

UW Food Systems and the Environment in Northern Japan

Summer 2026 PROGRAM HANDBOOK

UW Food Systems and the Environment in Northern Japan is offered by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in partnership with International Academic Programs (IAP). This Program Handbook supplements handbook(s) or materials you receive from your field instructor as well as the IAP Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information and advice available at the time of printing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

Questions about your program abroad (housing, facilities abroad, etc.) and academics (e.g. course credit and equivalents, UW grades, etc.) should be directed to your Study Abroad Advisor or Program Leader.

This program handbook contains the following information:

Contact Information.....	1
Program Dates.....	2
Pre-departure Program Date.....	2
Preparation Before Leaving.....	2
Travel and Arrival Information.....	4
The Academic Program.....	4
In Country Information.....	5

Contact Information

ON-SITE PROGRAM INFORMATION

UW-Madison Program Leader

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EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number **(608) 265-6329** between 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the study abroad staff on call at **(608) 516-9440**.

U.S. EMBASSY REGISTRATION

All program participants who are U.S. citizens should register with the U.S. Embassy before departure, as this will help in case of a lost passport. You can register on-line at [Hhttps://travelregistration.state.gov](https://travelregistration.state.gov). If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country's embassy or consulate.

US Embassy in Northern Japan
Kita 1-jo Nishi 28-chome, Chuo-ku,
Sapporo 064-0821, Japan
Phone: 011-641-1115
Fax: 011-643-1283

Program Dates

In-country Program Dates:

Arrival Date: Monday, August 17, 2026

Departure Date: Saturday, August 29, 2026

Pre-departure Sessions

August 3, 4, & 5 from 5:00 – 8:00 pm

Preparation before Leaving

IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

Passport: A passport is needed to travel to Japan. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application materials can be found on the U.S. State Department website. If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad.

Visa: A visa is not required for U.S. citizens for this program. U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport valid for at least six months beyond the end of the program. Non-U.S. Passport holders may have different visa requirements. Check visa requirement at the Japanese consulate (the one in Chicago: https://www.chicago.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/visa.html)
Ask your Study Abroad Advisor, if you have any questions.

HANDLING MONEY ABROAD

The official currency of Japan is the yen (JPY or ¥). When you arrive in Japan, be sure to have adequate funds to cover meals (see details below), souvenirs and snacks for downtime.

It is helpful to have an application or website, such as [XE](#), handy that will help you convert Japanese Yen to USD so that you know how much things cost.

Japan is a very cash-based society; though you will you likely be able to pay by credit/debit card at most restaurants, shops and the university cafeteria, it's recommended that you take some cash out at the beginning of the program to have on hand just in case.

ATM/Debit cards:

To withdraw yen using your U.S. ATM/debit card, consider visiting a Japanese post office, as ATM machines in Japanese banks accept only cards issued by Japanese banks while post offices will accept foreign bankcards operating on the Cirrus (MasterCard) or PLUS (Visa) systems. Seven Eleven ATMs also accept foreign debit cards. Machines are available only during limited hours (depending on the bank, until 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. on weekdays and up to 5:00 p.m. on weekends). Besides post offices, other places with ATMs that may accept foreign-issued cards include Citibank (which usually accepts both Visa and MasterCard and sometimes American Express as well), large department stores, and airports.

Credit cards: Credit cards may be used for obtaining cash and paying for accommodations, meals at expensive restaurants. The most readily accepted cards are MasterCard (also called Eurocard) and Visa.

PACKING

While most things are readily available in Japan, some items may be more expensive, or simply inconvenient to purchase there. You may wish to bring particular items with you from home. Some recommendations include:

Clothes: A wide range of clothing sufficient for the length of the program is necessary:

- Comfortable closed-toe walking shoes – you will do a decent amount of walking during the field trip in the afternoons
- Open-toed shoes/sandals can be worn in the classroom, but not to site visits.
- Slip-on shoes are very useful in Japan because you take your shoes off and on a lot and are provided slippers to wear. In the summer, it would be good to have a pair of socks in your bag so that you aren't putting bare feet into slippers that have been worn by many people.
- For men, semi-dress pants like cotton khakis and a collared shirt are recommended. Long or short sleeved shirts are fine but having one long sleeved shirt and tie would be good in case of a more formal event.

