

Teaching and learning on the JET Program

Ms Alanna Kochetkova is a first year ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) on the Japan Exchange and Teaching programme. She currently teaches at Kōryō Junior High School, visiting Kamiyashi, Ōkura and Sakunami elementary schools in Sendai City, the capital of Miyagi prefecture in northern Japan.

Alanna shares a little about her time so far on JET.

Before arriving at my placement, I had expected "life in a city like Sendai" to involve well-established schools with multi-storeyed buildings bustling with teachers and students moving between classes. I was pleasantly surprised, however, by the scenic commute to a newly built school surrounded by

mountains and rivers with a welcoming bear taxidermy in the front entrance. This was the beginning of my experience as an ALT in one of the smallest schools on the edge of Sendai city.

My base school, Kōryō Junior High School, has 49 students, or as my principal would light heartedly say, 'AKB48+1', and in my elementary schools, there are 15 students in each, in which you can see the strong bonds between teachers and all students. As an ALT working in the small schools neighbouring Yamagata prefecture, I am grateful to experience the local area that includes the Sakunami onsens, Ōkura dam, Nikka whiskey distillery factory and Jogi temple, where the families of my students come from. I have also been able to participate in special school activities, such as, skiing, rice harvesting, a concert by the Tokyo philharmonic symphony and capturing appearances from the monkeys, falcons, snakes and other native wildlife.



One of the reasons I wanted to participate on the JET programme as an ALT was from the influence of my first trip to Japan on the Kizuna-Bond Project in 2012, where I learned about the after effects of the Great East Japan Earthquake, and through that I developed a

longing to contribute back to the Japanese community. During the visit from our sister-school in Adelaide, we travelled to Aramachi Elementary School [above] near the coast which now stands as a museum. I saw the current continuing restoration of the area and was touched by the resilience of the locals.

Consequently, in my spare time, I have volunteered with our English Kids Club, Sunshine Smiles group to work with young adults with special needs and the ALT Christmas carols group where we bring festive cheer to uplift the spirits of those less fortunate. I found that simply expressing my feelings could bring hope and happiness to others. Also, learning a new hobby like Ikebana has helped me greatly in balancing my thoughts and expressing my creativity.

In my time here as an ALT, I am not only learning a lot through helping the Japanese community, but also further developing my character. I hope that applicants considering the JET programme will be able to create unique experiences that will in turn forge strong bonds and life-long personal growth and development.



Japanese Language Proficiency Test—take the challenge

The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) has been held since 1984 and it is **the largest-scale test of Japanese language in the world.**

The test is widely considered a benchmark to gauge the Japanese ability of non-native speakers. It not only acts as a reliable guide for government and corporate organisations, it is also a great way for students of Japanese to assess their own proficiency.

日本語能力試験

Some people (Japanese and Australian) say that level N1, the top level, would be difficult even for native Japanese speakers and that some of the content is too esoteric. While there is an element of truth in this, studying for N1 you will likely find words and structures that you realise occur surprisingly frequently once you have learned to recognise them.

The JLPT is offered twice a year, once in July and again in December, in various cities around Australia, including Sydney. (The July sitting in 2018, for example, is only offered in Canberra and Brisbane.)

The test is offered by the Japan Foundation and the Japan Educational Exchange and Services. In Australia, it is organised by the Japan Foundation Sydney in cooperation with host institutions around the country. Register online.

www.jpf.org.au/jlpt

Studying for the test

An official practice workbook based on past exams is available online at the JLPT website—

www.jlpt.jp/e/samples/sample12.html.

The Japan Foundation Sydney Library has study guides and past papers available for loan. Study guides are also available through select bookstores.

There is of course no shortage of online resources, but do be sure to check out actual past exams. As with most tests, it's best to be familiar with style of questions and the layout of the paper.