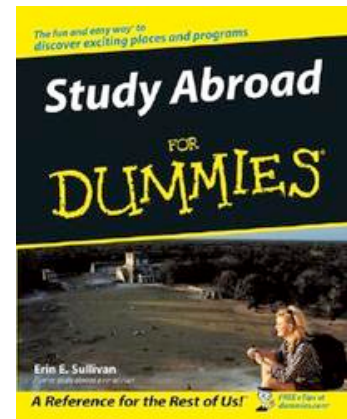




Book Review

Study Abroad for Dummies

by Erin E. Sullivan
Hoboken, NJ: Wiley (2004)
ISBN: 978-0764554575



Although this book was written primarily for North American undergraduates contemplating overseas study/travel, it may be useful for those in Japan organizing study abroad programs. It covers a lot of information in simple terms that offer clues about how to access additional study abroad related information fairly easily. However, such simplicity is not without a price: there is a tendency to sacrifice detail and overgeneralize. For example, when the author states, "Studying abroad can be the most exciting semester or year of your undergraduate college experience." (p.1) it is worth examining the underlying assumptions. First of all, study abroad is not merely for college undergraduates: students at all levels can benefit from overseas experience. Second, the majority of SA experiences are less than a semester in length.

This book consists of 25 chapters organized into six general parts. Much of the content of this text seems like commonsense to adults with study abroad experience. However, for nineteen-year-olds contemplating their first trip overseas, some of the information might be helpful. For those in Japan, Part I, sections of Part IV, and much of VI are apt to be of most interest. Part I covers basic background pre-departure issues that are worth considering, and Part IV offers some practical legal advice that is relevant in many countries. Part VI showcases some diverse overseas programs people who are thinking of designing overseas programs at their universities may find useful.

Strengths and Weaknesses

In many ways, this text tends to oversimplify and idealize study abroad, imbuing it with life changing outcomes as a matter of course. For example, the author enthusiastically claims that study abroad will result in "the time of your life" if you are "curious, adventurous, responsible, willing to learn, enthusiastic, and energetic" (p. 1). However, study abroad outcomes tend to depend on complex variables that are difficult to predict. For this reason, we feel the author should have qualified many of her statements about study abroad more carefully. Consider the following excerpt:

Studying abroad prepares you to take your place in the world by teaching you cultural awareness and respect. It also increases your self-awareness, particularly how you see yourself in relation to the rest of the world. International education not only advances learning and scholarship, but encourages cross-cultural communication and prepares students for leadership roles in a global community. (p. 9)

Careful readers will realize that there is a mythical quality to many of these statements. Although study abroad outcomes do often include some of the changes specified above, it is also true that some students can go through a study abroad program with few, if any, long-term changes (Vaillancourt, 2010).

Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of this book is the way it conceptualizes the study abroad experience. The author encourages readers to think of study abroad as, "one big, exciting, and educational adventure" (p. 1). This notion strikes us as very American; most Japanese would probably tend to conceptualize study abroad in a rather different light. Japanese male students in

particular would likely adopt metaphors such as "battle" [挑戦] and "fight" [戦い] to describe study abroad.

The Bottom Line

This book prompted us to consider whether any single study abroad text can provide meaningful information about the hundreds, if not thousands, of possible study abroad destinations worldwide. Less than a single page of the text covers information about Japan specifically. By contrast, over a dozen pages outline study abroad options in the United Kingdom.

North American women coming to Japan would probably benefit more from reading Pover's *Being a Broad in Japan* (2001) than this text. Another excellent text for Japan-bound westerners is De Mente and De Mente's *Japan: A New Way of Getting the Most Out of a Japan Experience!* (2012). Conversely, Japanese students thinking of heading off to North America may benefit from Silva and Toyoda's *Us and Them* (2011), which is an intriguing EFL text covering many cross-cultural issues. Japanese who are less proficient in English may prefer Asai's *Shitte Okitai! Kaigai Ryūgaku no Risō to Genjitsu* (2005) or Takano's *Ryūgaku no Shinjitsu* (2014). Both of these texts provide good insights about how to maximize study abroad experiences.

As more and more information becomes available on the Internet, the question should be asked whether *any* printed study abroad pre-departure text is actually needed. For example, the Institute of International Education's *Student Study Guide to Study Abroad* contains similar material to this book and it is available as a free download at <http://goo.gl/YP9FQN> . . . since detailed information about each study abroad destination tends to change quickly, the Internet itself might be the best information resource.

In summary, our recommendation of this book is lukewarm for the reasons mentioned above. For North Americans who like the format of the *Dummies* series, this text may be worth purchasing. However, for most people thinking of studying either in or from Japan, better alternative alternatives exist.

- Reviewed by Karen Yabuno & Tim Newfields

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