



# 2019 EXPERIENTIAL REPORT

Rakuten, Futako-tamagawa, Tokyo

**Jonathan Redfern**

May 2019 – December 2019

University of Manitoba

Computer Science

# Table of Content

1.0 Company	
1.1 History.....	
1.2 Products and Services.....	
1.3 Structure.....	
2.0 Internship.....	
2.1 Duties.....	
2.2 Working Environment.....	
2.3 Skills and Experience Acquired.....	
3.0 Lifestyle.....	
3.1 Dormitory.....	
3.2 Everyday Life.....	
3.3 Activities.....	
4.0 Conclusion.....	
4.1 Advice for Future Students.....	

## **1.0 Company Background**

### 1.1 History

Rakuten is a Japanese internet-based e-commerce and online retail company based in Tokyo, Japan. The company was founded in 1997 by Hiroshi Mikitani. Rakuten is mainly known for its B2B2C e-commerce platform named 'Rakuten Ichiba'. Since its founding in 1997 Rakuten has grown to become one of the largest and most well-known companies in Japan. In 2005, Rakuten started its expansion outside of Japan and as of today, Rakuten serves 29 different countries and regions around the world.

### 1.2 Products and Services

Rakuten has grown to be so much more than the simple e-commerce store that it started as back in 1997. Since then Rakuten has broken into many different markets including media and sports, communications and energy, investment and incubation, and fintech. It would take far too long to talk about all the different products and services that Rakuten owns in these different markets so I will just briefly mention one or two of them in the following paragraphs.

Rakuten entered the professional sports market in 2005 when it took control of the newly formed Rakuten Golden Eagles baseball team and in 2013 they went on to win the Nippon Professional Baseball championship.

Rakuten's largest venture into the communications sector would have to be Rakuten Mobile. Rakuten Mobile provides mobile communications services. Additionally, Rakuten owns Viber which is a global mobile messaging service used by millions.

Rakuten has more than 5 different projects currently that deal with investment and incubation. One of them being Rakuten Capital. Rakuten Capital is a corporate venture capital group that invests in more than 25 transformative internet start-ups.

Fintech is a sector that Rakuten has done very well in here in Japan. For instance, there is R Pay which is a Rakuten ID-based offline payment service, R Points which is a point card service offered by Rakuten, and R Edy which is an electronic money service offered by Rakuten.

Just briefly talking about all the different sectors that Rakuten is a part of it is clear to see that it has grown a lot since its founding in 1997. Now, instead of just being an e-commerce site it is a company that is involved in and thriving in many different markets.

### 1.3 Structure

Rakuten has multiple businesses and brands all over the world. For instance, Rakuten has a FinTech segment, an internet services segment, as well as a mobile segment. Each one of these segments includes multiple companies. The internet services segment contains a commerce company, media, and sports company, and investment and incubation company. The fintech segment contains a fintech group company and the mobile segment contains a communications and energy company. I am currently part of the Membership team which falls under the internet services segment of the company structure.

## **2.0 Internship**

### 2.1 Duties

I am currently a member of Rakuten's Ecosystem Services Department on the Membership team. Everyone in my immediate group is focused on working with client's accounts in one way or another. Large scale web-based applications interest me, which is why I wanted to apply to this position so badly in the first place. Throughout this internship, I have been working closely with my team members Maddy, Rana, Josh, Martha, and Gurnur. Gurnur is the one who decided on the project I would be working on during the majority of my time here at Rakuten.

Along the way, Maddy has given me a lot of help and advice which I greatly appreciate because a great deal of this is completely new to me. Additionally, our team meets every morning to discuss what we accomplished the previous day as well as the current day's goals and mission. We also have weekly sprints where we meet and create goals and objectives for the next two weeks and assign jobs to each member of the team. However, these are not the only times my team and I meet. Everyone is easily accessible throughout the day since their desks are only a few feet away from mine. I can also message them on one of the many chat applications that we use here at Rakuten.

One of the first tasks given to me during my time here at Rakuten was the on the job training project. The other interns and I were given the task of creating an energy tracker application. This application had a UI where the user would enter information about energy spending goals and the amount of energy currently spent. It would save this data to a database as well as graph it via a third-party application. I volunteered to work on the front end of the application since I have very little experience using React. This project gave me a lot of useful experience using React and working with a project from its infancy to its completion.

In addition to working on the Rakuten energy tracker, I was to complete weekly essays on relevant topics that were presented to me. Doing this exercise was a great way to get a better understanding of what is going on with the tech stack internally here at Rakuten.

