

The Mikan

EHIME JET'S OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER: WRITING AND PICTURES BY MIKANS, FOR MIKANS

JANUARY
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Annie Vuong

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy New Year Dear Mikans!

I am happy to finally present to you the first issue of *The Mikan* for the 2011-2012 JET year. It has been slow in coming, but thanks to all our contributors and our new team we're once again publishing.

Our staff consists: Melania Jusuf (Designer) and myself (Content Director and Editor). If anyone has an interest in joining please email me at vuong09@gmail.com.

The Mikan welcomes a wide range of articles and photos. Anything from reflection pieces to special memories you have made in your time here so far. Tips on travel or living in Japan are also good material to work with. Original photography, comics, recipes, and so on are further ideas for submission.

Since there were articles that weren't published before August of 2011, we are also including submissions from the previous JET year in this issue.

I hope you enjoy these pieces as much as I do. Once again, a big thank you to all who took the time and effort to contribute to this issue.



Annie Vuong
Content Director and Editor

PA MESSAGE

Dear Fellow Mikans,

2011 is coming to an end, and we would like to thank you so much for all your efforts and hard work that you have put in into your communities and schools across Ehime this year. Not only Ehime, but many of you have gone out and beyond for Japan since the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11th. Countless numbers of you have donated, helped out, and done the best that you can help to Japan. Thank you so much for making such an enormous contribution of your time and effort this year.

For first year JETs, we hope that you have enjoyed your time here in Ehime so far from its rich culture and history to its delicious and juicy mikans. Many more cultural and exciting events await you in 2012 so stay tuned for them!

For the fifth year JETs and those who have already decided to go back to your home country this year, we hope that you enjoy your remaining time to the fullest and accomplish all the goals that you have set or want to set in 2012.

We want to wish everyone a big "otsukaresama" and hope that you enjoyed your winter vacation. Please stay warm, keep safe, and have fun! We would like to end our letter with some announcements and "food for thought" for the new year.

Once again, the deadline for your reappointment decision is on Friday, February 10th, 2012. Regardless what your Contracting Organization or anyone tells you, you have till this date to make your decision to stay another year or not. Those who are being pressured or forced by their CO to make a decision sooner should contact us and the Japanese PAs for help or advice. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact us. Our email address for those who have forgotten is **ehimepa@gmail.com**.

In February/March of 2012, we will be selecting new members for the 2012-2013 PA/RA team. Let us know if you are interested or have any questions about either of the positions. We will fill you in about each role and the responsibilities that you will hold, if selected. We're eager to select a strong new team to continue making Ehime one of the best prefectures in Japan.

Thank you for reading, and we will catch everyone in 2012!

Your 2011-2012 PAs,
Vicky & Daisuke



PROPHETIC REFLECTIONS ON: THE FALL OF JET

The JET program is now entering its autumn stage. This is not simply because it's October and leaves are changing color. But like those trees, the JET program must soon put on a new set of colors to adjust to its ever-changing international climate.

Now in its 25th year, JET is truly a measuring stick against which all other English programs around the world compare themselves to. Still, there is reason to believe that the greatest days of not only the JET program, but also the need for English instruction has passed their peaks. To further my point, consider both the general decline on new admittances into JET as well as the inevitable rise of a simultaneous electronic translator.

It is no question that the JET program has gained popularity over its 25 years in existence: from its humble beginnings in 1987 with no more than 850 applicants/ people from four countries (the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand) this program has now come to represent people from more countries including: Korea, France, Germany, China, Ireland, Canada in just 15 years. However, JET's prolific period, the year when nearly 6,300 people from around the world were participating, was not last year...but in 2002, almost a decade ago. In fact, the need for JETs has fallen so dramatically that today's program recruits roughly 2,000 fewer participants than it did ten years ago. Certainly the possibility remains that many participants are simply staying in Japan longer, however this can hardly be the sole reason for a program to cut its intake by a third.

No, the demand for ALTs and CIRs is certainly on the fall. But why? In this writer's humble opinion, there is only one reason for this: Japan is losing her interest in learning English. It could be due to economical reasons. For example countries whose native language is English simply have not been economically stable in the past decade. Or perhaps it's a matter of nationalistic sentiment. As seen with the increasingly weak yen, the Japanese may find it best to improve upon their own national identity and language, resulting in English as being less of a necessity. Or could it even be a simple matter of increased technological dependence.

Prior to the internet boom in the late 1990's, learning a foreign language was limited to textbooks and CDs. This could prove expensive to the individual and be void of acquiring natural conversation skills—bringing about the rise of the stereotype that Japanese people can read and write in English much better than they can speak it. The implementation of the JET program tackled this problem by bringing a natural English experience as well as a touch of internationalization to the more rural parts of Japan. However, the internet took flight at the turn of the century

bringing such luxuries as the ability to not only post videos on the internet but to be able to video chat with someone from across the world—for free. Moreover, should you happen to forget a word in that language, plenty of electronic dictionaries exist online that can translate anything from one language to another all with a simple click of a button. One poignant example for me was when my girlfriend's mother from Korea and my father a non-native English speaker met for the first time. Neither spoke each other's language but when my father pulled out a laptop and opened up Google translator and started typing away, before long they were having a conversation—despite him knowing no Korean and her knowing very little English. It was amazing albeit a little unsettling.

