

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program has been running since 1987. As of last year, 3,761 young Australians have worked on the program contributing much to their local Japanese communities and gaining unforgettable experiences.

There are a number of JETs whose time on the program sees them end up in a third country. Mr Blair Milne is one such JET. He worked as an Assistant Language Teacher as did his 'partner in crime', Ms Carly Amber. Here he shares a little of his JET experience which he has titled



## Japan: A <sup>Love</sup>Rabu Story

My name is Blair and I came from Scotland to work as a JET in Nara Prefecture for two years. Among all the fantastic opportunities that came from working on the JET Programme, I was lucky to meet my Australian wife Carly early on in my time in Japan. So after proposing during the Sakura Light Up at Nijo Castle in Kyoto, then marrying in the Old Town of Edinburgh, we have "returned" to Sydney to begin our lives after JET. In this article, I wish to reflect on my experience on the JET Programme, and the importance of maintaining links to Japan.

Firstly, I came on the JET Programme to experience living in a culture alien to my own, and to experience life on the other side of the world (and, of course, for the sushi). The things that excited me most were being able to contribute to school life, and to introduce aspects of my own culture to the school. At the same time, knowing no Japanese was a daunting prospect. In hindsight, all the initial worries were largely unwarranted. No matter how alien the language was, some form of assistance was never too far away, and common sense was a winner. From buying a train ticket to finding food in the supermarket, I took my time and tried not to be overwhelmed.

It was at a welcome BBQ for new JETs on the banks of the Totsukawa River

that I first met Carly. Carly had come on the programme a year before, having studied Japanese at school then university. When Carly offered me a piece of her *renkon* (a Japanese vegetable), I knew we were destined to be partners in crime.

There are two senior high schools in Kashihara City: My school, Unebi, and

was one of the best parts about being in Japan for Carly and me.

Relationships are such an integral part of being on JET, from students to colleagues to Japanese friends outside work, as well as other expats living in Japan. In many respects, it is important anywhere, but the unique situation of being on JET can add challenges:

differences in language and culture can change dynamics in both obvious and subtle ways. I think for me, overcoming these differences was my biggest achievement on JET. (Apart from marrying Carly, of course!)

Now, living in Australia, I can look back fondly on everything I did in Japan, knowing I wouldn't be here if I hadn't partaken in the JET Programme. Being in Australia for me also means learning about a new culture in much the same way as I did in Japan; new concepts like "a fair go" or Aussie Battler instead of *Honne-Tatemae*\* and Salaryman. The smell of wattle in place of harvested rice fields, bushfires instead of typhoons, and Flat Whites instead of

Frappuccinos. Although I am loving life in Australia, and trying to make the most of the opportunities here, Carly and I both look forward to returning to Japan to see friends and maintain a connection to the community in which we met, and to remember all the little things about Japan that made us smile.

*Blair Milne*



Although based at high schools, both Blair and Carly also visited primary schools.

my wife's school, Kashihara. So when we were first spotted together, sipping coffee at Mister Donuts, I dread to think of the commotion we might have caused in the town. Certainly, grinning students became a pleasant part of life early on in our relationship. Later on, Carly and I were able to share parts of our life with our Japanese friends, from photos of our wedding, to stories about our travels around Japan. Sharing our life experience with friends in Japan

\* Honne-Tatemae 本音・建前 is a concept in Japanese denoting one's 'true' feelings or motive (honne) and the 'façade' (tatemae) one shows to others.