- Women should make sure they have at least one dress or skirt and a nice top. Women typically don't wear shorts in Japan, so skirts would be a good choice.
- Jeans for casual wear.
- Shorts are okay to wear around the hotel or on casual excursions (weekend) but are seldom worn by Japanese students to school. We suggest attire other than shorts or shorter skirts when you are on the Obihiro campus.
- Rain jacket – Japan has a rainy season (June/July/August) but the northern of Hokkaido is less impacted. Hat, sunscreen, and insect repellent is also suggested.
- The on-site visit will include a two-hour hike. Make sure that you bring either a pair of hiking shoes or running shoes that have good traction. This would be a hike involving a steep climb to the top of a volcano range.

Personal Items:

- Deodorant (it is difficult to purchase U.S.-style anti-perspirant in Japan)
- Any over-the-counter medicines you think you may need. While it is possible to get Japanese brands of over-the-counter medicines, if there is something you are accustomed to using often (pain relievers, cold medication, etc.) you may wish to bring it with you.
- Contact lens solutions in Japan differ from American brands and American brands can be difficult to find, so you might want to bring your preferred brand.
- Consider packing bars, peanut butter, dried fruit, chocolate and some other treats from home. Snacks are also readily available for purchase at the convenience store across the street from the hotel.
- Women should pack tampons/pads as you may have difficulty finding products you are used to.
- It's not uncommon for public restrooms not to have hand dryers or paper towels so a small micro-fiber travel towel can be handy.
- There are large athletic fields on the Obihiro campus and students may want to pack a Frisbee.
- Chopsticks are widely used in Japan. Practice using chopsticks with your Japanese hosts! They will appreciate it. For convenience, you may want to pack a set of plastic utensils for private use in the hotel for when you buy snacks.
- One Japanese tradition woven into the cultural identity is gift-giving. Gift-giving is more than just buying gifts for people on birthdays; it serves an important function in Japanese culture as not only a way to show appreciation, but as a way to strengthen and maintain relationships. "Temiyage" are gifts to be given to people you are about to meet or to say thank you for what they have done. You will spend many class periods collaborating with your OUAVM student partner. Prepare to exchange a small, nicely wrapped gift with them at the beginning of the program. Please begin to think of an item from UW-Madison or that is representative of Wisconsin (or your home state). These are some ideas: Stuffed Badger, calendar with Madison or Wisconsin scenes, agenda/notebook with a UW crest, dried Wisconsin cranberries or Made-in-

Wisconsin honey or maple syrup, small book with Wisconsin or Madison photos. The gift does not have to be more than \$10.

- Note: Do NOT bring pepper spray or any similar self-defense tool with you when traveling abroad. While pepper spray or similar self-defense items are legal in the United States, they are illegal to possess and carry in many other countries, including Japan.

Prescription Medications:

If you take prescription medication, please check with CISI insurance to verify that you can bring it into the country. Be sure to have a copy of the prescription and/or letter from your prescribing physician explaining the nature of the medication, the purpose of taking it, recommended dosage, and frequency of ingestion.

More specific packing information will be discussed in your pre-departure orientation.

Electronics: This will be discussed in your pre-departure orientation

NOTE: Do not bring pepper spray or any similar self-defense tool with you when traveling abroad. While pepper spray or similar self-defense items are legal in the United States, they are illegal to possess and carry in many other countries, including Japan.

Travel and Arrival

You are responsible for arranging your own transportation to Obihiro. Details and suggested flights and itineraries will be discussed at the mid-March meeting. **More information about a recommended arrival time will be shared separately. Due to the price of the airfare, we recommend booking your ticket as soon as you can once you receive the arrival/departure times from the Program Leader.** Leaving from bigger airport (such as Chicago) is often much cheaper.

Haneda airport in Tokyo offers direct flights to Obihiro (about a 2-hour flight), so you may want to plan to fly into/out of Haneda if you are planning to travel directly to/from Obihiro so that you do not have to switch airports. Traveling between Haneda and Narita (Tokyo's other international airport) takes around 1 ½ - 2 hours.

Students often choose to extend their stay in Japan either before or after the program to spend time in Tokyo or other cities/countries. If you choose to extend your stay, reach out to CISI insurance once you are enrolled to extend your international insurance coverage – it is very easy and inexpensive to do so.

Please contact your Program Leader, Aurélie Rakotondrafara, with any questions before purchasing tickets.

The Academic Program

Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (OUAVM) is part of the national university system, located in Hokkaido, Japan. Hokkaido is the northernmost island of Japan and the main agricultural production area of the country, with its education and research focus on life sciences, food production, and environmental sciences. The university's extensive, basic and applied research on agronomy, animal sciences, and veterinary medicine help develop highly practical curricula to foster academic growth in students who will contribute to improving local as well as global food systems.

