progress of their students but there aren't any other strict rules for work. You can work from your home or you can be at the NII for a whole week (every floor with students' offices includes small bedrooms for few people). Research teams are composed of members of many different nationalities and therefore the internship program is very motivating experience.

2. Visa

Czech Republic is involved among countries which don't need a visa for the short-term stay in Japan (a stay of up to 90 days). The visa is necessary in case of the long-term stay (a stay of over 90 days). Japanese visa is issued for free for Czech citizens and an application can be made directly to the Japanese embassy but it is necessary to submit a large number of verifying documents. Unfortunately, a process of acquiring the visa takes a long time (**several months**) because the application documents will have to be sent to the nearest immigration authority in Japan for examination.

Certificate of Eligibility (COE)

A Certificate of Eligibility can be issued before the visa application by a regional Japanese immigration authority under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice as evidence that the foreign national meets the conditions for landing in Japan, including the requirements that the activity in which the foreign national wishes to engage in Japan at the time of the landing examination is not fraudulent. Czech citizen with the COE can get the visa issued more easily at Japanese embassy within the standard processing period (**five working days**).

NII (normally assistant of supervisor) arranges all issues for an applicant. In my case, it took about **3 months** to acquire the COE and I had to send following documents to NII:

1. ID Photo (4cm x 3cm, two photos)
2. Original or copy of Certificate of Graduation
3. Original of Certificate of Student Status
4. Recommendations from your university or your institute

Thus, obtaining the certificate of eligibility (and a visa subsequently) is not difficult for applicant but it takes long time.

3. Tokyo

The Land of the Rising Sun is a country where the past meets the future and it is country of contrasts and contradictions. As an island nation shut off the rest of the world, Japan is very homogenous. 99% of the population is Japanese ethnicity and the largest minorities are Koreans and Chinese.

The Japanese are well known for their politeness. A degree of the politeness is unexpected for many tourists as well as cleanness and safety. Everybody is expecting big cultural shock in Japan but the right cultural shock is after comeback.

Tokyo is capital of Japan and the world's most populous metropolis with upwards of 35 million people. Tokyo, as the center of the Greater Tokyo Area, is Japan's largest domestic and international hub for rail, ground, and air transportation. Public transportation within Tokyo is dominated by an extensive network of clean and efficient trains and subways run by a variety of operators. The Tokyo Metro and Toei networks together carry a combined average of over eight million passengers daily.

Accommodation

Japan offers a wide range of accommodation types in both Japanese and Western styles. For all kinds of accommodation is valid that it is so small and expensive.

Sakura-House

Very common way of accommodation for NII students is the Sakura-House (<http://www.sakura-house.com/en/>). The Sakura-House provides apartments and shared apartments, rented on a monthly basis. These shared houses include an internet connection and other essential services what are needed for a normal life. If it is not possible to find an appropriate sakura-house in a particular area then there are other similar companies.

Public Transportation

Japan has an efficient public transportation network, especially within metropolitan areas and between the large cities. The quality of train transportation is well known around the world but according my supervisor the quality is decreasing – “Nowadays, it is common the trains have delays about one or two minutes.” First place to meet Japanese public transportation is on the way from the Narita international airport to Tokyo. The official websites offers many different kinds of transportations (<http://www.narita-airport.jp/en/access/index.html>) from cheapest trains (Keisei Main Line – 1200 yen) up to helicopter (from 280 000 yen).

4. Travelling

NII Internship isn't only about research activities but also about discovering Japanese culture, food, and amazing Japanese country.

Kawagoe

Kawagoe is located only 30 minutes from Ikebukuro in Tokyo and is suitable as a one day trip. This city is known as “small Edo” after the old name for Tokyo. In Kawagoe, you can't experience the traditional and pure Japan what you can't see in Tokyo.



Mt. Takao

Mt. Takao (Takao-san) is one of the closest recreation areas to central Tokyo (45 minutes from Shinjuku St. in Tokyo). This place offers 7 different hiking trails and opportunity to relax in a beautiful temple.



Hakone

Hakone is one part of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park in Kanagawa prefecture, about 90 kilometres from Tokyo. Hakone with Hakone pass offers typical Japanese way of traveling and relax – round trip in Hakone is composed of boat trip on the Lake Ashi, rope way via the boiling sulphur pits of Owakudani, cable car, and historical train – everything is included in Hakone pass. This area is a popular tourist attraction well known for its onsen (hot springs) and views of Mt. Fuji.



Kamakura

Kamakura is a city in Kanagawa prefecture, about 50 kilometres south-west of Tokyo. This city was political center of Japan in the beginning of last millennium and now it is very popular tourist destination (aka the Kyoto of Eastern Japan) with numerous temples and shrines.



Shirakawa-go

The Shirakawa-go is located in Shogawa River Valley in mountains. The Shirakawa-go is declared as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1995 and is famous for their traditional gassho-zukuri farmhouses (most of them are than 250 years old). The farmhouses' steep thatched roofs resemble the hands of Buddhist monks pressed together in prayer. The architectural style developed over many generations and is designed to withstand the large amounts of heavy snow that falls in the region during winter.



Hokkaido

Hokkaido (Yeso) is Japan's second largest island and is also northernmost of Japan's prefectures and its capital is Sapporo. There are many awesome national parks and it is possible to enjoy winter sports.

