



### Han Jeonggyu

A graduate of Korean History, from the University of Seoul. This is his third year working as a Coordinator for International Relations on the JET Programme at the International Affairs Division of Kochi Prefecture. He joined the division in April of 2016.

Han's workplace is located on the Kochi Castle grounds.

GRASSROOTS AMBASSADOR >>> The JET Programme

# Reinforcing Relationships: Korea and Japan

Korean history buff and Japanophile, Han Jeonggyu, brings two countries together through Kochi



Left : Translating sightseeing information and planning events to introduce Korean culture at the Kochi Prefectural office.  
Center : Han serves as both interpreter and envoy of friendship at the sister-city signing ceremony between Kochi Prefecture and Jeollanam-do, South Korea.  
Right: Nakatosa, retains its traditional atmosphere. Han enjoys the hot springs with an ocean view, delicious food, and the classic ambiance of the town.

It was 2016 when Han Jeonggyu first stepped into the Kochi Prefectural office as a Coordinator for International Relations through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. His responsibilities included translating tourist brochures, interpreting, as well as teaching weekly Korean classes and organizing a program to introduce Korean culture to local students.

“During university, my interest in Japan grew significantly. As a Korean History major, we studied Japan and its history, which intrigued me—especially when it came to the growth and prosperity of the Edo Period. I found the restricted foreign trade made through Dejima Island in Nagasaki really interesting. These aspects of Japan inspired me to visit in 2009 when I studied Japanese at Tokyo Gakugei University for a month.”

At the University of Seoul, Han participated in an exchange program with Japanese students. He realized the difficulties that arise from limited language ability, so the next year, in 2014, he helped with a Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan program called JENESYS 2.0 (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths) in Hokkaido. He still ran into the same language barrier.

“These experiences deepened my desire to acquire high-level Japanese communication skills,” recalls Han.

Han had seen a television drama called *Ryomaden*, which was a story about Ryoma Sakamoto: A historical figure who played an essential role in overthrowing Japan’s feudal regime despite his lower caste. Sakamoto’s hometown was Kochi, and he’s famous for negotiating peace as a pinnacle figure in Japan’s early government.

It was then that Han stumbled across the JET Programme—a perfect opportunity to put his Japanese skills to use. He applied immediately.

“I failed on my first attempt, but I really wanted to make it happen, so I enrolled in a Japanese language school in Japan. After improving my skills, I passed the test on my second attempt and was given the opportunity to work in Kochi, my dream town.”

Han discovered a true sense of hospitality in the people from Kochi. The prefecture lived up to its slogan: *Kochi-ke* (The Kochi Family) because everyone is treated like family.

“It seems Ryoma Sakamoto also extended such hospitality. I imagine this is why so many came to trust in him, which I am sure empowered him to make changes.”

Soon after Han joined the Kochi

Prefectural office, Jeollanam-do, Korea entered a sister-city agreement with Kochi. This gave him a strong connection with the prefecture, and when the Deputy Governor of Jeollanam-do visited, Han worked with his colleagues of a different nationality toward a shared goal. From this, he felt a sense of achievement. He mentions that the two provinces have shared a healthy relationship since 1997 thanks to Chizuko Tauchi from Kochi, known as the Japanese mother of Korean orphans, who established an orphanage in South Korea.

When his term with the JET Programme finishes, Han isn’t sure what he will do. He’s considering translating or working in tourism and community development, hoping to contribute to revitalizing the region.

“Kochi is considered advanced in its challenges. It faces threats of earthquakes, which the local government approaches proactively. Its population is graying, which is a challenge Korea faces as well. I hope to bring good examples from Japan to Korea and vice-versa.”

He’s thankful for the JET Programme that has opened a new world to him. “Japan is close to Korea, yet Korean visitors to Kochi are few. I want to serve as a bridge, introducing Kochi’s

hidden beauty and charm to my people. I really hope this will contribute to a deeper relationship between our two countries,” Han says with a smile. ✨

### About the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme

The JET Programme began in 1987 with the goal of promoting grassroots international exchange between Japan and other nations, and is now one of the world’s largest international exchange programs. 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). In 2016, the JET Programme welcomed 4,952 participants, and currently there are approximately 62,000 alumni from 65 countries living in all parts of the world.



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