The experience was upsetting to me since here was living proof that the role of a translator (and the need to learn any language) was beginning to drift into the pages of history books. Here was a role that thousands of people around the world still dream of having someday, but is perhaps slowly becoming obsolete. Soon technology will exist that will only require you to speak into a device that will instantly recognize, translate, and seamlessly reproduce in any target language of your choice. Its vocabulary will be updated every second of every day and never miss a beat. In fact, it will probably be an app you can buy for your phone.

SO WHAT HOPE
DOES THE JET PROGRAM HAVE
FOR ITS SURVIVAL IN THIS QUICKLY
CHANGING ENVIRONMENT?

So what hope does the JET program have for its survival in this quickly changing environment? The hope lies in a re-evaluation of its goals as an organization. No longer can JET see itself, can we see ourselves, as simply English teachers and translators. As statistics show, there are now two thousand fewer participants in the program this year than there were a decade ago, and YOU are one of them. The internet and technology may offer people the chance to connect with others from around the world effortlessly when they are sitting in their office, but when they are out and about YOU can be that real person they get to know in the grocery store, go out to eat a meal with, or go on a trip together and make real memories with. In the end, should this autumn turn to winter and the program fade away, let us never say that we did not make the most of the short time we had here in Ehime.

Drago Flores is this year's only new CIR in Ehime (giving a rowdy shout out to his four senpai: Caleb, Andrew, Hyemi and Shenwei) and of course all of the new ALTs throughout Ehime. "Come visit me in Ikata!"

CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN SCHOOL

BY TAMARA GRAHAM • MATSUYAMA BOARD OF EDUCATION • ALT (4TH YEAR)

An important, yet sometimes overlooked, aspect of our teaching experience on JET is the cultural exchange portion of our job. We are clearly immersed in the Japanese culture but how much of our own cultures do we share with our students and teachers alike?

You may have already heard it expressed, that we are cultural ambassadors here in Japan. However, it appears to me that the extent of the "exchange of culture", for many of us, this begins and ends with our self-introductions. What can be done?

How can we introduce various aspects of our culture while respecting the teachers' needs regarding completing the required curriculum? How can I even begin to broach the subject in a potentially uncomfortable situation?

Why not start by asking about Japanese culture? I can't speak to individual situations and challenges in this area but I can share a little of my experiences and approaches to this issue which have worked for me, in the hope that you will find something you can adapt to suit your needs.

Depending on the text used in your area, different stories may be presented to the students during English lessons. Without any advanced or detailed planning, I found it easy to mention or compare aspects of my culture while these stories were being introduced or read. Some teachers routinely asked me about customs in my country related to the lessons while others did not. In the case of the latter, at appropriate intervals during the lesson, I would simply raise my hand or otherwise indicate that I had something to contribute. Please note, keep it short and simple. Don't get too long winded or complicated with your input. Neither the teacher nor the students will be able to appreciate a long, complex or overly detailed explanation. I found it most effective to keep it short and allow the teacher or students to ask questions if their interest was piqued. It helps if you familiarize yourself with the text in advance and make brief notes whether mentally or otherwise, about what you would like to introduce. Perhaps you could have interesting pictures handy, just in case. Presentation time 1 to 5 minutes. This most certainly works for Junior High Schools but what of Elementary Schools?

There are different topics introduced at the Elementary school level which present us with chances to share our culture, if we capitalize on the opportune moments.

Have your pictures prepared in advance or a power-point presentation, just in case. I sometimes make the slides and show them to my teacher during a short break and briefly explain how they relate to the lesson

and how long it would take to show to the class. Try keeping things as interesting and colourful as possible. What simple ways could you be overlooking?

Foods: What food do you like? This is the perfect time to introduce your country's National dish or traditional foods. You can introduce a group of pictures of foods/prepared meals from different countries and have the students guess where each one is from.

Sports: What sport do you play? Try the gesture game and have the students guess. If your country's national sport is not a popular one, it should be even more interesting. Note also, that whether you actually play the sport or not, you can still introduce it. "I don't play ~ ~ but it's popular in my country."

What happens when you don't visit a school very often? My suggestion is to choose one item you would like to introduce and present it during the greeting time. What's this? No answer after 5 seconds; give a hint. Two hints later, you supply the answer. One minute later, your presentation is over and the lesson has not suffered for the loss of time. No time for the two hint quiz? Just go ahead and say what the item is and ask if there is something similar in Japanese culture. Get creative and get your teachers involved where possible. Sometimes I like to surprise my teachers but I am also very aware of the teachers who don't like surprises. Know thy teacher! Figure out appropriate times to introduce relevant items or topics and do a short demonstration for the teacher before the class where necessary.

Similarly, you can introduce special activities or festivals from your home country when talking about the days of the week or months of the year. You may be given an opportunity to do a full presentation at some point but more often than not, you may hear that there is simply no time. Take advantage of small windows of opportunity and squeeze a little of your home culture into the lesson.

