

Ada Reyes, Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto, Japan, Internship Spring 2016

There are lots of internships available in the United States. Why did you choose Japan for your internship?

This is actually an exciting short story. I tend to take signs in life and this was one of those times. Rosen College of Hospitality Management sends weekly newsletters informing students of various opportunities in the hospitality industry, ranging from part-time and full-time employment to internships and volunteer opportunities. It was during the Fall of 2015 that I received several newsletters encouraging students to apply for The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto internship. I thought to myself at that time that traveling so far away from home would be too difficult and that I couldn't possibly achieve the six months away in a foreign country. Then my professor for Hospitality Finance, Dr. Tadayuki (Tad) Hara, made an announcement via UCF Webcourses encouraging his students to apply as he is very good friends with the previous GM of the hotel, Mr. Yuji Tanaka. I began researching and found that Japan is the perfect country to learn hospitality and service. I wouldn't say I chose Japan, but that Japan chose me.

Describe the process for applying for the internship.

The first step in applying was to contact Ms. Sheila Vargas, Rosen's Career Development Coordinator. She helped me to convert my resume to proper Japanese format. The next step was to forward the resume to Ms. Suja Chaulagain, Faculty Coordinator / Instructor for the Office of Experiential Learning, who shared my resume with the Human Resources Department at The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto. From there I was contacted and invited for a Skype interview. On Friday October 9th, 2015 from 9:00PM I shared a Skype interview with Mr. Anthony Smekens, Director of Rooms (during that time as he is no longer there). That day I rented a private room at UCF's All Knight Study to conduct and prepare for the interview. On Monday October 12, 2015 I was offered a position in the Rooms Division. It was that same day I accepted the position.

Describe the process of getting a passport and visa.

I already had an active passport. For those who do not have a passport I believe one must complete an application, submit evidence of U.S. citizenship, pay some fees, and take a photo. The Spot on UCF main campus provides this service as well.

My visa application was handled by Mr. J.T. Ghim, Faculty Coordinator / Instructor for the Office of Experiential Learning (he is no longer in the position). I believe this process is currently handled by Ms. Sheila Vargas and Ms. Jessica Wickey.

The paperwork took two months to complete and was processed by the Japanese Ministry of Justice and Immigration Bureau. It is a requirement for one to be registered in the Internship course. Rosen uses this as a certification of enrollment and it is required in order to attain a visa from the Japanese Government. Although I already completed all required internship credits, I had to retake the Internship III course to meet that requirement.

I had to review and sign a standard contract which contained requirements and understandings between The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto and I. From there, I filled a Certificate of Eligibility, an immigration document which the company files on my behalf granting me permission to work and live in Japan. These documents took two to three weeks for approval by the Japanese Ministry of Justice and Immigration Bureau.

The next step was to prepare the visa applications for the Japanese Consulate General of Japan in Miami. Travel arrangements were made where I then submitted my passport with the visa application. This process took approximately ten days. Once the passport and visa was received, I was able to leave for Japan.

Tell me how your parents, family and friends reacted when you said you were heading to Japan.

My family, friends, and instructors were absolutely ecstatic. I had strong support from everyone but above all my parents, who emotionally and financially supported my decision. There were many upfront costs and considerations I didn't anticipate, but my parents believed in me and did help me so much. My dad is a fond traveler and gave me much advice on what I would need to prepare as far as currency, travel arrangements, insurance, and such (i.e: Paychecks in Japan are once a month, meaning I had to have two months of money saved. Commuters pass to travel and from work was \$500 for six months, Wi-Fi box \$400 for six months, housing deposit was around \$1,600, clothing for cold weather, a suit for work, airfare was roughly \$1,500 round trip, etc.). This amounted lot of additional expenses (\$4,000) and future interns need to know about them ahead of time!

Describe the trip to Japan.

On Saturday January 9, 2016 at 9:44PM I departed from Miami International Airport to Los Angeles International Airport through American Airlines. The flight was roughly six hours long. I met Ms. Ploy Saengpet (current Rosen student), who was also traveling to Japan for the internship. We had a layover that night and stayed in a hotel near the airport. The next day, Sunday January 10, 2016 we flew from Los Angeles International Airport to Osaka Kansai International Airport through Japan Airlines. The duration of the flight was approximately 13 hours. Our arrival date and time in Japan was Monday January 11, 2016 at 5:50pm. Upon arrival in Japan, I honestly just felt completely confused! This was my first international experience, so I really had no knowledge in traveling. Thankfully Ms. Ploy Saengpet is an avid traveler and knew how to manage! I would have gotten extremely lost without her! We ended up taking a bus to Kyoto station, an hour trip. From there we met Human Resources at the central gate of the Kyoto Station. Unfortunately, I was unaware of how much we would be walking, and as you could imagine, had a difficult time hauling 100 + pounds of luggage up and down escalators, stairs, as well as, in and out of trains. The trip was extremely exhausting and it was quite cold out. We finally arrived to the housing unit around midnight that same day. The next morning at 9:00am all the interns gathered outside the housing unit to fill

out residence paperwork and health insurance forms. We learned how to get to and from work using the Hankyu Railway; connecting Osaka, Kobe, Takarazuka, and Kyoto. We also enjoyed our first Japanese meal together. The following day, Wednesday January 13, 2016 was our first out of three days in orientation. Then we had two days for rest. From there we began working in our individual departments. I was assigned to Guest Activity as a Guest Activity Agent, coordinating, preparing, and performing a variety of the hotels activities. The first month was quite challenging because I was completely jet lagged. I felt vulnerable being in a foreign country, learning new things, and not understanding the language; yet wanting to excel and thrive in my passion for the hospitality and service industry.

