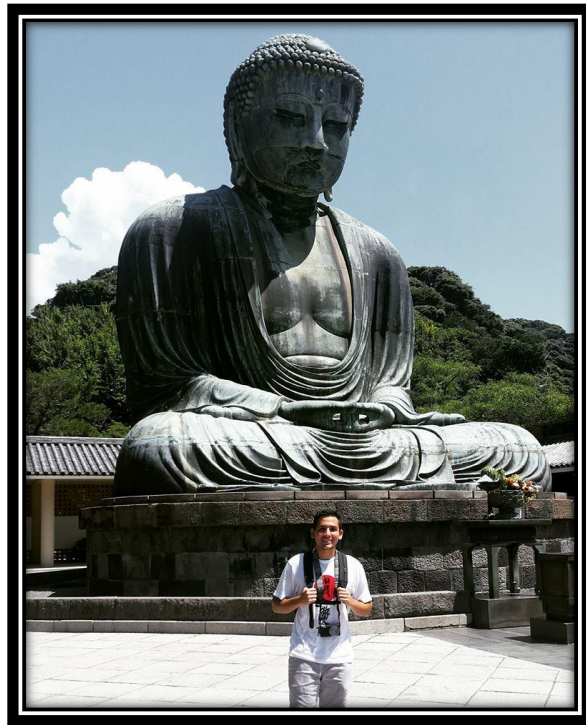


Imanol Garcia, Kafuu Resort Fuchaku, Okinawa, Japan, Internship Summer 2017

My name is Imanol Garcia. I am a senior at UCF Rosen College, majoring in Hospitality Management. I am currently 22-years-old and I was born in Mexico. I have severe hearing loss, but I have overcome that and am fluent in both English and Spanish. I have been traveling a lot for a while now, having visited much of North America, the Caribbean, Argentina in South America, Europe, and now Japan and Cambodia in Asia.



Why did you choose this particular internship?

It has always been my dream to visit Japan. When I received the weekly newsletters from UCF Rosen College and this internship was being advertised, I just knew I had to apply. I actually preferred Kyoto, but the deadline had already passed, so I chose Okinawa since it was the only other internship in Japan. I have no regrets, though, because Okinawa has been amazing.

Describe the process for applying for the internship.

The first step in applying was to contact Ms. Sheila Vargas, Rosen's Career Development Coordinator, and Ms. Jessica Wickey, the Internship Coordinator, and tell them I was interested in this program. Throughout this whole process, I worked closely with the two of them. They then helped me to convert my résumé to another format that the Japanese use. The next step was to forward the résumé to the Human Resources Department at Kafuu Resort Fuchaku. I also included a cover letter, which was not required, anything to give me an edge over the other applicants. After that, I was contacted and invited for a Skype interview. The interview was with Mr. Masao Tanaka, the COO, Mr. Carl Bastian,

Executive Advisor, Ms. Yoko Negoro, HR, and Ms. Ayami Machida from Public Relations. After the interview, they all conferred between themselves for about 10 minutes while I nervously watched. They then told me I was accepted!

Describe the process of getting a passport and visa.

I'm always traveling so my passport was no problem as it was already active for me. For the visa, I had to fill out a paper with some information about me, and where I would reside and work in Japan, for how long, etc. With this, I received help from Ms. Vargas, Ms. Wickey, and Ms. Negoro. I also had to fill out a Certificate of Eligibility and a contract between Kafuu and me. To finish the application for the visa, I had to purchase my plane tickets beforehand, so I could send proof to the Japanese Consulate General of Japan in Miami that I had flights to Japan and back home. The whole process took about two months to complete.

Tell me how your parents, family and friends reacted when you told them where you would be interning.

Everyone was very excited for me when they found out I would spend the summer in Okinawa. My parents were especially very happy as they knew just how much I wanted to visit Japan, but also nervous as I've never gone so far from home and for so long. My parents have been amazing support throughout this whole internship.

Describe the trip to and from the internship.

