



DON'T PANIC

Fukushima New JET Guide

-prepared for you by current and former FuJETs-

cover page photo credits:
 Merran Eby, Michelle Krüger,
 Aishat Adedamola Bello,
 Laurie Burrow, Canyons Japan

- About the NEW Fukushima
 Don't Panic Guide -

After quite a few years, the Fukushima New JET Guide received a much needed update in both appearance and information in 2016. This guide is lovingly prepared for you by both current and former FuJETs and updated each year. This *new* New JET Guide would not have been possible without the tireless effort and groundwork laid down by previous FuJET councils.

Blood, sweat, and tears went into the making of this refreshed and redesigned guide-- along with copious amounts of caffeinated beverages and swears (primarily directed at InDesign.) We hope that this guide will help answer at least a few questions in the days before your departure. We're looking forward to seeing you soon!

Guide Planning: Merran Eby, Kris 'Draws' Mokes

Guide Design&Layout: Kris 'Draws' Mokes

Guide Copy Editing: Merran Eby

Article Authors, Researchers, & Editors:

Merran Eby, Kris 'Draws' Mokes, Laurie Burrow,
 Josh Tweedy, Abby Rosen, Tana Espinoza, Sarah Chaney, Mimi Evans, Cormac Ryan, Xan Wetherall, Jon Dart, & countless current and previous FuJETs

Table of Contents

ABOUT FUKUSHIMA

What is FuJET?.....2
 FuJET Out and About.....2-3
 Culture Spotlight: Kibitan.....4
 Brief Intro to Fukushima.....6-7
 Rural Fukushima.....6-7
 Life in the Suburbs.....8
 Life in the City.....9
 Food Safety in Fukushima.....10
 Radiation Concerns.....10-11

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Peer Support: Before and After Arrival.....12
 Tokyo Orientation.....12-13
 Special Interest Groups (SIGs).....14-15
 Packing for Japan.....16-17
 Omiyage.....18

ON BEING AN ALT

Self Intro Lesson.....18
 International Associations.....19
 Teaching Elementary School.....20-21
 Teaching Junior High School.....22-23
 Teaching Senior High School.....24-25

LIFE IN FUKUSHIMA

Driving & Cars in Fukushima.....26
 Tips for Improving Your Japanese.....27
 Japanese Phrases & Useful Vocabulary.....28-29
 Fun with Your Money.....30-31
 Shopping.....32-33
 Surviving Winter in Fukushima.....34-35
 Tourism in Fukushima.....36-39
 Culture Spotlight: Akabeko.....38
 Out of Fukushima.....40-41
 Fukushima Volunteering.....42-43

FuJET
Fukushima AJET



What is FuJET?

FuJET – Fukushima JET – started as the local Fukushima chapter of **AJET***, but it has grown into something so much bigger and inclusive; it is an extended family network within the Lucky Island, and all ALTs and CIRs in Fukushima are members of the Fuku-family. FuJET's basic functions are to organise events, charity and volunteering opportunities, trips, parties, and get togethers for the ALTs and CIRs in Fukushima throughout the year. You can participate as little or as much as you want, but every event is great fun, a good way to catch up with people from other parts of the prefecture, give back to the community, and also a great opportunity to just have a variety of experiences around Japan. FuJET is here to make your time in Japan more fun and fulfilling!

Get Information and Stay Connected!

There are many ways for you to get information before you come! Our website (www.fujet.org) is a great resource for you to read up on more information about the prefecture! Facebook users can look up the *Fukushima ALTs* group to ask questions directly to sempai/predecessors. A few FuJETs every year are unlucky enough to get uncommunicative predecessors, so these are valuable ways to learn about what to expect!

You can also like our official *FuJET Facebook page*, through which all FuJET events will be posted and shared. It's the best way to know what events are happening!

FuJET Out and About! Making Memories in Fukushima

There are many events going on in Fukushima every month, from festivals to hikes to local dance parties! Rare is the weekend where you won't have something to do. In addition to these events, there are many events that FuJET organises (both big and small!) throughout the year. FuJET events include volunteering opportunities, cultural experiences, trips both in and out of Fukushima, and more!

At these events, you'll get to spend time with ALTs, CIRs, and Japanese people from all corners of Fukushima--and beyond! FuJET events are open to everyone, and they're a fantastic opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones! We definitely encourage you to come out to as many as you can.

One of our best and more popular trips takes place soon after you arrive--the annual **FuJET Canyoning Trip** to Gunma! Canyoning is exactly what it sounds like--traversing through canyons by sliding down waterfalls! Every September, FuJET organises a trip to Gunma prefecture to take part in this fantastic activity, with some other high-tension outdoor activities!

The course we take part in focuses on using our bodies to navigate the canyons and waterfalls. Equipped with wet suits, helmets, special canyoning shoes, and a harness, we will slide and swim through the course.

While half the day will be canyoning, the other half will be spent rafting, doing bungee, or another awesome activity. In the evening, everyone will gather by the river and have an amazing barbeque dinner (complete with vegetarian and vegan options!).

After you think that you can't eat another bite, the music will be starting up and the dance party will begin!