Tell me about your most exciting moment from the internship experience.

I would like to replace the word exciting with the word rewarding. I say this because in Japan, the culture prioritizes a strong importance on the work life. At the very end of my internship I felt rewarded by my accomplishments, in not only fully completing the six months, but surpassing the expectations I had for myself in my work. I feel honored to have experienced this. It allowed me to gain a new perspective on culture and how different cultures address various aspects of life and work.

Did you ever get homesick and if you did what did you do about it?

I became extremely homesick during my internship experience. Leaving wasn't an option for me, I wouldn't let myself do that; I placed high expectations on myself. I would look forward to my days off, so I could rest. I'd wake up and walk to the coffee shop, about a 10 – 15 minute walk. I'd put my headphones on and listen to Willow & Jaden Smith. At the coffee shop I would just write and enjoy a matcha drink. I would write to professors, friends, colleagues, but mostly to myself. I would draw. I'm a devoted stationary collector and used many days off to enjoy the art of writing and drawing. It's always been a release for me to clear my mind and balance my emotions. On the way back from the coffee shop to my housing unit, I'd stop by the flower shop and pick up flowers. Japan has wonderful and highly sophisticated flower boutiques. Many days I would take my Canon OS Rebel SL1 and take photos of the many beautiful flowers of Kyoto as well. Sometimes after work I'd walk to Teramachi (shopping arcade) and gaze at the art and stationary supplies (completely thriving in Japan). I'd walk to paper shops and admire. Eating was a huge comfort as well, go figure (pun intended as I gained quite some weight)! I always loved seafood but even more so now. I was privileged enough to taste the most delicious and fresh seafood I could have ever imagined. I wouldn't waste the opportunity for even a day. Not to mention the desserts in Japan are outrageous. Not too sweet, but perfectly balanced, featuring red beans and mochi. I remember feeling lonely in the beginning. Japanese culture is one that is beautiful. People are quite shy. So it wasn't until the end of my six months that locals began to warm up to me by simply saying "Ohayou Gozaimasu", good morning and bowing. It would make my morning. That was difficult for me in the beginning as well, coming from a Hispanic background, where I developed my deeply extroverted character.

Six months is a long time to be away from home, and in a foreign country, what's the biggest lesson you learned about long-term travel.

The biggest lesson I learned about long-term travel would have to be regarding language barriers. At the end of the day, no matter where we are from, what language we speak, or our level of education, we are all the same. We all feel. I could feel people's kindness without understanding their language. Those are a few very special memories.

I learned a lot of where I don't want to take my career, and most importantly where I do want to take it. I learned the most about myself on a personal level and professional level.

Preparation. I would advise any student or professional who wants to work, study, or live internationally, to finically, emotionally, and physically prepare. Make sure to have scholarship money, savings, loans or credit cards available. Keep in touch with your professors, advisors, and mentors. They want to know how you're feeling, and they want to be involved. It's important to know that support is there for you when you're going through professional change.

Lastly, pack light! Any essentials you may need to settle into your accommodations while traveling, are easily accessible there. Make sure you pack lightly so on the way back, you have enough room for gifts and goodies.

What would you say to another student who is considering an international internship?

I would tell them to pursue it passionately. I would tell them to stop playing in their minds all the reasons they cannot, and start playing all the reasons they will. "I graduate soon and don't want to push that back", "I can't afford it", "That's a long time", and so on. In the realm of it all, what is an extra semester or two? Scholarships are available, and you will come back to America when it is all done. This is real life experience that is going to enhance your dedication to the industry. It's going to engrave such a deep imprint and change you forever. Your professionalism will excel. Travel internationally to experience such extreme (positive and sometimes negative) discomfort that you pull yourself into a place of deep education and understanding for the cultural differences regarding hospitality, but most importantly for self-growth.

If you had the opportunity to do this again, would you? Why or Why Not?

I would do this again, no questions asked. There were a lot of times I wanted to go back home, but there were also so many things I experienced that I wouldn't have otherwise. I met my dear friend Aquanna Ishii (current Guest Activity Agent at RCK, started about three weeks after I did) and her sweet mother Feanna Ishii, who welcomed me always.

They really introduced me to the local life of Kyoto. They showed me such kindness and gave me such a clarifying perspective of the Japanese life and its people.

I met interns from all over the world, who I know are my friends forever because we shared time together and we all started together in the same place. I met Ms. Ploy Saengpet who traveled with. She helped me and listened to me. I grew. I learned so much about myself, who I am, and who I always was. I was reminded of myself, an extremely feminine detailed woman who loves learning and teaching. Forever I have a connection to Japan, where I learned the art of origami, furoshiki (Japanese wrapping art), photography, writing, and drawing.

Do you think this internship will help you get the job and career you want? Why or Why Not?

Sometimes we have to learn what we don't want to do, in order to learn what we do want to do. I certainly believe this internship has given me profound life skills to be able to overcome and conquer my highest of dreams.

If you could design the perfect international internship, what would it look like?

This is interesting. Perfect? I think that nothing about my experience was perfect. I made mistakes at work every day. I was constantly challenged into excelling and pushing through. The only roses I saw were on the walk home and at times beside me during my meals. In my case, the perfect internship is one where the student learns about themselves and learns where their passions fit in the hospitality and service industry. The outcome of the internship is going to be the most important factor. An experience such as this could be so terrifying and uncomfortable, but if you walk away feeling rewarded by your decision, then it was perfect.

How old are you?

Born September 19, 1991 I am currently 25 years old.

Please enjoy photographs I took ☺



The Kamogawa, or duck river. Sakura are blooming.



