From production to consumption, a global challenge is to develop effective food systems that ensure a safe, secure, sustainable, affordable, accessible and nutritious food supply for all. This program is geared toward students studying agronomy, agricultural business management, agricultural and applied economics, animal science, dairy science, horticulture, soil science, environmental science and environmental studies.

Students will explore the environmental landscapes throughout the program with visits to active volcanic areas to understand the origin of geology and soils in Hokkaido, as well as to observe the characteristics of volcanic ash soils and their potential for crop production. In addition, students will study and observe the wetland eco-system, which is specific to the cool and moist environment of the surrounding area. Students will learn about the climate, geology, and history of Hokkaido, providing them with the knowledge to understand current agricultural systems in different parts of the island. On a typical day, we will be on campus for lecture and discussion in the morning and on a field trip related to the topic in the afternoon. This would include field visits with local growers, dairy production facilities or food processing sites in the Tokachi region. The combination of lectures and field visits will enhance student knowledge of scientific research, farm management and food processing. Students will often have free time in the evenings.

UW-Madison students will gain cultural understanding of Japanese society by working alongside fellow undergraduate Japanese students throughout the class. Each UW-Madison student will be paired with an OUAVM peer. Graduate TA's from Obihiro University will work closely with students to support the course and facilitate cross-cultural activities. During the program, students will also learn by observing the local natural resources, as well as studying the social, political, economic, and technological aspects of agriculture in the area.

The field trip is more than a personal, social and cultural experience: it is also an academic experience. More details will be shared separately on the set of expectation that you will use to document your own learning and to help your instructor assign a final grade for the field study.

Getting Credit

This field study is a 2-credit class. To receive course credit, you need to submit a Course Equivalent Request (CER) by following these instructions:

1. [Log into your MyStudyAbroad portal.](#)

2. Select the “Academics” tile.
3. Select “Option 1: Pre-Approved CER”.
4. Select the appropriate course by clicking the blue “ADD” button.
5. Hit “Submit Request.”

Students can choose to earn 2 credits of [Envir St 402; Horticulture 375; or Nutritional Sciences 421.](#)

ORIENTATION

Participants will attend an orientation before the end of the semester, which will go over helpful information such as travel and logistics, housing, daily itinerary, and Obihiro University. More information about the date/time/location will be provided at a later time.

Mandatory Pre-departure program

On August 3, 4 and 5, 2026 from 6:00-8:00 pm, we will meet virtually for our mandatory pre-departure program via zoom. Because of the time difference of 14 hours, we are meeting in this time of the day to accommodate our Japanese partners who will be joining us. During those three days, we will gain place-based knowledge of Japan and our destination, overview the natural environments and resources of Hokkaido that influence current food production system as well as the culture and etiquette of the country, which are critical as we will interact with our on-site partners. We will use these times as well to get to know one another and meet our Japanese partners as we prepare to embark for the 10-day program.

FIELD STUDY

A field study can be stressful for many reasons. Students are away from the comfort and familiarity of home/campus or “your natural environment.” You will meet individuals you have never met before, and will face language barriers and cultural differences. Students will be with the same travel mates for days, evenings, and even nights as they share bus rides, meals in restaurants, and overnights in hotels. As a field study participant, students will be expected to be a team member. It is a 24-hour job to be a field study participant. Anticipate these challenges and be ready to address them with respect and grace. Stay open and curious!

Remember some of the basic stress coping skills and remember the following:

- You are a guest in Japan. Keep in mind that most people you will interact with have volunteered their time to teach about their business / culture / country. It is essential to remain respectful and considerate with everyone you meet throughout the program. Keep in mind that each site offers firsthand experiences and opportunities to learn about the local people, culture, and program topics.
- Interaction in your group. Be respectful of each other. During the tour you will get tired, hungry, homesick but that is part of the tour because it is taking you out of your comfort zone. Be kind to yourself and those around you.
- Most importantly, a field study provides opportunities to build connections between both participants and locals. Students are challenged to think outside the box and oftentimes quickly make decisions. Being proactive and engaged during site visits can

help students feel more connected to their program and local culture, especially considering the short duration. The rewards of a field study are only limited by one's attitude, so we encourage every participant to embrace their field study experience. It will be over before you know it!

- On-site staff and your Program Leader are available to help students with difficult situations, to encourage open conversations, and to build greater understanding.