How often should you do this? As often as you can. Simply standing in the classroom day after day physically representing your country should not be enough. The students are curious and want to know more about you and where you are from. How is your country similar to Japan? What is different? What do you like best about your country? Do you have Japanese anime in your country? Which ones do you watch? These questions are simple enough to answer using interesting pictures and gestures to illustrate your point. I cannot say it enough, for a better result and good response, keep things simple! Remember, the E in JET actually stands for Exchange so learn about Japan, teach about your culture and have fun doing it!

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E IN JET ACTUALLY
STANDS FOR EXCHANGE SO
LEARN ABOUT JAPAN, TEACH
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TAKE (RICE PLANTING) WITH MY PRIMARY SCHOOL KIDS

BY EMMA CRAWFORD

JUNE 2011, UWAJIMA

It's days like this one that make me know why I'm in Japan. I'm out in the sunshine with my feet squelching in the mud, chatting to my kids about the important things in life: Food, baseball, celebrities and the leeches that are trying to attach themselves to our toes.

I love it that we're talking freely. It's not quite English and it's not quite Japanese. It definitely involves a lot of flailing and not all that much grammar. 'Communication' is what I like call it!

These times I spend with the kids outside the classroom are by far one of the most rewarding opportunities for both them and me.



◀ School Ground Scenery

Planting rice whilst looking out on the fields and hills.



▲ A 'Totoro' Moment

Wandering back after a good morning's work.



▲ Bare Feet

Shoes lined ever so neatly along the edge of the paddy

MY MAGIC BOX OF WEBSITES!

BY SERENA VERE

Greetings everyone!

I'm a 2nd year JET in Kamijima-town in Ehime. Kamijima-town is a group of islands in the Seto Inland Sea, at the very Northern part of Ehime prefecture. Hiroshima prefecture is just a hop skip and a jump away, and I often spend more time there than I do on mainland Ehime.

Living on the islands and in such a rural location, I rely heavily on the internet to do shopping. I also use the internet for most of my travel needs. So I thought I'd introduce the websites that have been invaluable to me over the past year. Perhaps you know some or all of them already. If so, great! If not, have a look!

SHOPPING

www.amazon.co.jp

You can buy just about anything here, and a great perk is that you can pay with an overseas credit card! Many Japanese websites (such as rakuten) only take Japanese credit cards, which I, and probably many fellow JETs, do now have. You can also pay via a post office ATM's "Pay Easy" option.

www.rakuten.co.jp

I actually tend to favor this website over amazon for its variety of items. I've bought all matter of things from here—many shops have free or extremely reasonable shipping. I usually pay via bank transfer, but you can also pay via cash on delivery for some shops, or at a convenience store (an option I always overlook considering there are no convenience stores near me!). Both Rakuten and Amazon have English versions of their websites, making them rather user friendly for those who aren't comfortable ordering in Japanese.

<http://eplus.jp>

This is a website for ordering tickets to shows, concerts, musicals, whatever. Sometimes they even have "pre-orders" before tickets are on sale to the public, so you can get in and get good seats ahead of everyone else. I've used this to book mainly Takarazuka musicals (<http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/>) and have on occasion got stellar seats for doing pre-orders. There's usually a small surcharge for the pre-orders, plus a small fee for using their site in general. However, the fees aren't unreasonable in my opinion. The convenience is worth it. Tickets will be mailed to your door. I tend to pay via the post office's Pay Easy ATM option, but I think you can pay at convenience stores too. Word of warning, they don't accept non-Japanese credit cards. Another word of warning: It's all in Japanese. You'll need to register to use it (as with most sites these days), but that just makes it easy to get tickets the next time because it'll already have your address and everything in the system.

TRAVEL

www.hyperdia.com/

This allows you to look up train and subway schedules between two destinations. It lists various options for your specified route (you specify the date and time), and gives you stats on the price, time, and time of transfers between transportation. Shinkansen is also included on here, and this can be a helpful website to check before buying your shinkansen tickets in person.

www.jalan.net/

I love this website. Though one word of warning: I don't think it has an English version. If you have trouble using it yourself, feel free to ask a friend or co-worker for help. I use this website all the time whenever I want to book a hotel room somewhere. You search based on area and date, and can specify amenities you want, or an upper price range to keep within budget. The results are given via user rankings, and are also conveniently labeled on a map of the area you selected, so you can pick the best location for yourself. I've been able to find really cheap hotel rooms this way that I've been pretty happy with. You also get points every time you stay somewhere, which translates to a couple hundred yen off the next time you book a hotel with this website. Those points can be used anywhere as long as you book the hotel on the site—it doesn't have to be the same chain or exact hotel you stayed at prior. The only times I don't use this website is if I'm wanting a hostel, in which case I'll just search the internet for a particular area hostel.