On the way back to Fukushima, we will stop at a famous mixed outdoor onsen to soothe our tired muscles (the mixed portion is optional). Get excited and make sure to bring your bathing suit as sign ups will start soon! It's a experience not to be missed!



fox canyon, minakami, gunma

Due to the ongoing pandemic, events are subject to change. We will keep you in the know!

Here is a quick breakdown of just a handful of some of our bigger events. This is by no means an exhaustive list! We're constantly looking at creating and sharing new and rewarding community-building opportunities and activities. Have an idea for an event? Let us know and we'll do our best to see if we can make it happen.

Event Breakdown

- The first event after your arrival is the **FuJET Tokyo Welcome Dinner**, which, as the name suggests, happens during Tokyo Orientation. After the first day of orientation, relax and get to know your fellow FuJETs in proper Japanese style--at an enka dinner!

- In mid summer, we'll have one last hurrah to wish good luck to all of the FuJET's heading out to new exciting adventures with the **FuJET Leavers' Party**. One last time together to enjoy barbeques, swimming, and good times together before it is too late!

- In August, all new JETs will attend a 3-day Fukushima Orientation, held in Fukushima City. In the evening, we will have the **FuJET Fukushima Orientation Welcome Party!** See familiar faces from orientation, and meet new ones who couldn't make it out to Tokyo!

- In September, we'll go on the **FuJET Canyoning Trip** in nearby Gunma prefecture, which will be your first chance to take a trip with your fellow FuJETs outside of Fukushima! You can read more details of this event on the previous page.



The FuJET Sapporo Snow Festival Trip is filled with amazing sights you can't find anywhere else in Japan!

- In October, FuJET volunteers at the **Aizu International Festival**, held every other year. Lucky you, the festival is on this year! Raising money for charity, having fun with local children, and sharing our culture with community--it's a great day giving back to the community!

- In November, JETs--both old and new--gather in Fukushima City for a mid-year conference. It's very rare that we are all in the same place together so we take advantage of the fact and head down to the local beer hall for a night of good food and better friends at the **FuJET Midyear Beer Hall Dinner!**

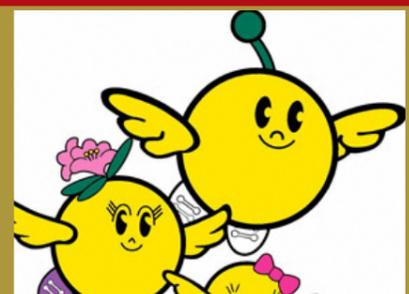
- One of our biggest trips is to Hokkaido in February for the **FuJET Sapporo Snow Festival Trip**. Enjoy a long weekend of sightseeing, skiing, snowball fights, and world famous snow sculptures in the beautiful Frozen North!

- Have you ever looked at Mt. Fuji and wondered what the view is like from the top? Well, you can find out firsthand on the **FuJET Mt. Fuji Climb**, an overnight adventure to see the sunrise from atop Japan's most famous mountain!

Beyond these big events, smaller, local, and new events will always be happening so keep your eyes peeled as you'll never be bored!

Come to all of the trips or just one! We are so excited to meet you, and hopefully help make your time here in Fukushima one that is filled with good memories and great friends.





Kibitan

is the prefectural mascot of Fukushima. Kibitan is a bird designed after the local bird 'Kibitaki', and his mission is to revive Fukushima. He has a mission to tell to the world that Fukushima is beautiful and has hope for the future.

A Brief Intro to Fukushima the lucky island

Fukushima Prefecture is the third-largest prefecture in Japan (area-wise), and has a population of around 2 million. It is the southernmost prefecture in the Tohoku region of Japan. Famous for fruit, the region contributes to 20% of Japan's fruit production. There are also a lot of sake and beer breweries to be found here. Shaped a little like Australia, the area can be split into three regions, each with its own distinct geographical and cultural identity. The culture in Fukushima varies from the lively big-city vibe of Koriyama, to the beaches and coastal fishing towns of Iwaki, to the quiet mountain life of Minami Aizu.



Aizu (Aizu and Minami Aizu)

To the west is the Aizu region. Surrounded by mountains on all sides, the Aizu region tends to be the hottest part of the prefecture in the summer, and the coldest part in the winter. Winters are famously cold and snowy in Aizu. Thankfully, there are quite a few onsen and ski resorts to make sure you stay warm. While Aizu has a few cities, they all have a very rural feeling to them due to the large population sizes being spread over a vast area, and old fashioned traditions still being very much a part of day to day life here.

Aizu Wakamatsu (会津若松) Aizu Wakamatsu is the 'Samurai City'. Filled with historical sites, museums, and onsen--this rural city is a big tourist spot. You can read more about Aizu Wakamatsu in the tourism section as there is too much to list here!

Kitakata (喜多方) Kitakata was once written '北方', which meant 'northern place'. Located on the northern most border of Fukushima, Kitakata is famous Japan-wide as one of the top three ramen destinations.

Minami Aizu (南会津) Formed in 2006 through the merging of Tajima, Ina, Nango, and Tateiwa villages. Nestled through the mountains, Minamiaizu is beautiful and green half of the year. The other half of the year sees Minamiaizu (affectionately called 'the Miz') blanketed in white snow. If nature is what you desire, the Miz is the place to be.

