

Name: Anders Ågren Thuné

Duration: 2021.4~2023.3

Home University: KTH



My name is Anders Ågren Thuné, and I studied a Computer Science master at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden.

From April 2021 to March 2023, I took part in a Double Degree exchange with Tohoku University in Japan, which meant that I did the greater part of my master's degree at Tohoku, and got a degree from both universities upon completing the exchange.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, I had to participate remotely from Sweden during the first year of the exchange, and was only able to travel to Japan in April of 2022.

### *Life as a Student at Tohoku University*

In this article, I will tell you a bit about my experiences during the exchange and my outlook having returned to Sweden.

The layout of the master's program is quite different in Japan as compared to Sweden. For one, the courses are really small, and one takes many more courses in parallel than we do at KTH. Second, and more importantly, each master's student belongs to a "lab", a group led by two or three professors specialised in a given subject.

The lab has an introductory training course and



regular seminars, and students write their master's thesis under the supervision of one of the professors in the lab. In addition, much more time is dedicated to the master's thesis than in Sweden, with most students finishing their courses during the first year and then focusing solely on the degree project.

I found this model to work well for me, as I was able to get a more research-oriented experience than I probably would have at KTH. I was very happy with my lab (the Sumii-Matsuda lab, which focuses on programming language theory); the professors were very nice and went to great lengths to make everything work despite the pandemic, while also being quite eminent within their respective fields.

For my degree project, I was able to work in a field that I found very interesting, and being able to focus completely on my degree project during the second year was something I appreciated a lot. In fact, we were even able to submit a paper based on my master's research to an international conference (although we don't know if it will be accepted yet), something which the professors encouraged all students in the lab to aim for.

Most courses were given in Japanese, although they accepted assignments in English as well. In the lab, seminars were also given in Japanese, but I was able to choose to present in English when it was my turn. This worked well for me, although I had studied Japanese a lot of previously. If you're not confident in your Japanese, Tohoku University offers a half-year introductory course as part of the exchange program which you can take before beginning the master.



My only criticism is that the coordination between the two universities wasn't that great. After starting the exchange at Tohoku, there was little follow-up from KTH's part, so I had to pull the necessary strings whenever needed.

For example, when doing my degree project, I had to follow the steps of each university separately to get the project accepted at both, which was complicated by the fact that degree projects at KTH are typically shorter than they are at Tohoku.

## *Living in Sendai*

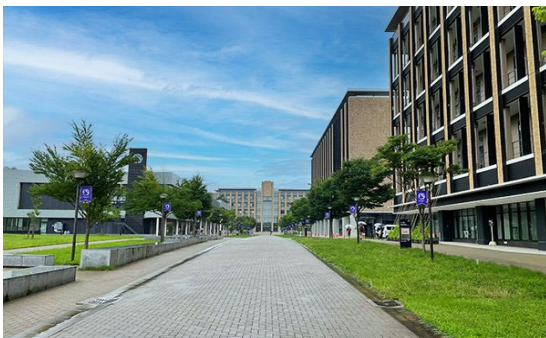
The costs of living in Sendai were low compared to Sweden, especially the rent and food prices. At my dorm, I paid around 30000 JPY a month, which is about 200 EUR by today's rate. The dorm was very well run, and they had cleaning ladies cleaning the facilities every day.

Eating out typically cost me between 400 and 1250 JPY (2.6 and 8 EUR) per meal, so I was able to get away with cooking very little myself.

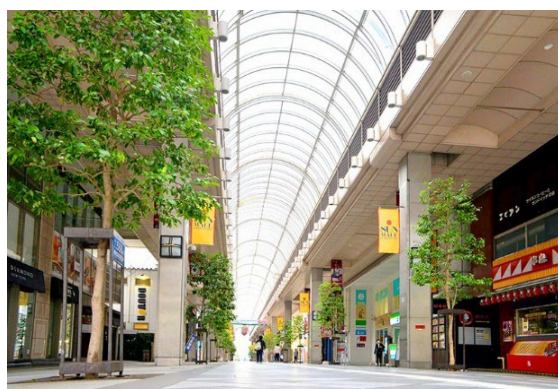


The student cafeterias were especially good value for the money, and I happened to have one of those in the same building as my dorm. I should note that the food prices are rising recently, however. The cost of commuting with the subway was a bit higher, and the monthly cards were sold separately for each subway line. I chose to pay per use at the subway with a rechargeable card, and walked whenever I could.

The Aobayama campus where my lab was located was about a 40 minute walk from my dorm, which made for some good daily exercise. All in all, I would estimate my monthly costs at about 450 EUR excluding the rent, but you can definitely get away cheaper if you cook more at home for instance.



After arriving in Japan, the university helped me out with the necessary paperwork at the city council and with getting set up at the dorm. At the dorm, I was able to make friends with another exchange student, who helped me set up a Japanese cellphone contract and showed me the nearest Aeon mall where I could buy the essential equipment for my room.



Making friends with Japanese students is a bit more difficult; my recommendation would be to join one of the many student clubs. I went to the shogi (Japanese chess) club a number of times myself, but ended up focusing more on my research later on.

In the Japanese academic calendar, semesters start in April and October, and end in early August and February, respectively. This means there are two long breaks with no courses running between August and October and between February and March.

You might still have to do some lab work in these breaks, or job hunting if you're looking to stay in Japan after graduating, but there will definitely be ample time to go travelling and enjoy Japan as well.





I was able to travel to Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, Yamagata and others during my stay, and of course Japan has a lot to offer in terms of tourism. Three experiences I would like to recommend especially are climbing mount Fuji, watching sumo wrestling and visiting an onsen hot spring resort. Oh, and don't miss out on the ramen noodles: my personal favorite is Ramen Jiro in Sendai, who serve massive bowls of pork bone ramen with lots of garlic and vegetables.



## *Career Path*



I have now finished my exchange to Tohoku University and am back on Swedish soil. After returning to Sweden I had to present my degree project at KTH as a final step before finishing my Swedish master.

I considered staying in Japan after graduation, but with the working conditions in Japan and Sweden in mind, I decided to search for work in Sweden.

I am now working as a research engineer at KTH in my Swedish professor's group, doing programming and research in roughly the same field as I studied in Japan.

This is a temporary employment of one year, and after finishing it I'm primarily looking to find a

PhD position to get to delve deeper into the subjects I have been studying. With a double degree (and hopefully a conference paper) on my resume, I hope that I will have a solid foundation to get started on an academic career.