JAPANESE

www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/cgi-bin/wwwjdic.cgi?1C

This is my absolute "go to" dictionary that I always use. It even has audio files for most of the words on there these days. The URL is a bit of a pain, so I usually just bookmark it, or else access it via google by typing in "Jim Breen." That's the name of the guy who developed it I believe, and usually the dictionary comes up right away.

www.polarcloud.com/rikaichan/

This is a neat little add-on program you can download for your Firefox web browser. You can toggle it on/off whenever you like. It basically makes it so that any Japanese word or character that you mouse over will result in a highlighted dictionary entry about that word. This eliminates the need to copy and paste a word into a separate dictionary page, and makes reading Japanese text a breeze.

www.alc.co.jp/index.htmls

This is another dictionary that I don't use very often, but it's strong point is that it gives you many examples of a word in context. If you're not sure how a word is used, or want to learn more expressions using that word, pop it in the dictionary and you peruse the wealth of information it returns. Especially useful when the single line Jim Breen entry doesn't quench your curiosity. I also hear it's helpful when trying to do translations.

RELAXING



www.wordpress.com

I keep a blog. I use this website. I like the user-friendliness of it, the relatively straight-forward, professional-seeming, add free interface, and some of its other more minor features. There are plenty of blog websites out there, but I think this one is pretty neat.

www.skype.com

I'd be surprised if people don't know about this website already, but this has been my lifeline back home to friends and family. You can get various packages of minutes, or unlimited packages, to a particular country or multiple countries, usually for quite cheap. A great way to stay in touch with people who don't use the computer or e-mail (like grandparents) since you can call their phones directly.

YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD AJET

November 5

Mt. Ishizuchi

Mt. Ishizuchi is the tallest mountain in western Japan, and this year AJET led a quest to conquer the beast. Usually, Mt. Ishizuchi would afford climbers a clear, crisp view of Ehime during the months of spring and fall. This trip was a little different as climbers hiked through the rain to reach the top of the mountain. Tired and a little wet, everyone not only made it to the top, but several also successfully climbed the heavy chains that lead to the final summit. Maybe November really isn't the ideal time to climb, but from the looks on their faces I don't think anyone minded!

November 12

Pot Luck Dinner

This past November AJET held their first Pot Luck Dinner. We invited JETs from all over Ehime to join us in Matsuyama for an evening of mingling, cooking, and—most importantly—eating! We wanted to create a casual and fun chance for everyone to come together before all the business of December. From the great turnout of JETs and Japanese alike, I'd say we succeeded. Ehime-ites came from all over to share their holiday spirit with local dishes from Korea, Japan, England and a host of other countries to make this night fun, warm, and delicious!

AJET would like to make this a recurring event to help build a community spirit, both among JETs and our Japanese neighbors. To get the ball rolling, we'll be moving the next location of this event outside of Matsuyama. Keep your eyes on the listserve to find out about upcoming dates and places.

October and December

Matsuyama Orphanage Visits

While the visits to Matsuyama's orphanage haven't always been organized by AJET, members have been always supported and funded events to give kids a fun holiday experience. This fall AJET sponsored two special holiday-themed visits for Halloween and for Christmas. We made costumes, had a visit from Santa, and janken-ed until we could janken no longer.

While it may seem like a lot to ask teachers to visit kids on their days off, these days are fun for everyone involved and the amount of support we received was really overwhelming. Giving gifts, playing games, and generally being big kids gives everyone a chance to relax and do a good deed in the process. We hope everyone will join us for our next visit to give these kids a smile, and re-energize your own!

December

SDC Enkai

It's everyone's favorite nomihodai of the year. That magical evening when you think, "Who is that person?", "Has he really been here 3 years?", and "I'm so glad I don't have to present tomorrow."

While our faithful PA's and RA's were toiling away, making this year's Skills Development Conference shiny and new, AJET organized the enkai that followed the first day of lectures. It's a small effort, but one we all take a lot of pleasure in. This event is also in thanks to all those who organized and presented during SDC. After all, what's the fun of an enkai if we aren't all working hard together? With that in mind, AJET would like to extend a thank you to the real heroes of SDC: Daisuke and Vicky! おつかれさまでした!

Upcoming Events

This year AJET is going to be channeling an old-matrimonial saying to improve on our activities to come. So look out for: 'Something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue.' We'll be sticking with favorites like the Shimanami Kaido bike ride, as well as prefectural collaborative events such as Tokushima rugby. We hope to keep going with Pot Luck Nights, have a second year of St. Patty's Day festivities, and launch a round of outings into Ehime.

Ehime offers us some truly wonderful and unique opportunities and AJET wants to help everyone explore and rediscover their home prefecture. Keep your eyes on the listserve and on the Ehime AJET website for news on upcoming events. Wishing you blue skies and smooth sailing for 2012!

VICKY'S KITCHEN: RICE RICE RICE!!!

Japan is a land of many fine traditions. From artistic woodblock prints to militaristic martial arts, the Land of the Rising Sun is a country of much culture and sophistication.

For JETs, an integral aspect of Japanese life that touches us on a daily basis is rice. More than just a staple food, rice is a building block of Japanese society. If you partake in the fine culinary experience that is known as 給食 (kyuushoku) then you receive the white ambrosia at least 3 – 4 times a week.

However for most people this is not enough. The first in this regular series of Vicky's Kitchen will describe how to cook rice, so that it can be enjoyed everyday in the comfort of your own home.