Nakadori (Kenpoku, Kenchu, and Kennan)

Nakadōri is right in the middle of the prefecture – with Aizuchiou to the left, and Hamadōri to the right. The Naka (中) means "middle", and this region makes up 1/3rd of Fukushima. Many cities are in Nakadōri, such as Kōriyama City and the capital city of Fukushima Prefecture, Fukushima City! Being in the middle of the prefecture means most places get little snow, and summer isn't too hot.

Kōriyama (郡山) is in the center of Nakadōri. Also know as The City of Music, Kōriyama is a large city – the second largest in the ken. It has an estimated population of 329,339. Kōriyama is arguably the most advantageous place to live in Fukushima. In addition to its central location, Kōriyama also lies at the crossroads of all major forms of travel in Fukushima – bus, trains, and even the bullet train! About 90 minutes east by car or train will bring you to the coastal city of Iwaki, while Aizu Wakamatsu on the western side takes about 40 minutes. Fukushima city, the capital, is 30-40 minutes by car north.

Fukushima (福島) is near the top of Nakadōri and is the capital of our prefecture. It is a large city, having a population of around 290,064 (The third largest in Fukushima ken). Fukushima City shares many qualities with Kōriyama – both are large, have a large FuJET community, and is a great place for shopping or cultural events. With museums and movie theatres, as well as many interesting things to see and do, and friendly FuJETs everywhere, Fukushima City is a fantastic place to be located.

Nihonmatsu (二本松) is close to Kōriyama and is home to the famous Lantern Festival. The festival has been held annually since 1643 and is one of the three largest lantern festivals in Japan. A smaller town of only 56,386, Nihonmatsu is a very old town with much history, such as Nihonmatsu Castle, an amazing spot for cherry blossom viewing. Other places of interest are the Ebisu Circuit, a famous drift racing track, and right next that is the Tohoku Safari Park.

Sukagawa (須賀川) is located close to Kōriyama and has a larger population than Nihonmatsu (currently around 76,976). Sukagawa is home to the famous Taimatsu Akashi – Fire Festival. With a history of more than 400 years, the Taimatsu Akashi is one of the three major fire festivals in Japan. Also home to the Peony Garden, Sukugawa is a beautiful places with many things to see and do!

Shirakawa (白河) is an great place to visit. A sleepy rural town of around 62,688 people, Shirakawa has several festivals, most notably, the Daruma Ichi Festival (wooden doll festival). Shirakawa is also home to a famous castle, Komine Castle, which has lot of history behind it. Also Nanko Park, which is claimed to be one of the first officially named parks in Japan.

Many smaller towns make up the rest of Nakadōri. Centrally located with a great climate, why not enjoy all the sights there are to see!

Hamadori (Iwaki and Soso)

To the east is the Hamadori region. Hama (浜) means "coast" in Japanese, and indeed a long stretch of beautiful Pacific coast is the main feature of this part of Fukushima. It has the mildest climate of Fukushima's three regions, with warmer winters and cooler summers than the rest of the prefecture.

Iwaki (いわき): Nicknamed the "Sunshine City" for its bright and clement weather, this is the most southeastern of Fukushima's municipalities, and the closest to Tokyo. While it's technically classed as the biggest city in the prefecture, Iwaki is in fact a huge conglomeration of fourteen smaller towns under one name, most of which will rarely see snow during the winter. New Iwakians can expect to join an unusually large local JET community of nearly 30 when they arrive, due to the many schools scattered throughout the towns and villages here.

Soma (相馬): Situated on the northern coast of the Soso region, just south of the border with Miyagi prefecture, Soma is larger than it is to Fukushima's own capital city. Historically, this was a place where samurai horses were bred and raised; many animals are still kept here by the local population, and the local Soma-yaki pottery style is easily recognized by the delicately painted horse patterns it favors.

Many smaller towns make up the central part of Hamadori. The coastline suffered heavy damage from the tsunami in 2011, but recovery, while slow, has been steady. Some populations, like Okuma and Namie, have relocated inland to places like Aizu and Nihonmatsu in the interim; several other towns, like Hirono, have since reopened, and their people are returning. JETs whose placement is with one of these contracting organizations may end up living in a completely different part of the prefecture.



Country Life in Haiku

-a selection of haiku from Matsuo Basho-

*exhausted I sought
a country inn, but found
wisteria in bloom*

*the crescent lights
the misty ground.
buckwheat flowers*

*by the old temple,
peach blossoms;
a man treading rice*

*the tree from whose flower
this perfume comes
is unknowable*

*stillness
piercing the rocks
cicada's shrill*

*the village so old
there's not a single house
without a persimmon tree*

The Pros and Cons of Rural Fukushima

Danielle Markewicz /Fukushima ALT

So you've got your placement! And you've never heard of it before. So you hop over to Google to see where it is, and there seems to be a whole lot of nothing on that map! Congratulations, you've been placed in the inaka! The Japanese word for 'rural countryside' is 田舎("inaka.") Now to a Tokyoite, even the largest city of the prefecture, Koriyama, with a population of 338,000, is considered the inaka. But for the purposes of this guide, I will call any town (町"machi") or village (村"mura") with a population of less than 10,000 people "inaka".

