

The JET Programme: A Great Way to Experience Japan

Bringing Japan and Trinidad Closer Together

One of the greatest aspects of participating in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme is the opportunity to experience and learn about Japan while sharing with those around me the unique culture and history of my home country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Japanese and Trinidadians have a limited understanding of each other's countries and cultures, and it is my hope to bring the people of these two nations closer together. As an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Iizuka, Fukuoka Prefecture, for the last three years I have enjoyed introducing students, colleagues, and members of the community to customs such as Diwali, a festival with roots in India, that reflect the tremendous cultural diversity of Trinidad. Japanese friends have been equally generous in introducing me to the rich history and culture of Iizuka and surrounding areas.

Although my first exposure to Japan came from anime and other pop culture, I joined JET to experience the country's traditional side and act as a bridge for my own culture. My participation in a local *taiko* drumming group over the last two years has shown me that Japan and Trinidad, although culturally different, are wonderfully compatible. When I first joined the group, I was concerned my limited knowledge of Japan would lead to unintentional social missteps. But in fact, I have forged strong bonds of friendship with my fellow members, who have firmly embraced my Caribbean style of self-expression and have opened up to me in their own way. In addition, I have learned the importance of hard work and dedication through *taiko*, and I hope to continue improving so as to share the beauty of this traditional Japanese art form when I return home.

I aspire to a career in teaching in Trinidad, and my participation in JET provides an invaluable opportunity to learn about the Japanese education system from my talented colleagues and the section leaders of the prefectural board of education. My experiences working as an ALT, visiting other schools, and participating in English camps have opened my eyes to many new aspects that can be applied in Trinidad.

One of the most gratifying aspects of my job is interacting closely with students. Each year I assist in staging an English play for the annual school festival. While challenging, it is a fun experience for students that is immeasurably rewarding for the performers and audience alike. I have also been impressed at the way students here take responsibility for cleaning their own classrooms. I hope to introduce this practice in Trinidad, as it promotes respect for the educational environment and teaches manners and practical skills.

Interest in Japan is on the rise in Trinidad, and I would like to use my JET experience to deepen connections between the two countries. I hope to eventually establish high school and university Japanese language courses to give students in Trinidad the chance to study and become proficient in the language. I would also like to foster personal connections by developing an exchange program that will allow Trinidadian and Japanese students to learn firsthand about each other's unique cultures.

After returning to Trinidad, I intend to remain active in the JET community by helping nurture the next generation of JET participants and organizing cultural events to deepen appreciation and understanding of Japan. My JET experience has taught me the importance of self-motivation, and I believe it will serve as an invaluable asset toward building stronger ties between Japan and Trinidad.



Tsai-Ann Quan Kep
Born in Trinidad and Tobago. Arrived in Japan as a JET participant in 2012. Currently teaching at Kaho Higashi High School.



1. Kep talks with other teaching staff between lessons.
2. Kep poses for a photo with first year students.
3. Kep plays *taiko* drums during a performance.



The JET Programme official website
<http://www.jetprogramme.org/>