Wash the rice

Washing rice is actually a controversial topic. The general opinion is that washing American rice will get rid of its nutrients. The rice available here is a different kind, so washing will just alter the stickiness of the rice when cooked. In Japan it is tradition to wash the rice until the water is clear.

Some ladies of old recommend letting the ethereal kernels soak in water for an hour or so before cooking. These knowledgeable but rustic dowagers of the kitchen have confided that it promotes softer and fluffier rice.

Put the rice in a rice cooker

Press start

Empty the rice onto a plate (or bowl for the Oriental minded) and enjoy.

The rice cooker is capable of producing many different kinds of rice simply by adding some ingredients into your rice cooker at the start.

For example:

Replace some of the water with coconut milk

Add allspice, garlic, thyme, salt and canned red kidney beans (available from Kaldi in Matsuyama)

DEAR DIARY...

BY JAMES KEMP

17TH DECEMBER 2011:

It's only a week until Christmas and here I am in Osaka! Nenkyu confirmed, suitcases packed and karaoke microphones hung up for another year, it's time to set off on my Christmas holiday! On Saturday evening, I bade farewell to my sleepy inaka home of Johen and jumped on the night-bus. Nine-and-a-half hours later, I disembarked, bleary-eyed and achy, to a dusky, 6AM Osaka. After a quick nap and waking up to be relatively refreshed, it's off to have a look around some of the sights that I didn't get to see last time I was here. Osaka Castle, here I come!

22ND DECEMBER 2011:

Monday morning finally came and it was time to set off for Hong Kong! After an uneventful journey, I arrived at Hong Kong airport. From there, it was just a train ride away from Central station where my friend Tiffany was waiting. Of course, there had to be some hitch—luckily, mine wasn't too major. Turns out that the day I was flying out was incidentally my payday. As much as I looked and inquired at Customer Information, the airport terminal just did not have an ATM that would take my little-known Japanese Farmers' Bank Card. So the only dollar I had to exchange for my journey was that which was already in my pocket. That awkward moment when you inadvertently end up travelling on a student budget.

As a city, Hong Kong was certainly busier than any place I can remember in Japan. It seemed to be constantly abuzz with traffic and people... certainly more densely populated than what I've seen in Japan. The city was a sprawling patchwork of a city—streets going up and down, jutting off at different angles and curling around; neon-lit shopping arcades and bustling pedestrian crossings set against arched trees jutting out from the city walls, interspersed with sea views and inner-city temples. It felt much more raw and organic than either London or Tokyo.



On the usually-dull topic of traffic... I found myself caught off guard by how funny taking the local buses turned out to be. For the smaller buses, there's just no such thing as a "bus stop". If you want to get off, you just yell at the driver, he abruptly stops and you jump out.



That also means that if you want to get on one, there's no particular place you have to wait—you just wander the busy roads to wherever they happen to be heading. Add into the mix some ridiculously bumpy Hong Kong roads and you've got yourself one hilarious experience. Organised chaos at its best.

Somewhere amidst all this chaos, Tiffany and I took time to treat ourselves to a Thai massage. Well, I use "treat" loosely, since at one point my little Thai masseuse climbed onto my back on all fours (using both her knees and her hands to work on my back), before rolling me over and contorting me into something I can only describe as a human pretzel. Halfway through, I burst out laughing right in her face—not because it particularly tickled, just because the way she was massaging me was so comical I couldn't help but crack up. Luckily, she got it and burst out laughing too. Funny shit.

So, that's Hong Kong done! Having somehow stretched my pennies across an eventful four days, it's time to say farewell to Tiffany and head off for the next leg of my Christmas adventure—to Beijing to meet Claire!

HONG KONG: DOS AND DON'TS!

DO: Take a ride on the local buses—they're both cheaper and a tonne more enjoyable than taxis! Check out the Avenue of the Stars at night; the best place to see Hong Kong's beautiful evening cityscape. Brave a local massage parlour!

DON'T: Rely on being able to use your Japanese bank card abroad... be sensible, think ahead and draw your money out before you set off! Don't be scared to ask locals for directions if you get lost—generally, the level of English in Hong Kong is great! Lastly, don't be put off travelling in winter—Hong Kong's climate is refreshingly mild, even in December.

DECEMBER 24TH 2012:

After a nine-hour night bus ride, numerous taxis and four aeroplanes, I finally made it to my final destination: Beijing. However, this wasn't quite the end: my friend Claire, who I'm staying with, lives in a city called Tianjin, two hours south of Beijing—so one more bus ride on top of that and I was ready to settle into my new home for the week. In terms of where my friend lives, our two situations don't really compare: people in Tianjin don't think of it as much of a big city, but compared to Johen, it's huge. Twelve million people huge, to be precise.

I've definitely been touched by the friendliness of some of the Chinese people I've met—giving me seats on the bus and helping me find the right subway tickets without even asking—but as a whole I feel a lot more like an unwelcome outsider here. My Japanese experience, on the other hand, has so far has been *defined* by the friendliness of the Japanese people. Tianjin is definitely more fast paced compared to the sleepy countryside that I'm lucky enough to call home. It seems like there's not an hour of the day when the cars aren't furiously tooting their horns from the streets below. Too much noise pollution for me thanks (...simply more evidence that the transition from City to Country Boy has been fully completed).