Living in the inaka can be either the greatest or worst experience of your life. It's all about what you make it. Take the positives and run with it, and overcome any negative aspects as best you can. My time spent in my little mountain town of less than 2,000 people has been some of the happiest years of my life. But one of my predecessors broke contract after a few months, and while there may have been other factors, one of the main reasons was due to the rural placement.

Let's go over some common complaints about living in the inaka, and how you can turn that con into a pro!

There are no shops!

In my little town out in the mountains, there are no supermarkets, no convenience stores, and certainly no retail shops or amenities. While this was daunting at first, I was quick to discover a few family-run grocery shops. One of them was owned by the family of some of my students, and they are always happy to have me support their shop!

It has also been the case where I've forgotten my wallet at home when I filled my car up with gas, and the gas attendant just waved me away, telling me to pay next time I came by. (Of course I returned immediately after grabbing my wallet from back home.)

Many locals have their own gardens, and grow fresh vegetables, and being

one of the few people without a garden (I live in one of two apartment complexes in town), I'm an easy target to get gifts of fresh veggies in season.

Of course sometimes shopping is necessary, but while living here, I've gotten into the habit of doing one large grocery run a week on Sunday on my way back into town after a weekend out and about, then supplementing with fresh veggies bought during the week from my local shops. It also forces me to think about my menu for the week, so I don't buy anything unnecessary. It's made me a better cook and organizer!

There's no privacy!

Living in the inaka is often said to be like living in a fishbowl. Everyone in town knows who you are, and can make having a private life difficult. For instance, when I started jogging in the evenings, within a few days, people were already asking me about it. Even though I was running in the dark, and they could barely see me!

But if you think about it another way, because everyone knows who you are, you can get the star treatment. Many people are happy to stop and chat, and often want to hear your life story. I got very good very quickly at a funny little self introduction, simply because I had to repeat it over and over again to every baachan ("grandmother") and jiichan ("grandfather") I met. This might have given them a false impression about how much Japanese I spoke, because apart from that self-intro, I stumbled a bit even on simple conversation.

You can also use the lack of privacy to your advantage in certain cases. For example, if you get lost, pretty much everyone in town knows where the ALT's apartment is, so you can ask almost anyone for directions home. I've also been a part of the gossip chain. Many times the ice has been broken at a party when I ask about something someone else has been doing. It's a great bonding experience, though be sure not to spread around bad rumours.

There's no one else around!

For the very rural placements, you might be one of few, or even the only ALT in town. There may be practically no English speakers living nearby. What to do?

Use it to really focus and improve your Japanese. I specifically requested a rural placement just for this reason. Having studied Japanese in university, I knew that getting the full immersion experience would be a sink or swim moment for me, but studies show there really is no better way to learn a language. Being forced to use only Japanese when around town, and not being about to fall back on English, really made me improve my Japanese in a hurry. A lot can be conveyed with just individual words and gestures, so use that as your jumping-off point.

After a while, you'll find yourself communicating. Some ALTs feel cut off due to the language barrier, but I promise a little effort will go a long way.



Beautiful Autumn Views of Mishima Town (Population ~1,724)

*take a journey
and know my haiku
autumn wind* -Basho

Danielle's Tips for a Great Time Living in the Inaka!



1. Try setting a language goal and sticking to it every day.

It can be as simple as watching a half-hour morning TV programme as you get ready for work, to fifteen minutes' dedicated flashcard study, or even read three street signs on your way home from work. Find something that works for you!

2. Join a local club.

Even if your town is small, guaranteed there are special interest clubs around. If you play a sport, ask if there's an amateur team that practices nearby. If you want to learn more Japanese culture, join a martial arts club, a dance group, or a craft club such as ikebana flower arranging or tea ceremony. I was lucky enough to be invited to join a taiko drumming group in the next town over, so even look beyond your own town. Pick something and commit a bit of time every week. It's an easy way to learn Japanese language, culture, and to make friends in the local community. A shared passion can cross language barriers!

3. Learn about local events.

If you don't get them delivered to your mailbox already, keep an eye out for the local newsletters and flyers for event information. There probably won't be an English version, but many festival and event flyers will be designed with photos so you can get an idea of what kind of activity it is. Try to go to as many local events as possible. It's a great way to get involved in the local community by supporting their activities!

Good luck, and congratulations on a fabulous placement!



When Living in the Suburbs...

Make Sure You Locate...

- Your nearest supermarket and/or convenience store
- A post office
- Your bank
- A pharmacy
- The train station

Things to Look For...

