UW Wellbeing and the Art of Forest Bathing in Japan, Winter Intersession 2026-2027
Program Handbook

UW Wellbeing and the Art of Forest Bathing in Japan is offered by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) in partnership with International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This Program Handbook supplements handbook(s) or materials you receive from your field instructor as well as the 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 options, facilities abroad, etc.) as well as questions relating to your relationship with your host university or academics (e.g. course credit and equivalents, registration deadlines, etc.) should be directed to your advisor at CALS Study Abroad at UW-Madison.

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Contact Information

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UW-Madison Information

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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 IAP staff on call at **(608) 516-9440.**

Embassy Registration - Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

All program participants who are U.S. citizens must register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) before departure as this will sign you up for automatic travel and safety alerts as well as help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. You can register on-line at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country's embassy or consulate.

U.S. Consulate in Osaka
2-11-5, Nishitenma,
Kita-ku, Osaka 530-8543
Phone: +81 06-6315-5900
Contact Form: https://www.ustraveldocs.com/jp/en/contact-us
https://jp.usembassy.gov/

Consulate-General of Japan
Japan Information Center
737 North Michigan Avenue Suite 1000
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(T) 312-280-0430
Email Address: jic@cg.mofa.go.jp
https://www.chicago.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_en/index.html

Program Dates

1/03/2027 through 1/16/2027

Preparation Before Leaving

Program Orientation
We will meet three times before departure: once as a group once in person, once as a group on Zoom, and once individually in person or Zoom. With the group, we will go over the syllabus, assignments, and the itinerary. In these sessions, you will learn about the sites we will be visiting and why they have been selected. We will even learn some simple mindfulness exercises during our first meeting and try them out. We'd like to meet individually with everyone so that we can get to know you a little better and you can have the opportunity to share anything with us that you didn't feel comfortable sharing with the group.

Itinerary
A detailed day-to-day itinerary will be provided as part of your pre-departure orientation about a month before the program begins. It will not be available earlier and you will be busy every day of the program, so please do not make any fixed plans during the program dates.

Visas
Visas are not required of U.S. citizens for this program, but you will need a passport. U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the end of the program. Non U.S. Passport holders may have different visa requirements. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you should research whether you are required to have a visa to enter Japan.

Passport
Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov/passport). If you already have your passport, *make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad.* You may have to apply for a renewal.

Handling Money Abroad
In Japan, the yen is the currency. You will be able to use a credit card to purchase items in the stores. Access to ATMs is available in Kyoto. We will discuss when meals are provided by the program and the times when you are responsible for your own meals.

Packing
Packing will be discussed in your pre-departure orientation. Like Madison, it will be winter although a significantly milder one. The average temperature in Kyoto in January is 48 degrees and on average there are 7 days of rain. While you're not likely to need your heavy down coat, we would recommend you bring warm clothing that you can layer as well as rain poncho and an umbrella.

We will do a LOT of walking so a good pair of hiking shoes are necessary and ideally, they would be waterproof too. While we will not be doing any rugged hiking there will be long days on your feet. Bring comfortable shoes or slippers to wear in the evening.

Electronics
This will be discussed in your pre-departure orientation, but we would discourage you from bringing your laptop. Try to unplug and live in the moment.

Japan uses two main types of plugs — **Type A** and occasionally **Type B** power outlets.

- **Type A plug**: This is a two-pronged, flat plug often found in North America. It is the most common type of plug in Japan.
- **Type B plug**: This is also a flat, two-pronged plug but includes a grounding pin. While Type B outlets exist, they are not as widely used as Type A.

Type A plug will work perfectly fine in Japan!