CHINA: DOS AND DON'TS!

DO: Be prepared to be dealt with a little more hostilely than you might be used to in sunny old Japan! Rely on local taxis—although you may not always get service with a smile, they're seriously cheap and, for that reason alone, convenient!

DON'T: Forget to pack lots of layers if travelling in winter... especially if travelling to northern cities like Beijing—temperatures are a lot colder than the relatively mild Ehime climate and southern Hong Kong!

JANUARY 1ST 2012:

On Tuesday, Claire and I jumped on the train from Tianjin to Beijing to take a look around Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. Obviously in our foreign ignorance, we had not a clue where we were heading and almost headed home thinking we'd seen Tiananmen Square when we hadn't even set foot inside it. We'd looked around the Forbidden City for a while, posed for our picture in front of Mao's portrait, laughed at the guard's War-era Germany-style uniforms, and were just heading off to lunch to ponder why the world's biggest public square (Tiananmen) seemed underwhelming small, when it dawned on us. Looking across the street, the penny dropped. "Shit, *that's* Tiananmen Square". Some would say degrading, but we found it in the end.

Christmas Day itself was much more difficult than I envisioned it being. Having spent the past twenty Christmases with my family in England, it just didn't even feel like Christmas being so far away from home. Either way, I certainly felt homesick. A Skype call home to the family was enough to bring the tears. Thankfully, all of their presents arrived on time and everyone seemed pretty chuffed with their new Japanese wares. But looking through the Skype window into my living room thousands of miles away, full of family, was tougher than I thought it was going to be, for sure.

After Christmas passed, it felt like an invisible burden had been lifted and both me and Claire got a new lease of life to explore. And where more famous than the Great Wall? Reports from friends had been that it was overrated as a tourist attraction, and that we'd struggle to make much fun of it particularly during winter. The sights from the Wall were extraordinary and it wasn't so busy that they were impossible to

appreciate. After we'd made our way to the top, we then made our way back down to do some omiyage shopping for some of my JTEs and Japanese friends.



Claire and I saw two panda hats we liked and after having initially been offered one for ¥180, we ended up walking away with *two* for ¥100. Win. Understandably, the sight of what appeared to be a foreign couple wandering around Beijing in matching panda hats was apparently too much for some passersby to take. We were definitely feeling smug at how cute we knew we looked. And when our cuteness caused one particularly intrigued Chinese man to stare so hard he seemingly forgot how to walk and subsequently fall down the subway stairs, our smugness was vindicated.

So, after two weeks of travelling, it was time to pack up my panda hat and jump on a plane back to Japan! Travelling straight from a nightclub to the airport at 5AM probably wasn't the wisest idea I've ever had, but my journey home ended up being a relatively smooth one... smooth, but LONG, clocking in at a grand total of 26.5 HOURS. I eventually arrived back in Johen at 7.30AM this morning. Not bothering to unpack, I dived under my kotatsu for a quick nap. Only to awake ten hours later, dazed and confused at 5.30PM. Oh, Japan, how I've missed you!

So, there you have it! My diary from two weeks in China! All in all, definitely a location worth spending some nenkyu on! If you book your flights early enough in advance, find some buddies to accompany you and take heed of my travel tips, you might just be able to have a blast without breaking the bank!



CV BUILDING 101

BY VICTORIA MURPHY

During my first couple of days in Japan, I went to the British Embassy as part of Tokyo Orientation. I hadn't given much thought as to what I wanted to do after JET, but one of the ideas I was toying around with was applying to the Foreign Service. That night I ended up talking with someone from the embassy and he told me that years ago, participating in the JET Programme was an almost guaranteed way of getting a job with the Foreign Service. However, with so many applicants who now have a background in overseas work, having been on JET is not enough on its own. It's certainly a very valuable thing to have on your CV, but if you can show that you did more than just teaching, that's where you begin to stand out to prospective employers.

As David Jones pointed out during the Skill Development Conference in 2011, the regular job of an ALT develops skills that are applicable to any career that you wish to pursue after JET. By taking on extra duties or pursuing qualifications there are several ways during your time in Japan to enhance your CV even further. Here are my top ten suggestions.

Japanese Language Proficiency Test

As you are living and working in Japan, improving your Japanese language skill is one of the most obvious ways to add a little something to your repertoire. The JLPT isn't necessarily the ultimate test of your overall Japanese ability, being scarce on the speaking and writing areas, but it is an internationally recognised qualification. If you want to use Japanese in a professional environment, then you should try to pass level 1 or 2. However any level will show that you made an effort to adapt to the language and didn't spend your time in Japan twiddling your thumbs.

Distance Learning

There are courses available that let you obtain qualifications without having to be physically in attendance. As an English teacher, the most obvious type of distance learning is a TEFL course, or something similar (check out the National AJET website for more information about different types of qualification <http://ajet.net/professional-development/esl-teaching-courses-and-reviews/>). The additional bonus is that it can be directly applied to your work as an ALT.

If you're not looking to get a qualification related to teaching, the Open University has many online, degree level courses. A list of the courses available to residents of Japan can be found on their website (<http://www3.open.ac.uk/courses/countries/Japan.shtm>).