- Restaurants
- Clothing shops
- Souvenir shops
- Parks
- Gym/swimming pool/athletic facilities

Life in the Suburbs

Abby Rosen / Fukushima ALT

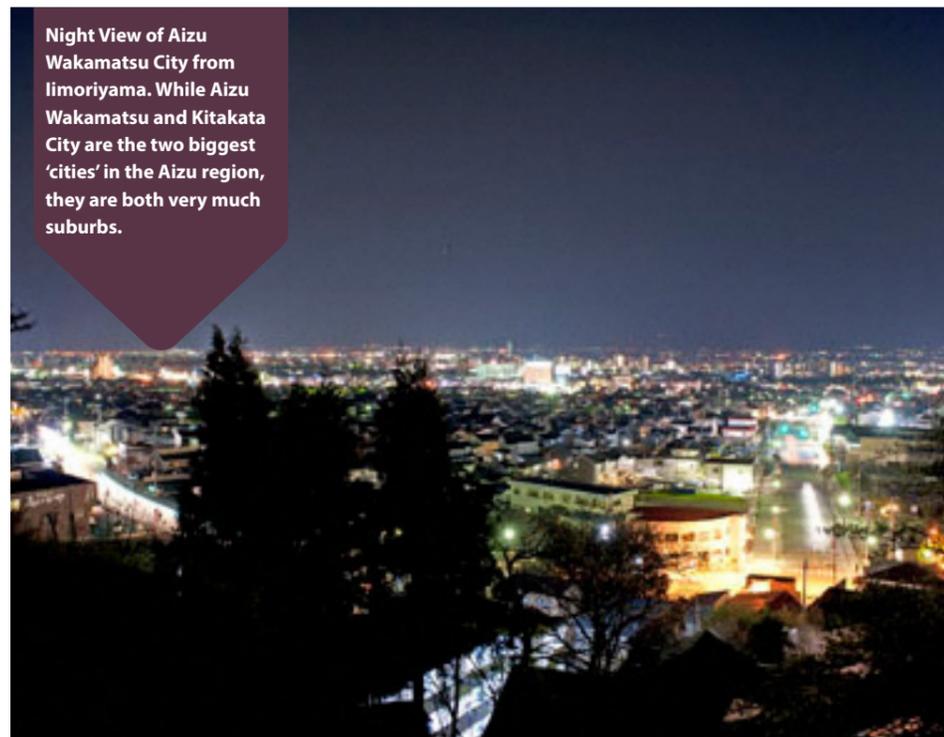
Welcome to suburban Fukushima! Living in a suburb affords you the best of both worlds: you get the convenience of living in a city without the hustle and bustle of some of the bigger, more populated areas. Living in a suburb means most of the things you'll need in your day-to-day life will be pretty easy to access, and the big cities will be only a train ride away for all of your metropolitan needs. Most of the suburbs in Fukushima are technically cities, albeit small ones, so it won't be difficult to find things like supermarkets, banks, post offices, and other daily necessities. There will also be at least one train station, making transportation to and from your apartment relatively easy.

Many of Fukushima's suburbs are actually small cities, which means that they have many of the conveniences that most cities have, from necessities, like supermarkets, pharmacies, and banks, to amenities, like restaurants and small shops. Depending on your location, entertainment opportunities in your area may be somewhat limited to restaurants, bars, and karaoke, but you'll be able to access more options in some of the larger cities without too much difficulty. Additionally, if you

like exploring, you never know what you'll find in your community just by picking a street and wandering down it. You might find a small produce stand owned and run by someone in your town or a souvenir store with items made in your area. It's also a great way to meet the people who live near you!

Transportation specifics will depend on what part of the prefecture you live in, but living in a suburb means a car most likely won't be necessary. However, many JETs in Fukushima (including suburban JETs) choose to have a car anyways, since the trains don't run as frequently here as they do in some of the larger cities (depending on where you live, they tend to run about once an hour, on average.) Of course, whether or not a car makes sense for you is going to depend on where you live, as well as how often you plan on traveling outside of your area and where you plan on going, so the best course of action would be to ask your predecessor what they recommend and, if in doubt, get an International Driver's License just in case. Many people in Japan ride bikes as one of their main forms of transportation, so if you don't want to drive, a bike will be sufficient to get you around your area.

Night View of Aizu Wakamatsu City from Iimoriyama. While Aizu Wakamatsu and Kitakata City are the two biggest 'cities' in the Aizu region, they are both very much suburbs.



Life in the City

Josh Tweedy / Former FuJET President

Congratulations! You have been placed in a city! That's a great thing, right? Places to shop galore, and getting around will be a piece of cake! Certainly that is true, but there are some drawbacks about living in a large city too. Ones that may not seem obvious at first....

First, let's look at the best points about living in a large city, such as Koriyama, Fukushima or Iwaki.

PROS Shops:

One of the main positives of a big city is the large amount of shops everywhere! Compared to the countryside, cities have everything you could ever need – supermarkets, banks, dry cleaners, clothes stores, and all the rest. Also, finding imported foods is a lot easier in the city. Stores called *YaMaYa* or *Jupiter* usually have a wide selection of all the foods you miss!

"But surely this is the same in cities all over the Fukuhima!" you might say. Certainly, but Fukushima, being the third largest prefecture in size, tends to have more countryside villages and suburban towns spread across it than large cities. Even 'cities' such as Aizu Wakamatsu and Motomiya aren't really cities. Even though they have high populations, they are incredibly spread out and much more suburban in nature and amenities. Fukushima really only has two or three truly urban cities, while the other cities in the prefecture only get to enjoy the title and not the actual perks. Getting everything you need easily or "just down the road" is not something every FuJET is lucky enough to enjoy!