Travel and Arrival Information

Students will make their own individual travel arrangements, purchasing flights and using public or private ground transportation to make their way to the program lodging in the city of Kyoto as appropriate. **You must arrive at the hotel by 7 pm (Japan standard Time) on Sunday January 3rd.** You can arrive sooner than that but not later. This allows for ease of coordination. We, the Program Leaders, will in the lobby from 5-7pm to greet you with some Japanese snacks. It is your choice whether to fly to Osaka (the nearest airport to Kyoto) or fly to Tokyo and take high speed rail (Shinkansen) to Kyoto. Students are encouraged to purchase fully refundable flights with flexible cancellation policies if possible.

We will share additional travel information provided by the CIEE Kyoto team, which you should fully review before purchasing your flights. You will receive an email when this travel information is made available in the coming weeks, so stay tuned. *Do not purchase flights before you have reviewed the guidance from CIEE.*

When purchasing your flight, these are some general guidelines:

- Check your program dates and arrival information. Some tickets add a "+1 day" so you'll arrive the next day.
- Review the travel advisory level and entry requirements for any countries where you may have a connecting flight or transit through on the way to your program site. Choose flights that are in countries with a Level 1 or Level 2 travel advisory country.
- Arrive during the day whenever possible as a safety precaution. Not all airports are open 24 hours/day.
- Review what is included in the costs. Some airlines charge extra for seats, luggage (including carry-on), meals, etc.
- Explore fully refundable tickets and travel insurance options to protect against potential travel disruptions.

The Academic Program

General Information

In the age of digital media and increasing mental health challenges, spend two weeks in Kyoto, Japan's sparkling artistic capital, exploring the connections between mental health, nature, and art. Through a series of forest walks and hands on workshops, students will examine the concept of shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) and the process of artistic creation as important aspects of preventive healthcare and wellbeing in Japan, where recent studies have demonstrated how forest bathing can improve sleep quality, mood, ability to focus, and stress levels. These five senses will serve as a grounding framework to experience the psychological effects of immersion in forest preserves, gardens, meditative practices, and participation in the arts.

Surrounded by bamboo forests and renowned for its skilled artisans and museums, Kyoto provides the perfect context for students to practice shinrin-yoku. Local experts will lead forest walks and introduce the concept of forest bathing and its foundations in Japanese culture, concepts of healing, and medical research, inviting students to understand the various meanings assigned to the practice. The program also includes visits and Garden of Fine Arts, Kyoto Museum of Crafts and Design, and other museums of note. Students will participate in workshops taught by local artisans, some designated as "living treasures" by the city, Zazen meditation, a tea ceremony, incense making, shibori hand dyeing, chopstick making, and traditional Japanese drumming.

A translator will travel with the group, so knowledge of the Japanese language is not required.

Course Information

Students will receive 2 credits of Nutritional Science 421.

Getting Credit

To receive course credit, you should submit your 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."

Field Study

Be aware that field study can be stressful for many reasons. Students are away from the comfort and familiarity of home/campus, and this might be uncomfortable. Students will meet local individuals and will face language barriers and cultural differences. As field study participants, students will be expected to be team members. 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. It is a 24-hour job to be a field study participant. Please anticipate these challenges and be

ready to address them with respect and grace. On-site staff and leaders are there to help students with difficult situations, to encourage open conversations, and to build greater understanding.

During field study, students visit many sites, oftentimes multiple in one day. At many of these sites, the people students interact with have typically 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 gain experience about the local people, culture, and programs.

The field course is carefully planned by the course leaders' months in advance, but as with most things in life, changes may be required, and this often happens at a moment's notice. These changes are often necessitated by unexpected logistics, illness, and unforeseen work commitments experienced by our partners. Flexibility and understanding that our partners have commitments outside of the course is essential. Though things may change, you will still have a rich and memorable experience.

Most importantly, though, 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 deliberate 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 what the student can achieve, so we encourage every participant to embrace their unique experience.

Living Abroad

City/Site-specific Information
Kyoto flourished as the capital city of Japan from 794 to 1868 A.D., from the beginning of the Heian aristocracy to the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate (Edo) period. To this day, it remains a vibrant artistic capital - a treasure trove of cultural assets and traditions kept alive through its citizens. Built upon a foundation of skilled artisans and craftspeople versed in aesthetics developed over a millennium, modern day Kyoto has also witnessed the birth of frontier technologies and international business successes. This is a city where the best of both the old and new can be found.