Tokyo Orientation Assistant (TOA)

Do you remember when you first arrived in

Japan? There was that nice person who looked after you in Tokyo, took you to dinner, and then traveled back to Ehime with you. Well that person could be you! The TOA job is one of the most fun things you can do during your time on JET. It allows you to attend Tokyo Orientation for a second time, and this time you won't be JET lagged! It can be quite a tiring couple of days as you make sure your JETs are OK, take shifts in the CLAIR hospitality centre, and welcome people at the airport but it's a good experience and a nice addition to your CV. The application to be a TOA opens up in February.

Regional Advisor (RA)

A slightly bigger challenge than being a TOA is being an RA. The RAs are responsible for organising social events in their area, keeping their JETs informed and helping their PAs with various tasks. There's a lot of teamwork involved, along with other communication skills. If you're thinking of going into any career that deals with providing resources for others, being an RA is a great addition to your resume. The application process for becoming an RA starts in February.

Prefectural Advisor (PA)

As a PA, you gain experience in: counseling, team-leading, information distribution and conference planning. Twice a year, you can attend PA seminars where you'll receive training from professional counselors who work with CLAIR. While you don't come out of the seminars a professional counselor, you do gain a good working knowledge of the basic listening skills needed to help people solve their problems.

Being a PA can be a big challenge. It takes a lot of work which often happens outside of your normal workplace hours but the organisation, communication and leadership skills it develops are highly applicable to any future profession, not to mention very different from the regular skills utilised as an ALT. It's a great thing to do if you're not thinking of going into a job related to teaching. Personally, I've found the job very rewarding. In particular, working with a partner has been great. It's been amazing getting to share the successes and blips in the road with someone else. I love you, Daisuke! Application for the PA position also starts in February.

AJET

If you'd like to work in a team to help the JET community in Ehime, then Ehime AJET is for you. The AJET crew is responsible for the big social gatherings in Ehime. Ehime's branch of AJET is one of the strongest ones around, and over the past couple of years, it's expanded on the type of events it's involved in. Ranging from parties to mountain climbing, the AJET events are varied and require you to flex your organising and teamwork muscles.

Beyond prefectural involvement you could even apply to be on the National Council. Responsibilities may include: writing reports for the government agencies in charge of JET, working with the corporations that sponsor AJET, revision and publication of Planet Eigo, and being in charge of its monthly newsletter.

Getting Involved with the Community

International relations is an important part of your ALT job. Examples of cultural exchange include: conducting adult conversation classes, or even teaching a skill or talent to the local community. Remember that you can't receive money for the extra work but there's nothing in your contract that says you can't barter your skills for food!

Besides adult conversation classes, there are many ways to get involved in your community, including judging speech contests, taking part in local festivals, giving speeches to the volunteer guide groups in your city or even hold cooking lessons.

The Mikan

If you're looking for something completely different to add to your CV then why not write something for **the Mikan**? For a bigger challenge you can join the editing and publishing team.

Writing skills are an integral part of any profession you may go into. Why not hone your skills and share your experience of life as a JET at the same time by contributing to our local newsletter? Even if writing isn't your forte, submitting work, and going through an editing process helps to brush up on the skills you learned back in school. Contact the editor of *the Mikan*, Annie Vuong (vuong09@gmail.com) for more information on how you can contribute.

Orphanage Trips

Joining the regular trips to either the Matsuyama or Uwajima orphanage is a great thing to do. The trips are great fun and if you want to get even more involved you can even help out organising them. Contact Vicky Murphy for more information (vmurphy101@gmail.com)

Toastmasters

Toastmasters is an internationally recognised organisation where you can practice giving both planned and impromptu speeches. They have a tried and tested method that guides you towards becoming a better communicator and leader. Joining the club expands on vital public speaking skills, which is always useful from a CV perspective. There are clubs that meet regularly in Imabari and Matsuyama. Contact the Matsuyama branch president, Josh Arestie (jaresty@gmail.com), for more details.



MATSUYAMA JETS' CHRISTMAS FEAST

BY DYLAN LAWSON BROWN



The well equipped kitchen at COMS was rich with the aromas of a Christmas feast on the 25th of December as JETs who had hunkered down in Matsuyama for the festive season congregated to celebrate peace, goodwill and stuffing of our faces. Vicky's delegating skills were put to the test as she conducted operations while preparing a fat juicy turkey.

Catherine and Tim concocted one of the delicious stuffings while Julie

Anne and friends set about preparing roast vegetables. Jessica and Helena whipped up a delicious eggnog that wouldn't have been out of place in a top confectioners while Kazuyo, Jia and their team created a range of sculpted desserts. Kyle got to work carving the turkey once it was ready.



We itadakimasu'd and chowed down to Christmas hip-hop interspersed (every second song!) with Mariah Carey's "All I want for Christmas" which Catherine had sneakily added to the playlist on intermittent repeat. We may have been surrounded by the glass, steel and linoleum of a Japanese community centre but the vibe and the food transported us into the Anglophone collective memory of a pine-scented, tinsel and baubled Yuletide banquet hall with crackling fire and jingling sleigh bells. Crackers cracked and glasses clinked and we did a great job of making merry, even though our glasses held only tea and juice. And the food just kept coming! JETs from further afield drifted in bringing ever richer desserts; cakes, tarts, fudge, pudding and more cake... Zeno ate so much he had to lie down clutching his stomach. No amount of kyushoku could have prepared him for this.