The main project that I worked on during my internship was an automated configuration deployment pipeline using Gitlab. To do this I had to learn and understand how Gitlab works which included learning how to mirror existing git repositories/set up webhooks so that the Gitlab repository pipeline would be triggered by certain actions (such as pull requests, or commits), and write multiple Bash and Python scripts which did things such as reformatting YAML files and linting them to ensure they follow correct standard. Additionally, I was tasked with migrating the format of stored YAML configuration files to a different format. This project gave me some great insight into the DevOps realm of software development, something that I have always been interested in.

The last thing that I worked on while here at Rakuten was writing tests for the CAT application. There was very little test coverage existing for the application (less than 30%) so my team wanted me to try and bump that number up a little bit. This proved to be harder than expected due to the size of CAT and the complexity of mocking data using Golang. Golang is the language that CAT is primarily written in so the tests should be written in the same language. Golang is known for maybe not being the best testing language so getting experience with that will help me in the future when I am tasked with writing tests.

## 2.2 Working Environment

It is a short and simple commute to the office from my apartment. I only need to walk about 13 minutes and take one train. However, the train I take rides the Denentoshi line which can get extremely populated in the morning commuting hours, but I have gotten used to it (for the most part). Luckily, I am only on the train for about 15 minutes.

At the office, everything is open space. This means that there are no cubicles, and everyone is situated in a row of individual desks, with about 8 or so people belonging to one row. I enjoy this because it encourages discussion and team building a lot more than cubicles do. I can easily walk over to Maddy or another co-worker to ask a question if I need to. I have gotten to know my coworkers a lot better because of this. Since arriving at Rakuten I have hung out with several co-workers on many different occasions. Meeting with co-workers outside of work is the best way to become closer as a team because you get to know what the person is like in a normal environment and become closer as a result.

Rakuten doesn't seem to follow the usual Japanese after-work drinking party rituals that lots of other companies here follow. During my time as an intern at NTT, I was greeted the first week at the office with a welcoming party, it was amazing. Everyone really opened up and I feel as though I got to know my team members a lot better right away which helped ease my transition into Japanese work life. Rakuten, while being a Japanese company seems to follow western work culture, so there are far less organized after-work activities. During my time at NTT, we had a lot of team get-togethers which were honestly one of my favorite parts about living and working in Japan. Even though Rakuten might not organize these events like those as often I still became just as close

with my team at Rakuten as I was with my team at NTT. For instance, Rana (a member on my team) and I work out at the same gym multiple times a week after work. We also frequently get lunch together as a team.

### 2.3 Skills and Experience Acquired

Before this internship, I had little experience with DevOps as well as web applications. However, I have learned more in the span of this four-month internship than I have in all the classes that I took on those subjects back home combined. Every single day I learn about something new which is exactly what I was hoping for when I applied to this position.

The first couple of weeks of this internship taught me a lot about front end web development. It was good getting to learn the ins and outs of React while also communicating with the other interns working on the back end of the application. Additionally, having to be in constant communication with the sustainability department (the people we were making the application for) improved my communication skills immensely. We had regular meetings with them where they would voice their opinion on what we had so far. What they liked, what they didn't like and what they would like to see.

## 3.0 Lifestyle

### 3.1 Dormitory

During my time here in Japan Rakuten was kind enough to get me an apartment. The apartment is located in Azamino, Yokohama and is about a thirteen-minute walk from the train station. The apartment itself is extremely comfortable. I was surprised to find out that it came with its bathroom, toilet room, kitchen, and washer. Before coming here,



I was fully prepared to have to use communal showers and bathrooms so that was a nice surprise. In addition to that, the apartment is about a 3-minute walk to a convenience store so I have quick access to any groceries I want. The dorm itself is quite roomy and can easily fit me and a couple of friends.

### 3.2 Everyday Life

My day to day life here is pretty average most of the time. I wake up at 7:00 or so, get ready and then make my way to the train station. I arrive at work between 8:00-8:20 depending on which train I catch. I try and get to work before 9:30 so that I can take advantage of the free breakfast that is offered to employees here. I work from 9:00 A.M until around 12:00 P.M or 1:00 P.M which is when I break for lunch. In addition to free breakfast, there is also free lunch that is offered. The amount of options is insane, there are two different cafeterias located in this building with each one offering around 6 or so different dishes. So there is always something for everyone. After lunch, I usually go on a little walk around the park which is located near the office. I find that going outside is a good way to reset the mind after being cooped up in an office all day. After lunch, I usually work at my desk for another couple of hours before moving to the cafeteria to work for the last little bit or so. I find that changing my working environment is another good way to reset the mind. Some days after work I take the train to Shinjuku, or Shibuya to walk around and try to experience as much of Japan as I can before I leave. Another aspect of living on my own that I enjoyed is having conversations with random people that I meet on the street in restaurants or at a bar. Every day is different which is what I love about living on my own here in Tokyo. Other days I might go back to Azamino, and get a good workout in at my local gym. One of the harder things to do here I've noticed is continuing a healthy workout schedule. Back home I can go to the gym at

least three times a week quite easily because I have a car and the gym is right by my house. But since moving here I've noticed I'm a lot more busy than usual and since I don't have a car it is a lot more work to go to the gym. This prevents me from going as much as I'd like to.