Entertainment:

Bored on a Friday night? Large cities have a myriad options for you to entertain yourself! Cities have jamming nightlife – pubs, gastropubs/izakayas (居酒屋), game centres, Round 1 (a huge sports park/arcade), and so on. It is easy to go out and explore the nightlife, meet new people and have a great time.

Drinking not your thing? How about movies? Fukushima, Koriyama and Iwaki all have movie theatres for you to watch the newest movies with subtitles...3-6 months after their Western releases!

For example, this year's blockbuster 'Deadpool'!
US Theatrical Release: February 12, 2016
US Home Release: May 10, 2016
Japan? June 1, 2016...

But aside from that, there are so many things to do in a large city, you will never be bored!

Transport:

Getting around via public transport is very easy. Trains and buses depart frequently all around the city, and taxis run throughout the night. Going from one city to the next is very easy with the highway buses or the bullet trains. Using a bike is a convenient way to get around as well, seeing as all the stores/shops are close by!

CONS

There are some downsides to living in a large city. Some are pretty obvious – traffic, noise, pollution etc. Others are more subtle.

Foreigners:

In large cities, there are a large amount of foreigners. Usually, foreigners on the JET Programme will be placed together for housing. While this can be an amazing thing, having friends nearby to keep you company and reduce culture shock, it can also be a double-edged sword. You may not feel the need to venture out of your city, to explore or meet new friends, as you have formed a clique. While this in no way is a bad thing, it can stop you from experiencing the many varied experiences Japan has to offer! Further, it can be more difficult learning Japanese. This may be because you can simply surround yourself with your English speaking colleagues, but also more people in large cities will speak English, meaning you can get by with minimal Japanese.

This is something to be aware of – don't fall into the black hole of the city – there is a life and friends outside of it! Take part in festivals outside of your city, invite others to your city for your local events, attend FuJET events and events hosted by your local international association-- just make sure to get out and connect with the rest of the prefecture and Japan!

Cars:

Since public transport options are so vast, you may not want, or need, your own car. However, if you do want your own car, you may run into some obstacles. There may be several reasons why. For example, your contracting organization may not let you/want you to drive. If they do agree, they may not let you drive it to work. Furthermore, you are legally required to have a parking space if you own a car, and since these are costly and fairly uncommon, you may have trouble finding a place to park! Also, just getting the paperwork done to prove you have a parking space is costly and time consuming! You may end up having to pay a lot of money just to park your car!

PRO/CON

If you like getting attention or feeling like a rock star in your town - you won't typically receive that treatment in a big city. You may just be another face in the crowd. People won't stare as much as they might in rural area. Your students and teachers won't be as amazed by seeing you or bumping into you on the street. Whether this is a good thing, or not...I will let you decide!

So, living in a big city has many good points – easier to shop, get around and finding other foreign teachers will be easier. It will also be easier to have a more active social life. On the other hand, you may find that you get sucked into the black holes that cities can be – everything's around you, so you don't need to venture forth! You don't need Japanese as you are surrounded by foreign friends...

Whether or not this is how you want to experience Japan is, of course, up to you. But there is so much to see and do all over Japan – get out of your city and go see it!



Food Safety in Fukushima

To prevent the distribution of food containing radioactive substances exceeding the Japanese standards, there is a strict inspection system in place to assure maximum safety.

The Japanese standards on radioactive substances in food is much stricter than most other places in the world. Japan's permissible levels for radioactive cesium (caesium) for general food is 100 Bq/kg. The US permissible level is 1,200 Bq/kg, and the EU permissible level is 1,250 Bq/kg.

Since the 2015-2016 fiscal year, not a single sample tested exceeded the high Japanese standards for radioactive substances.

Not only is food from Fukushima delicious, but it is rigorously tested and held to exceptionally high levels of safety.

Radiation Concerns

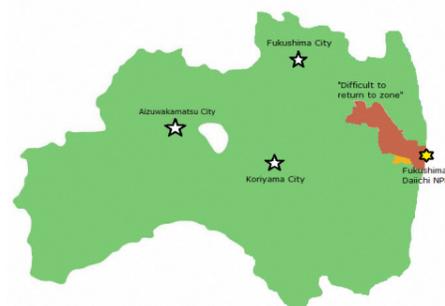
Cormac Ryan / Former FuJET President

There is a lot of information out there – both good and bad – about the current situation in Fukushima and it can be very difficult to make sense of it all or know what to believe. We hope the information contained here will help put your fears to rest.

Fukushima

First off, let's take a look at the wonderful place that is Fukushima prefecture. Home to almost 2 million people and roughly in the shape of Australia, Fukushima is the third largest prefecture in Japan and boasts scenic nature, bountiful agriculture and a friendly local populace. Major urban centres include Fukushima city in the north, Koriyama city in the centre and Aizuwakamatsu city in the west. Many other smaller cities and towns are scattered throughout the prefecture.

