

The JET Programme: A Great Way to Experience Japan

Finding Shared Values and Building Lifelong Friendships

My interest in Japan grew after my freshman year at university in 1981 after I read a book called *Japan as Number One*, by Ezra Vogel. Around the same time, I started practicing a Japanese martial art called Shorinji Kempo which increased my interest in Japan. I came to realize that Asia, including Japan, was not only off the beaten track for Americans but also where the future would be and I began to study Japanese.

Arriving in Japan in 1985 as a Monbusho (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture)* English Fellow (MEF), I became an Assistant English Teacher (AET) in Gifu Prefecture. In the next two years I visited a great many junior high and high schools in the prefecture.

My goal was to inspire students to develop an interest in speaking English and the outside world. I felt like an ambassador enabling the kids to expand their dreams. I also supported teacher-training programs to help Japanese colleagues use English as a tool of communication.

In my third year in Japan, the MEF Programme became the JET Programme, and I am proud to have been one of the first participants in JET— by then I was a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Gifu, a position that covered prefectural and local government as well as grass-roots and local business relations.

With the Gifu-Chubu Future Expo (Expo '88) being held that same year, I was able to be involved in the planning and implementing of a variety of events. And the connections I was able to build through this became a valuable asset for me.

Indeed, what attracted me to the JET Programme in the first place was a desire to immerse myself in Japanese culture, and JET was the best way I could think of to do that. My experiences as an AET and CIR have played, and continue to play, a significant role in my life ever since.

I learned, for instance, that as an American I share many of the same values as the Japanese—values such as commitment, strong relationships, good health, self-reliance, and focus on quality—even if our languages are different.

The knowledge I acquired in Japan has helped me build my career as an entrepreneur. Today I am the president and CEO of an omni-channel brand response company which offers products under the concept of “enriching lifestyles worldwide,” and the response has been fantastic. We operate not only in Japan but across Asia, offering great products and brand with Japanese service. Such brands are very popular outside of Japan as people see products that are well-received in Japan as synonymous with quality. Even though we may speak different languages, the desire for quality products is universal.

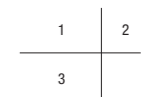
The JET Programme changed my life. To aspiring JET program applicants, I say: come to Japan with a passion to share and to learn; you will meet great people, learn, and build lifelong friendships for your career and for your life.

*Now known as Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)



Harry A. Hill

Entrepreneur, philanthropist and participant in the first year of the JET Programme. Originally from New York City, Hill's life and career has traversed the United States and Japan and won him the highest accolades in both countries. He is the CEO of a company that runs an omni-channel brand response company called Shop Japan.



1. Teaching as a young AET teacher in Gifu Prefecture.
2. Harry A. Hill is an accomplished martial artist with a passion for the Japanese martial art of Shorinji Kempo.
3. Hill places great importance on communicating well with his colleagues.

The JET Programme

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme began in 1987 with the goal of promoting grass-roots international exchange between Japan and other nations.

The JET Programme is primarily sponsored and administered at the local level by local government authorities in Japan, which are also the direct contracting organizations of JET participants. At the national level, the JET Programme is administered by the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) in cooperation with three Japanese government ministries: the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

JET participants are placed in every region of Japan and work in one of three positions: Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), or Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs).

Now in its 28th year, the JET Programme has gained high acclaim both domestically and internationally for its role in advancing mutual understanding and for being one of the world's largest international exchange programs. In 2014, the JET Programme welcomed 4,476 participants, and currently, there are approximately 60,000 alumni from over 60 countries living in all parts of the world.

No prior knowledge of Japanese or Japan is required to apply to the JET Programme. If you are interested, please visit the official website for information on how to apply: <http://www.jetprogramme.org>.