The trip is honestly exhausting, especially with the time change that just leaves you completely dazed and confused. We, me four other interns, left Orlando in the early morning of May 19. From there, it was a three-hour flight to Chicago, with a one-hour layover. We then switched planes and flew to Tokyo, a 13-hour flight. We left Chicago around noon, and due to the time change, landed in Tokyo in the afternoon, even though we'd been flying for literally more than half a day and our bodies were already in night mode. In Tokyo, we had a two to three-hour layover, before flying two and a half hours and to Okinawa. We were picked up in the airport by Mr. Bastian and Ms. Negoro; we then drove for an hour to Kafuu. We arrived at our dorms at midnight. We left Orlando May 19 in the early morning and arrived at our dorms May 20-21 at midnight. Needless to say, we were all tired. The trip home was even worse, as I decided to travel after I finished the internship. I ended up in Cambodia, where it took me 45 hours with an overnight stay at Tokyo Airport, four flights and three layovers in Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Chicago, to finally get home.



What did you pack that was helpful? What didn't you pack that you could have used?

Honestly, the only thing I packed were summer clothes, shorts and shirts, and a bathing suit. I also packed bedding as I've been told my room would not include those. I tried to limit my packing as I didn't want to make my trips worse by having to drag around two or three pieces of luggage. Anything else I needed I just bought over there, and I also left a lot of stuff behind on the way home as many items didn't fit in my luggage for the return trip.

What was your first impression when you arrived in Japan? First impression at the internship site?

My first impression when I arrived in Tokyo was just awe and shock that I was actually in Japan. That was only in the airport, so I didn't get to see much at first, as we were just there waiting for our layover to Okinawa. But just looking at the people, the Japanese language in all the signs, the food court, it was already a big change. My first impression at the internship site was also of awe, but it was a more pleasant one as Okinawa was just so beautiful with its beaches and sunsets and our gorgeous hotel.



What was your most exciting moment from the internship experience.

There are too many moments to just pick one. From trying new foods, to learning a new language, walking on the bottom of the sea floor, learning to wakeboard, hiking Mt. Ishikawa (and getting lost), making our own sushi, meeting and befriending amazing people. The three months were all just one unforgettable experience. This is not even including the two weeks I traveled afterwards, which were just as incredible.

What challenges did you face due to your special needs? How did you resolve the issue?

Due to my severe hearing loss, the Japanese language was definitely a challenge. What many people don't realize about deaf people is that we read lips. However, the Japanese move their lips in a different way than people who speak English and also speak very quickly. This, coupled with their accents, made it almost impossible for me to understand anything. This led to a lot of funny moments where I would think they were saying something completely different. Many times, I had to ask them to write down what they were saying because I had no idea! But the Japanese are very friendly people with a strong focus on hospitality and they always tried their best.



How did people in your internship experience react to your special needs?

The Japanese people always tried their best to make sure I understood and I were comfortable. However, they were also very impressed with my ability to fluently speak both English and Spanish, with a little Italian, as well, even with my severe hearing loss. The other interns were also very helpful and it would have definitely been harder without them. As time went by and we all grew closer, they would even know when I didn't understand something just by the face I would make!

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

I most definitely did get homesick. I'd say it probably started around the two-month mark, when I started missing my family, my friends, the food, the English and Spanish languages, my car. At this point, there was nothing I could do, except go back home, which I was not going to do. I kept going about my days, working, exploring, being with friends, just enjoying the days because pouting wasn't an option.



Several 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.

Probably the biggest lesson I've learned is losing my fear of the world. Living in Japan and afterwards, traveling by myself, I realized just how big the world is, with so many amazing people that no matter how vastly different your cultures are, are still just like you. I learned not to limit myself and to instead step out of my comfort zone and learn and experience as much as I can in as many places as possible.

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

I would easily and strongly recommend they do it. It is such an amazing experience that you will fondly remember for the rest of your life. It will also look really good on your résumé!

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

Yes, I'd do this again, no question about it. However, I would love to go to another part of the world. I'm hoping to do another summer internship next year in either Europe or South/Central America. It is my goal to explore as much as I can of the world, and especially to live in those places, as you don't get the same experience traveling as actually living in that location for several months.

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

I am already in the career I want, although this internship has solidified the notion that I am in the right career. I have gained invaluable experience of the hotel industry working in Housekeeping, Concierge, Reservations, and Guest Relations. I have already received quicker job offers. However, the job I want is a high management position at a resort, so I still have a long way to go.

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

I think there is no perfect international internship. Everything has its ups and downs, with the homesickness being one of the biggest downs, which is something that cannot be avoided when doing an international internship. For me, the closest an international internship can be to being perfect is one in which you learn about the industry, the world, and yourself, and you take that learning with you for the rest of your life, which easily applies to this internship I did.