On the eastern edge of Fukushima prefecture, directly on the Pacific coast lies the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Infamous for being the location of the 2011 nuclear disaster following the Great East Japan Earthquake, the plant is provides employment for thousands of workers who are involved in containment and decommissioning activities (see TEPCO website for details).



Solar radiation monitors are located in every school yard and public park in the prefecture.

Extending north-west from Daiichi is a thin sliver of land known as the "difficult to return zone". In this area, radiation levels are higher than what is considered safe for long-term exposure. As a result, former residents are not permitted to return to their homes, access is severely restricted and decontamination efforts are ongoing. This is the "Fukushima Ghost Town" area you will mostly read about online. However, most of the area is clean and safe. Residents are gradually returning back home and many people go about their daily business.

The Environment

While a large area was affected by fallout after the 2011 nuclear disaster, in typical Japanese style an extensive clean-up operation was launched to collect the offensive material and decontaminate the prefecture. As a result, radiation levels in the majority of Fukushima are now the same or lower than the rest of the world [1]. This can clearly be seen all over the prefecture where solar powered radiation detectors have been installed in schools, parks and other public areas to inform people of the hourly radiation dose in the area. Additionally, continued monitoring is ongoing by the government, experts and public interest groups to ensure the safety of Fukushima's citizens. It is now a well-known fact (within the prefecture at least) that Fukushima is a perfectly safe place for people to live and work.

Radiation

Radiation comes from many different places: from space, from rocks in the ground, it is in the air and even naturally occurs in food. No matter where you are in the world or what you do, every year you will get 2-4 mSv (milli-Sieverts) of radiation in a year – and this is ok! The International Atomic Energy Agency says that on top of this, normal people should get an additional 1 mSv – and this is still ok! This number will be higher if you travel a lot by plane, and will be much higher if you have to get medical X-rays or CT scans, but it still won't be dangerous.

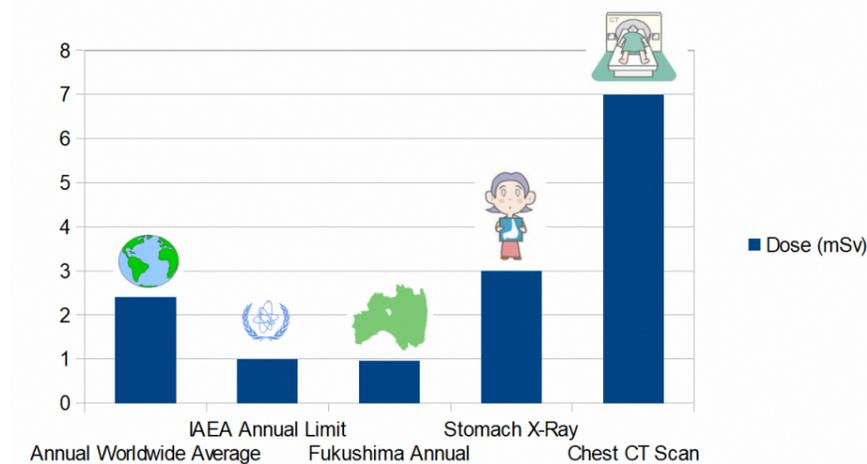
Tens of thousands of Fukushima citizens have been measuring their radiation exposure since the accident in 2011 and it has been found that the average annual radiation dose in Fukushima is just below 1 mSv [1]. This means that living in Fukushima will give you no more radiation than anywhere else in the world. The levels you will be exposed to fall within the limits set by international expert bodies and pose no risk to your health and safety. While newspapers and the internet love to kick-up a fuss about the dangers of Fukushima and the imminent threat it poses

to the Earth, it simply isn't true. The unfortunate events of 3.11 still do continue to have an impact on some people's lives, but for the majority of Fukushima prefecture its business as usual. Most importantly, there have been no deaths or cases of radiation sickness from the nuclear accident, and according to the World Health Organisation "the health risks directly related to radiation exposure are low in Japan and extremely low in neighbouring countries and the rest of the world."

Of course this article is by no means a definitive guide to the current situation in Fukushima and I encourage you to maintain some skepticism! If you seek some more reliable information, then consider following up on these links:

- Japanese Ministry of the Environment: <http://josen.env.go.jp/en/>
- Japan Atomic Energy Agency: <https://emdb.jaea.go.jp/emdb/en/>
- Fukushima Revitalisation Station: <http://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal-english/>
- Interactive Food Safety Map: http://www.foodradiation.org/map/index_e.html
- Real-time Worldwide Radiation Monitoring: <http://realtime.safecast.org/map/>

- Sources:**
- [1] N Adachi et al 2016 J. Radiol. Prot. 36 49
 - [2] "Radioactive Substances in Food" issued by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare





Peer Support: Before and After Arrival

There is a two-tiered peer support system in Fukushima Prefecture.

The first is the **Prefectural Advisor (PA)** support system. Fukushima prefecture has four PAs: two Japanese staff members of the International Affairs Division, and two JETs. All prefectures in Japan have PAs who receive basic training in counseling and commonly occurring problems for JET participants. Anything said to PAs will be kept strictly confidential.

