

My Experience (so far) on the JET Program

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After acing my interview held in D.C. and eagerly awaiting for my placement for JET, I had no idea what to expect in the coming years. Placement is picked seemingly at random, which was confirmed at least to me after I got the email saying Kumamoto Prefecture. I had asked for a placement up north in Hokkaido. Kumamoto is located in the deep south of Japan, in Kyushu, and as luck would have it, Kumamoto was the prefecture that suffered two devastating 7+ magnitude earthquakes just a few months before I was set to arrive in August, 2016. Even so, I can't describe the excitement I had for moving to and making a life in Japan.

Some of the things I looked most forward to were the cuisine, visiting historical and beautiful sites like Kyoto, Hiroshima, and the summit of Mt. Fuji, and being able to make Japanese friends using the Japanese I learned from UVA. After one year, I can say I have succeeded in all of those things. While I could go on with how life is in Japan, I'm sure there are many interest posts and blogs about the topic already. Instead, I want to talk about what surprised me the most about living in Japan, which was the amount of international friends I made in Kumamoto City. There are JETs here from all over the world, and meeting with many people of different nationalities, like Australia, England, Germany, Turkey, Singapore, Canada, Mexico, and South Africa, among others, ended up being an unexpected pleasure from living and working in Japan. I feel that I have certainly become more culturally aware, which I think is so hard to do especially if you are American because it's easy to stay stuck in the vastness that is the USA.

I have learned to be more patient with simple misunderstandings I experienced in daily life (British people call underwear "pants," and garbage "rubbish," for a simple example), and have come to appreciate the complexity and power of international relations. Just from talking with friends I've made of various nationalities, I feel like I can look at recent world issues such as Brexit, Trump's presidency, and the North Korea missile crisis through many different lenses. With America physically being so far from other countries, it's easy to look through the lens of "America first" exclusively; however, I believe this experience through JET has led me to sympathize much more with people from different countries and backgrounds.