JAPAN – LANGUAGE

English is not the primary language in Japan. Many Japanese people speak some English, but it is not uncommon to find people that speak little or no English, especially in more rural areas. To help communication, be patient, try to speak slowly and clearly by using simple language when interacting with the Japanese partners.

While the program is taught entirely in English, it is helpful and polite to learn some basic Japanese words and phrases as you interact with the Obihiro students, faculty, and members of the general public. Your Program Leader will teach you to say a few things like “hello, thank you, & excuse me” before you depart, and you will also have a basic Japanese Language course as part of the program.

DuoLingo is also a great way to learn and practice basic phrases in Japanese before you leave, and there are many videos and websites online as well.

Google Translate is a very helpful tool that can translate English speech directly into Japanese. There is also a camera feature that lets you point your phone camera at Japanese text or printed words to instantly translate into English. This is especially helpful at restaurants where the menus may only be in Japanese! We recommend downloading this application and testing it out before you depart.

JAPAN -- BACKGROUND

Japan is an archipelago comprised of four main islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu, although thousands of smaller islands occupy the surrounding water. Its climate is temperate, with four seasons. It rains between 40 and 120 inches a year, contributing to Japan's long growing season from early spring to early autumn. Steep hills and mountains cover over 70% of the land, which divides the habitable parts of the country. Due to this, Japan is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with a population of over 120 million people.

Japan has few natural resources, apart from some wood, fish and rivers for hydroelectric power. Unlike most industrialized nations, Japan is almost completely dependent on imports for its raw materials and is one of the world's major importers of oil, coal, iron ore, lumber, cotton, wool and even silk. And even though its farms are among the most productive in the world, Japan still imports much of its wheat and other foods. Nevertheless, no other country in the world with so few natural resources has achieved the level of economic success that Japan has. After World War II, the Japanese people built their country from virtual devastation to a

leading economic power. Textile manufacturing was its first success, then shipbuilding. Today, the automobile industry is key, as well as its advancements in a variety of technological industries.

The government in Japan is democratic with a constitution that guarantees representation and individual rights. Japan has one of the world's oldest unbroken monarchies with an emperor that, while possessing no governmental power, continues to perform many ceremonial state functions.

While most Japanese people do not practice religion on a regular basis, Japan has been influenced by two major religions: Shinto and Buddhism. The basic Shinto belief is that people should live in harmony with all living things. Shinto established a set of ethics that guide the relationships between human beings and nature, and between the individual and society. Buddhism taught that salvation was possible by purging oneself of personal desires and attachment to worldly things. In practice, millions of Japanese are both Shinto and Buddhist, for example, using Shinto rites when they marry and Buddhist funeral rites when they die. The two beliefs are not incompatible. In everyday life, also, the Japanese perspective on morality and ethics has been influenced by Confucianism, which is not a religion but a philosophy of personal behavior. Most Japanese do not consider themselves to be Confucianists, but its concepts of a rational approach to life and society strongly influence the culture.

City/Site Specific Information: Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine is part of the national university system, located in Hokkaido, Japan. Hokkaido is the northernmost island of Japan and the main agricultural production area of the country, with its education and research focus on life sciences, food production, and environmental sciences. The university's extensive, basic and applied research on agronomy, animal sciences, and veterinary medicine help develop highly practical curricula to foster academic growth in students who will contribute to improving local as well as global food systems.

Housing: For the duration of the program students will stay in the APA Hotel Obihiro Ekimae in downtown Obihiro, with two students per room. The rooms are basic but comfortable. The hotel offers breakfast, free WiFi, and laundry facilities. OUAVM will arrange a shuttle service to pick you up from the hotel to campus. Shortly into the program, the group will do an overnight trip to Lake Akan, where they will stay at Hotel Gozensui (up to 4 students per room) which has an onsen, a traditional Japanese spa, on the top floor.

Food: Students are responsible for paying for their own meals during the program, outside of the organized welcome/departure receptions. On most days lunch will be eaten at the Obihiro University cafeteria, which is a la carte and costs around \$5. There are many restaurant options for dinner around the hotel. Lunch box "teishoku" will cost about ¥800-1200 (\$6-10). Inexpensive sushi meal around ¥1000 (about \$7.50), ramen about ¥700-1000 (\$5-\$7), bowl of soba noodle about ¥400-700 (\$ 3-5). Refer to the program cost sheet for the amount to budget for meals.

Note that there won't be many western food options. It is advised that students bring snacks from home such as granola bars, nuts, peanut butter, or plan to purchase snack food at convenience stores if you anticipate having trouble with the available options.

