

The JET Programme: A Great Way to Experience Japan

A Once-in-a-Lifetime Opportunity



Ayesha Constable

From St. Catherine, Jamaica. Worked as an ALT for the Yamanashi Prefectural Board of Education from 2007 to 2009. Currently an active Jamaica JET Alumni Association member, involved in the leadership of several organizations that work toward fostering female empowerment and environmental awareness.

Participating in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme was a dream come true for me, for I had long wanted to visit Japan. The reality was even better than I had dreamt, and nothing could have fully prepared me for the fullness of my experience on the JET Programme. I was placed in the picturesque Yamanashi Prefecture at the foot of Mount Fuji, where I was offered a plethora of opportunities to get involved and make the best of my experience as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT).

I loved my students and enjoyed watching them grow from shy students, who were reluctant to say a word in English, to brave young adults, who would approach me and initiate a conversation. It was rewarding to listen to them talk about their dreams of traveling the world, much as I had dreamt of visiting Japan. I taught them English; moreover, I was also a motivator, mentor, and friend, and I value the lessons they taught me. One of the most satisfying parts of my role is that I was able to touch their lives.

Though I was employed as an ALT, my experience was not limited to the classroom. In addition to my teaching duties as an ALT at a senior high school, I was an active member of the local community of fellow JET participants and Japanese residents. I lived intensely, making the most of every opportunity offered. The friendships I built with Japanese and foreigners alike were the richest part of my experience. The friendships I made while participating in JET have survived distance and time, and we remain close friends to this day.

I credit my experience in Yamanashi with making me who I am today. It changed my life and transformed me personally and professionally. The skills that I acquired as an ALT, such as public speaking, the ability to engage with strangers, and confidence, have helped me in interviews and other occasions since I completed my tenure on the JET Programme. Because of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I am now able to give the world a different, firsthand understanding of Japan and its people. I grew to fully appreciate the fact that we are not confined to any one place, but that the world is truly our oyster and we can affect the world in so many ways.

Like many former JET participants, I want to continue to act as a bridge between Japan and the rest of the world by encouraging foreigners to visit and see Japan for themselves. This is why one of the first things I did upon returning to my home country was to volunteer to host a presentation called "Japan: Through the Eyes of a Jamaican" to share my unique experience in Japan as well as details on Japanese culture, people, and society.

I can never thank my students and colleagues in Yamanashi enough for everything—for their friendship, support, and guidance, and for embracing me for who I am. I will be forever grateful to everyone who played a part in changing my life while I was on the JET Programme. It was indeed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.



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 2013, the JET Programme welcomed 4,372 participants, and currently, there are approximately 55,000 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>.



1. Learning about various cultures with elementary-school students. 2. I am as radiant as the sun in the picture the students drew of my smile. 3. At the eighth station of Mount Fuji.