Housing
Participants stay in a hostel with 2-4 students per room with breakfast and Wi-Fi included. Rooms will have a lockable door, a bed for each individual, bedding/linens, and access to a shared bathroom. The hostel provides breakfast. Other meals will be a combination of group meals arranged by the program as well as meals where students are expected to purchase their own food from local businesses.

Transportation
You will travel as a group and all in-country travel is arranged by Program Leaders and CIEE, the on-site program provider.

Health and Safety
Be sure to fully review the required Health and Safety Orientation in your MyStudyAbroad portal for general health and safety guidelines. If you have specific questions or concerns, please contact your Program Leader and/or Study Abroad Advisor.

Should you get sick (a cold) but are still able to participate in the day's activities, you must wear a mask to prevent spread to the group. Do not take off your mask until you consult with the course leaders.

Hiking
As part of this program, you will be expected to easily walk 20,000 steps per day. This will be both up and downhill.

Insurance
You will be enrolled in the UW System required health insurance through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) and the cost of the insurance coverage is included in program fees.

Communication
Access to WIFI will vary depending on location and may not always be available when we are outside Kyoto. It will be cheapest and easiest to communicate with friends and family back home using email or a communications app such as WhatsApp, FaceTime, etc.

Additional Resources

UW-Madison International Academic Programs
studyabroad.wisc.edu

U.S. State Department:
travel.state.gov

Center for Disease Control
cdc.gov/travel/

Tourist Information
lonelyplanet.com

Comments and Advice from Past Participants

General

"Our on-site staff was great! They made the program very enjoyable and were always supportive of us. They definitely made it known that we could reach out to the them no matter the issue and did their best to make us comfortable."

“The program had many cultural, social, and learning opportunities overall, as there were many different activities. I felt I learned a lot about how natural meditational practices should sometimes be the first resort before prescribing Western medicine.”

“I hope to work as a physician, so the information about forest bathing and all of its health benefits will be of great importance. Forest bathing can be a form of preventative healthcare so I will definitely be utilizing the information with future patients.”

“My landscape and urban studies, geography, and environmental studies majors were intensively applied as I surveyed the site and considered how sociocultural influences impact city planning and distribution of people and resources!”

“During my time in the program, there was a strong emphasis on spending time in green spaces and understanding how this supports health and well-being. I was able to experience these benefits firsthand. Returning to UW–Madison, the program helped me recognize the value of using the campus’s green spaces, and how they can positively impact my well-being. As a result, I plan to be more intentional about spending time outdoors rather than defaulting to my phone or other technology.”

“I think overall, I felt so much more enlightened with all the natural experiences. l also felt like I learned a lot about culture, language, food, traditional practices, and history.”

Health

“Be sure to check your prescription medications and be prepared with Japan’s rules and regulations!”

“…really take care of yourself and health, and make sure to bring legal medication for the trip even if you believe you won't get sick.”

Finances

“Be sure to apply to scholarships in advance even in the summer. And keep total of expenses because in the moment it may not seem like a lot but everything definitely adds up.”

“[Be] prepared to pay in cash for a lot of places!”

Preparation Tips

“A lot of restaurants also have menus completely in Japanese. I would suggest practicing basic phrases in advance and downloading a translating app.”

“Language is the smallest hurdle. As long as you can say "this please", "excuse me", "thank you", "hello", and the basic numbers, you will be okay. Really do your best to learn the social faux pas. Americans have a very bad reputation as tourists for imposing their own culture on the host country and not being respectful of the host country, and Japanese people are very sensitive to

this. People are very quiet and respectful in public spaces, and jaywalking/and loud conversations are not a norm. Do your best to do things how the locals do them."