We came to the end of our scheduled time and plates were still stacked with sugar-soaked goodness, so Vicky went on a diplomatic mission downstairs to see if she could extend our stay for another hour. She strategically kept on her Santa apron and elf hat, and with a gaijin-smash of Christmas cheer, got us granted another hour of feasting. By this time though, most of us were sounding a bit like Cartman: "no... more.. pie"... so we confronted the challenging task of getting people to take food home so that none would go to waste. Teamwork got the place looking pika-pika in no time at all and after much persuasion and coercion, all the calorie-laden sweets found people to go home with. We hobbled out grinning, most of us with acute hyperglycemia and "All I want for Christmas is youuuuuuu" playing on a loop inside our heads.

BUDO ON THE BEACH

BY KYLE DUSKE

For the holidays I decided to stay in Matsuyama. This time frame was filled with non-stop eating, relaxing and running from house to house to see friends and their families. Were it not for the fact that this was all happening in Japan, it almost felt like I was home again. However, to complete this holiday experience something felt like it was missing.

A tradition I've carried out every year for the last five years, is something I like to call "New Years Day Training." This is where on New Years Day a few friends and I put on white suits and head down to the beach. Hoping no one mistakes us for escaped inpatients from the local insane asylum, we do some Karate and then jump in to the ocean. All hangovers are instantly cured and ever-growing bonds are built between a few crazy men and women who have kept up this tradition. This has been carried out in ice-covered snow that made our feet bleed, and even after horrific windstorms that filled our jogging trails with new and exciting obstacles and on a few years. Despite how ever many times I have said "Canada is not as cold as you think," we have had to literally break the ice before entering the ocean on occasion.

When I realized I was not going home for New Year's, I began telling everyone I met who had any interest in Budo about this annual tradition. This mostly resulted in me being called crazy. My continual attempts at recruitment were turned down by all but two wonderful Japanese men, Tatsuya and Takahiro. Tatsuya my current Aikido training partner, loves the ocean just enough to have been tempted by my proposal. Takahiro is the younger brother of a good friend of mine. His sister and I harassed him until he sleepily agreed. He has some Karate and boxing experience and though he seemed hesitant to come, I think he was more attracted to this crazy tradition than he initially let on.

By a quarter past one the three of us were at Beishinji jumping around on the sand in our bare feet while the waves rolled in. It was a "warm" ten degrees Celsius, the skies were clear and the air was fresh. We kicked the sand, punched the air, took some knees to the guts, and threw each other around until our feet were numb. Finally, we faced the ocean, assumed a long deep front stance, and counting in Japanese advanced forward one punch at a time. The first ten brought us to the edge of the water, the next ten took us waist deep then I yelled ten more. We punched into the waves until we were up to our ears in saltwater. We all dove in and ran back out as fast as possible.

In an almost sadistic fashion I asked the men to assume seiza. Sitting at the edge of the ocean, water crashed against our knees while we took a moment to meditate. After a few seconds Tatsuya asked "mukusou yame?" I said "no" and we sat there reflecting on the years past and dreaming of the year to come for a little longer. We then bowed our heads to the ocean and the beautiful world around us. Then we bowed to each other "Otagai ni rei" and acknowledge ourselves as equals, shared some congratulatory high fives and took a few more dips in the ocean.

Once we were all cleaned up, we sat in my friend's mother's van and shared some traditional Japanese food served during New Year's Day called Osechi Ryori. I was especially fond of the cream cheese filled Kamaboko, that strange processed fish cake I am sure you have all tried at least once. I showed pictures of my Canadian New Year's Day training past and explained about the Polar Bear Swim. My friends could not believe that hundreds of people show up every year on January first to dive into Vancouver's share of the Pacific Ocean. Tatsuya told us about how when he was in Hawaii he would get up at sunrise on New Year's Day to surf. To me being up for sunrise is far crazier then swimming in icy waters. Sharing this tradition with my new friends was the highlight of my holidays. Being in the ocean made me feel alive and got me excited for the New Year to come. I enjoyed it so much I am debating on having another swim on Chinese New Year is anyone interested in joining me?



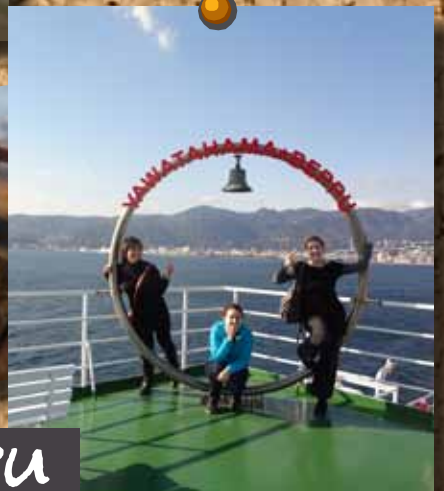
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