

JET

PROGRAMME

Jessica is a recent returnee of the JET Programme. She worked as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) in Akita City from 2017 - 2019 and is now managing the JET Desk at the Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney. She shares her experiences with us.

泣ぐ子はいねが？ Are there any crybabies around?

Welcome to Akita Prefecture's catchphrase. This infamous quote is said by the prefecture's mascot: **Namahage**, a demon-like ogre that comes down from the mountains in winter to look for lazy or disobedient children.



Before I went on my placement, I knew nothing about Akita. Now, after two years of living and working there, I proudly consider Akita as my home-away-from-home.

In my day-to-day life, I primarily taught English at one junior high school with about 540 students. My students were the best thing about being an ALT. Whenever they saw me, be it in their class, the neighbouring class or walking down the hallways, they always greeted me so enthusiastically.

After school, I would visit the various school clubs on offer (everything from baton twirling to volleyball) and the students were eager to teach me, no matter how terrible I was, and talk.

I even joined my school in the prefecture's most famous event: Kanto festival. For four nights in summer, hundreds of lantern adorning bamboo poles up to 12m tall and 50kg heavy are lifted into the air to the festive sounds of flutes, thunderous taiko drums, and the crowd cheering "**Dokkoisho, Dokkoisho!**"



Dressed in traditional **happi** emblazoned with my school's emblem, I played taiko on the back of a truck with my students. The energy on that night, especially as a performer, was absolutely indescribable.

Outside of school, I also joined a local Kyudo club. **Kyudo** is the martial arts practice of traditional Japanese archery. During



break time we would all sit down on the tatami mats, drink tea, munch on weird and wonderful Japanese snacks, and talk. My Kyudo club made such an impact on me that I even joined the **Sydney Kyudo Kai** club when I returned to Australia.

I had too many amazing and unique experiences on JET to list here, but I can honestly say that **it was the best two years of my life!** Now, managing the JET Desk, I get to help others experience their own JET journeys.

Visit jetprogramme.org/en/ or contact the **JET Desk** on (02) 9250 1000 to learn more!

spring is on its way!

The Setsubun ceremony involves people scattering (rather than throwing) beans, a practice called **mamemaki**, to get rid of evil or bad luck.

While scattering the beans, normally soybeans, you say **Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi**, literally 'Out with the devils (*oni* 鬼), in with good fortune (*fuku* 福)'. **Mamemaki** was commonly done inside and outside a home or building. In a family, one person is normally made to wear a devil mask and becomes the *oni*, and the others, especially the children, have fun throwing beans at the *oni* to drive evil out. Crowds of people also gather at temples or shrines where celebrities are sometimes asked to perform **mamemaki**.

Another custom at Setsubun is to eat the same number of beans as your age plus one to ensure good health for the year ahead.

鬼は外、福は内



A devil mask and lucky beans (**fukumame**)