

# Looking back on JET

*Andrew MacAskill spent three years on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme between 2005-08, working as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Toyama Prefecture. A member of the JET Alumni Association (JETAA) Sydney Chapter, he recently acted as an interviewer on a panel undertaking the important task of selecting candidates for the 2010-11 JET programme. Here he reflects on what he gained from his own time on JET.*

How to sum up three amazing years of JET life? What does JET mean to me now looking back and how has it affected, changed, and improved my life? Why would I recommend the JET Programme? While there are far too many points to list here, the answers to these questions are interrelated and perhaps the best place to start is with people. During my time in Toyama I met thousands of them through work, social circles, festivals, events ... I was one of 110 JETs from all over the world and, JET being a transient time, after



**Taking part in the Shinminato Hikiyama Festival**

three years and many bittersweet goodbyes and excited welcomings, there must have been about 250 different JETs in our prefecture during my time on the programme. Making wonderful friends from such an incredibly diverse range of countries, from Japan to New Zealand and South America to Russia, and sharing the interesting, challenging and exciting life of foreigners in Japan together was amazing. I was lucky to meet some truly exceptional people and to make lasting friendships that are easier to maintain than ever before in our ultra-connected modern world.

Of the innumerable experiences and memories that remain with me from JET, many come from the unique opportunities that living in a semi-rural place afforded me. Being a part of local community life is extremely satisfying and is one of the most important parts of the JET goal of grassroots internationalisation and cultural exchange. Getting to know my neighbours and joining in local festivals, chatting with old ladies, fisherman,



**In front of thatched roofed houses in Gokayama  
[Andrew—front, second from right]**

farmers, businessmen, students, teachers, civil servants and others that I met walking down the street or at a local restaurant or pub, these sorts of simple encounters provided me with countless good times and helped me to make many friends. The knowledge that my time in Imizu City, so tremendously beneficial to my life, also left a positive mark on many around me is indescribably marvellous. To visit the same town years later and have people call out to you because you taught their children or they remember you from newsletters or local cable TV is truly heart warming.

Among the many other long lasting benefits of the JET experience, improved language skills, particularly in regards to cultural significance and communication and a deeper understanding of Japan's people and culture, have aided me in my work, studies, and have enriched my personal life. I wholeheartedly recommend approaching JET with an open heart and mind, listing no preferences, and letting life take its course so the cards fall where they may. Doing so gave me three of the best years of my life so far and has helped me to face the future with enthusiasm, optimism, and the knowledge that I am part of something far greater that is shared to this day with my friends and former colleagues. To anyone considering JET, do it, you will definitely not regret it.

*Andrew MacAskill*



**Being Banzai-d at my farewell party**