If you have any dietary restrictions or allergies, please discuss this with your Program Leader and/or Study Abroad Advisor before you depart so that we can provide recommendations and advice.

Transportation: Program staff arrange all in-country travel for the program.

Students may rent bikes during their free time from a bike rental at the train station:

<http://www.machicen.com/bicycle/>

Safety: UW-Madison is dedicated to maintaining the personal safety and security for each of our study abroad participants. Our office takes necessary precaution, remains in close contact with the program staff, and will work with them in case of an emergency. While traveling abroad, make sure safety is your first priority. Safety will be discussed further during pre-departure orientation.

Visit <http://internationaltravel.wisc.edu/> for more resources.

The drinking age in Japan is 20 years of age. Please be mindful that you are representing the University of Wisconsin- Madison and the United States. IAP and CALS expects responsible behavior from all program participants. Japanese law prohibits individuals under the age of 20 to smoke. As of 2023, cannabis or possessing anything with THC, CBD oil for both recreational and medicinal use remain illegal and punishable with up to 5 years in prison in Japan.

Health: This will be discussed in your pre-departure orientation. All students will receive health insurance coverage through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). The cost of the insurance coverage is included in program fees. Please refer to your My Study Abroad account "Health and Insurance" tab or visit www.culturalinsurance.com for more information.

Communication

Contact your current plan provider before you go abroad to discuss the following options:

- Unlocking your phone to be able to purchase a local SIM card that is compatible with the cellular network in your program location
- Adding international calling capability (and associated costs)
- Turning off data to avoid charges
- Additional fees to expect
- If you have a warranty is it for your phone, your number, or your SIM card?
- Potential impact to your plan when you return to the United States

If your current cell phone cannot be used in your program location, do research on purchasing a pre-paid phone for your time abroad.

For communicating with friends and family back home, app-based communication (WhatsApp, Signal, Skype, Messenger) when connected to WiFi may be the best option.

When making calls, keep in mind time zone differences (www.timeanddate.com/worldclock). Country and city codes can be found online (www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/dialing.html). Some of the following steps can vary if you are using a calling card, landline, or cell phone. If you have an international plan on your mobile phone you may not need to follow all of these steps.

To call *from* an international country *to* the United States:

- Dial the country *exit* code for the country you are in. For Japan it is 010
- Dial the country *access* code for the country you want to reach. For the United States it is "+1"
- Follow with the area code and the local number as normal.
- **Example:** Japan's exit code is "010." To call to the U.S. from Japan, the following format would be used:
 - 010-1-XXX-XXX-XXXX

To call *from* the United States *to* an international country:

- Dial the United States' exit code "011," the country code for the country you want to reach, the area/city code, and the phone number
- **Example:** Brazil has country code 55, Rio de Janeiro has city code 21. To call Brazil from the U.S., the following format would be used:
 - 011-55-21-XXX-XXXX
- Note: some countries employ varying numbers of digits for area/city codes and for telephone numbers. Don't be surprised if the number you are trying to call has more or less than the standard "three plus seven"
- The international code for Japan is +81

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT INFORMATION/WEBSITES OF INTEREST

U.S. State Department Students Abroad site:

<http://www.studentsabroad.state.gov/>

UW-Madison International Academic Programs

<http://www.studyabroad.wisc.edu>

U.S. State Department:

<http://travel.state.gov>

Center for Disease Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>

Current exchange rates

<http://www.oanda.com>

Lonely Planet

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

STUDENT COMMENTS

“Learn a little bit of Japanese beforehand. I started doing Duolingo the moment I got accepted into the program and it helped me get a grasp of the basics of the language by the time I got there which helped with communication and made the whole process easier. Make sure when you are speaking to none native speakers to speak slowly and with easily translatable works to avoid confusion.”

“For future students it would be good to keep in mind that please refrain from talking loudly in public places like on the trains or buses. Also tying shoes on chairs might not be a good idea. Last but not least, I would recommend future students to be patient during this program, since your Japanese partner may not be good at speaking English. But they are trying their best and they do understand English so please listen and encourage them to speak up.”

“I loved being paired with another Japanese student. Even though some of them didn't speak very good English, it was really fun to be able to get to know them and their lives in Japan. I liked that we pretty much traveled together as students. For someone who didn't know Japanese culture or language at all before I left, I was glad that I got to experience the whole trip with the rest of the students with me.”

“This is a very great program for gaining cultural experience and understanding as well as having wonderful fun in talking about your major interests in a country where the agriculture is similar.”