

## Mark Dixon: Shimonoseki City University (Semester 1/2008 & 2/2008)

Program at UQ: Bachelor of Arts (Japanese)

It's quite a difficult task to summarise one of the most amazing years of my life. My time in Shimonoseki, Japan was nothing short of out of this world. While most people wanting to go on exchange first opt for the major cities, I instead headed for the 'countryside' (hardly, by Australian standards). I felt I was in a privileged position in that I reaped the benefits from living in a smaller, more tight-knit community, as well as being just a twenty-minute train ride from a large city. The advantages of being in or near a city are obvious: bright lights, a vibrant night life, a cultural wonderland. However, for me, my life in Shimonoseki gave me access to the 'real' Japan. Being the only westerner in my university, and one among a small minority in the entire city itself, I was somewhat of a celebrity, constantly drawing attention to myself just by being a 180cm white guy in a sea of Asian faces. Many people would approach me, introduce themselves in haphazard English and immediately want to be my friend. My attendance and participation in local festivals often led to my face showing up in newspapers and on television. It was something of an interesting experience!

Claims to fame aside, my studies at Shimonoseki City University (SCU) began as quite a steep learning curve. As I mentioned, being the only native English-speaking person, even among my exchange student friends, very few could speak English well. This was a great push for my Japanese language and I soon became quite comfortable using Japanese regularly in my day-to-day life. The small group of SCU exchange students, through living and studying together, soon became my second family. The relationships I made there are without a doubt lifelong and we already have a reunion planned in the near future!

For anyone wanting to experience a rich culture, exciting adventures, long-lasting friendships and a great learning opportunity in a place with people that truly welcome you into their community, then a foreign exchange (especially in Shimonoseki!) is most certainly something to consider.



Left: Through my year in Shimonoseki I regularly participated in traditional Japanese dance classes and performed in public.

Above: One of the many outings that us exchange students were treated to by some of the Shimonoseki locals.