### 3.3 Activities

I don't think I have spent one weekend day/night at home since I came here. Every single weekend has been filled up with events/excursions/parties which is exactly what I wanted. I could honestly write ten pages just talking about all the extracurricular stuff that I have done here so I'll only mention some of them.

My first couple of weeks here were mostly just catching up with friends and exploring what Tokyo has to offer. I went out drinking, ate delicious food, and explored this beautiful city. It was exactly what I expected it to be. For the first couple of weeks here I think I averaged around 30,000 steps per day on the weekends, which is crazy and I started to feel the wear and tear on my feet after a while. But as I started to adapt to Japanese life once again so did my feet, and the blistering/pains stopped.

The first big trip I went on while I was here was during Obon week. My girlfriend and I started the trip by visiting Osaka and Nara. I've never been to Osaka before so it was really fun exploring a new city with someone I care about. We enjoyed the nightlight and met a couple of new friends while also seeing what the city had to offer during the day. Our trip to Nara was on one of the hottest days of the year. Even though I almost sweated my body weight in water it was extremely enjoyable. The deer were very courteous (except when they bit me) and even bowed if you offered them a treat. After Nara, we hopped on a shinkansen to Kagoshima which is one of the most southern points of the

main island of Japan. We stayed in Kagoshima for a couple of days and enjoyed exploring the city and Sakurajima island which is an active volcano. One of the more memorable points of this trip would be when my girlfriend and I took a random bus to what we thought was a popular beach. It turns out the bus took us to an unpopulated beach. We had to walk down the highway for over an hour in the blazing heat to find a way back home. We ended up having to hitchhike back to the city because we couldn't find a working bus stop. But in the end, it all worked out and is a fantastic memory.



The people nice enough to pick me up off the highway    Enjoying the hot sand onsen in Ibuski, Kagoshima

During my time here in Tokyo I was lucky enough to have about 10 different friends visit me. It was lots of fun being their tour guide for the week or so that they were here. Being away from home for so long sure makes you appreciate your friends back home so it was great being able to see them



Some friends from back home and I waiting for a boat tour

Additionally, it was great catching up with old friends who I made last time I was here. When I worked at NTT last year I lived in Kokubunji and made lots of friends at a local bar there. One of them was nice enough to invite all of us over to his parent's and I can honestly say that was the highlight of my trip last time I was here. So I was extremely happy to be able to meet up with them multiple times and even visited a Sake brewery with one of them.

Another great experience that I had here in Tokyo was attending one of my NTT co-worker's weddings. I became pretty close with Kazato-san last time I was here because he was my supervisor at work. When he heard that I was coming back I hung out with him and some of my other NTT friends multiple times. A month or so ago he asked me if I wanted to go to his wedding so of course, I said yes. It was a fantastic time and I'm extremely happy for him and his new wife.



Photo of my former NTT co-workers and myself at Kazato-san's wedding

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

I can't believe that eight months flew by this fast but it did. My time here in Japan truly was wonderful. The knowledge that I gained through this internship will serve me for the rest of my life as will the memories that I made. I am extremely grateful to have worked for a well respected and established company such as Rakuten. They pushed me more than any other school assignment or previous internship has and I appreciate them a lot for that. As for all the friends that I made here. It will be sad leaving but I know that we will meet again someday

#### 4.1 Advice for Future Students

The main piece of advice that I would give to any student who is about to embark on the same journey that I just did is keep an open mind. Japan is very different from back home but if you simply embrace the differences instead question them you will have an amazing time. Another sound piece of advice that I would give is saying yes to everything possible. If a co-worker invites you out to drink? Say yes. If you meet someone on the street and they say they're going on a hike tomorrow and ask if you'd like to join? Say yes. The more you go with the flow the greater the possibility you have of experiencing something amazing and unique. I am truly jealous of you if you are about to start your journey in Japan because mine is already over and it feels as though it has just begun. Good luck!