

The JET Programme: A Great Way to Experience Japan

Sharing from the Heart Across Continents

I was active in theater as a freelance actress in my hometown of Cape Town, South Africa, so it is not surprising that I was initially connected with Japan through movies. I saw my first Japanese film in 2006, and while the story was average, I was captivated by one of the actors and quickly became a fan. Yearning to learn more about Japan, I joined Nihongokai, a local language school, where I studied Japanese and participated in cultural activities.

The cultures of Japan and South Africa are different in many respects, but they both share rich culinary histories. I visited Japanese restaurants with other Nihongokai members and enjoyed different cuisine, such as sushi, and also prepared dishes for friends and family, including *agedashi tofu*, a savory, deep-fried tofu. Since arriving in the country on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme in 2012, I have sampled a wide range of Japanese dishes and have also shared South African-style fish and chips, peppermint crisp tart, and other flavors from home with those around me.

I chose to participate in the JET Programme to experience Japan firsthand. I have recently begun my fifth and final year as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) at Nabari Seiho High School in Mie Prefecture. One of the most fulfilling aspects of my job is learning how students view the world and helping them express their ideas succinctly in English.

A crucial element of this has been the introduction of debate in class. In preparing, students must consider topics from multiple angles, a task requiring them not only to stay up to date with current events but also to search for information in books and online in Japanese and English to learn how other cultures view various issues. I enjoy engaging students in their writing and have been involved in developing a writing code that enables them to hone their arguments over multiple drafts. Students have gained confidence, are better at expressing their ideas, and their worldviews have expanded. In addition, I have seen a marked improvement in writing skills and higher scores on language proficiency exams.

In my free time I enjoy exploring the beautiful countryside around Nabari on foot. As I traipse through a quiet hamlet, locals are often surprised to see me, but I relish those special moments when a person will let go of their inhibitions and interact on a one-to-one basis. During such moments I sincerely enjoy the politeness of Japanese customs and the way people consider the feelings of those around them.

I look forward to sharing my JET experience with people in my homeland as well as those from other countries. I have been impressed by the way schools in Japan look after the needs of students, with teachers forging very close bonds with their charges. I hope someday to help promote a similar system in South Africa, which due to economic and other issues suffers from a disparity in educational opportunities, and provide all schoolchildren a safe, supportive learning environment.

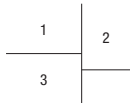


Larissa Hughes

Born in Cape Town, South Africa. Arrived in Japan as a JET participant in 2012. Prior to coming to Japan, she was a theater actress and toured widely throughout her home country.



Hughes helps third year students with pronunciation as they read an English text about a microcredit program.



1. Hughes poses with one of her third-year English classes. She team-teaches with another ALT and a Japanese teacher of English. 2. Hughes beams with excitement as she tries on a *yukata* for the first time. 3. Hughes talks with students during the weekly ESS club lunchtime gathering.