The second level of support in Fukushima Prefecture is the **Area Support Leader (ASL)** system. As Fukushima is a large prefecture, most JET participants live far from the prefectural capital, Fukushima City, where the PAs are located. The ASL support system performs an important function, in that it gives all JETs someone close by to call for advice and support. The prefecture is divided into 7 areas, each with its own Area Support Leader. Like the PAs, they must keep all personal information confidential, but may ask for permission to involve the PA in more serious situations. Unlike the PA, however, they receive no official training on counseling issues. They are there to be a listening ear for any issues that may arise.

Detailed information about your current PAs and ASLs are listed on the prefectural website.

Yokoso! Tokyo Orientation & What to Expect JAPAN

**This is an explanation of the Tokyo Orientation before the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Sunday - Arrival

When you arrive at Narita Airport and head through customs, you will be met by travel agents who are there to welcome you to Japan. They will direct you outside to your bus. Here, you will send off the majority of your luggage to your placement (please see the General Information Handbook regarding split luggage) before being taken to Keio Plaza Hotel for Tokyo Orientation. Remember, it won't just be travel agents welcoming you, but Japan's sweltering summer heat as well. Don't worry about not looking your best right now. Everyone is in the same position, and probably looking a bit the worse for wear after a long flight; whatever you do, don't be the guy/girl who wears a suit on the plane. You don't start work until Monday, so wear comfortable clothes on the way!

Arriving at the Keio Plaza, you will be herded off the bus in the same way you were herded on, and swiftly taken through the check-in process. Here you will be given handouts, books, and flyers containing pertinent information for Orientation and your first few weeks on the job. Take the rest of this day as an opportunity to relax, get your bearings, and get over some "JET" lag if you have come laterally rather than over the equator like the Australian and New Zealand JETs, since the next few days and weeks are going to be very busy for you. You are right in the center of Shinjuku, which is a pretty cool place. Make the most of this free time to get a feel for Tokyo and grab some lunch or dinner in one of the many restaurants nearby. Make sure you get back to the room and rest up at a decent enough time, though; your year in the JET Programme starts tomorrow!

Sunday Tips and Tricks

- Grab a drink from a vending machine at the airport before getting on the bus. It's a long ride and you will most likely be hot, sweaty, and tired.
- Try to bring the least amount of luggage possible to Tokyo Orientation. You won't want to be carrying multiple bags around while traveling to your new home on Wednesday.
- Don't attempt to read all of the material given to you at check-in at once. Read it over the course of your first few days and keep it handy in your first few weeks to refer back to if necessary.
- If you're not feeling awake enough to venture out of the hotel for lunch/dinner, there is a small convenience store on the bottom floor of the hotel.
- If you are feeling adventurous, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building has a great view of Tokyo from the top floors. It's free to go up to the top and it's near the Keio Plaza Hotel.

**Important reminder:
Throughout Tokyo
Orientation, please
keep your passport, JET
number, and Japanese
work and home
addresses on you at all
times.**

Monday - Orientation Day 1

Both the orientation and your contract begin on Monday morning. Registration is taken at each session, so DO NOT think about skipping this first morning. In fact, you really shouldn't skip any of Tokyo Orientation! You are officially employed, after all, and it is expected that you will act professionally.

The morning is spent listening to various official presentations, something you will get used to in Japan. If anything is in Japanese, or if things are repeated, do your best to maintain an air of professionalism. In the afternoon, you will attend the workshops that appeal most to you. These will give you practical advice on living in Japan, suggestions for work, and lifestyle tips. On Monday night, FuJET will hold a prefectural welcome night out for all Fukushima JETs. This is a great opportunity to get to know each other, relax, and have some fun! It's certainly one of the highlights of Tokyo Orientation. This may be when you meet your closest Fukushima friends, so don't miss out! We will head out to a local izakaya (Japanese pub) for dinner and drinks, and then a smaller group usually continues on to the second party for more fun.

Monday Tips and Tricks

- Make sure you eat breakfast before the presentations start. It's a long day of presentations and you'll need energy. They will serve breakfast in the hotel, or there's the convenience store on the bottom floor for something quick and portable.
- Bring a pen or pencil and a notebook or paper with you to the sessions. Most of the necessary information will be in handouts, but there might be some relevant tips that didn't make it in. Also, the workshops will often require some writing, so it's good to have one on hand!
- Don't overdo it at the FuJET welcome party. Tuesday is an early morning and you may still be getting over jetlag. Don't be afraid to skip karaoke for a few extra hours of sleep.

Tuesday - Orientation Day 2

This will consist of more workshops and a prefectural meeting to attend. DO NOT miss the prefectural meeting, as it will give you important information about your journey to, and arrival in, Fukushima. There may also be a presentation about the Peer Support System.

On Tuesday night, most embassies will have a welcome party for their new arrivals (some may be held on Monday as well, but this is unusual.) Unfortunately, the U.S. embassy does not have an embassy night, as there are way too many U.S. JETs to fit into one room.

Tuesday Tips and Tricks

- There will probably be a brief (5-10 minutes) Japanese proficiency test during the prefectural meeting to determine levels for Fukushima orientation in August. Don't worry about studying forgotten kanji or grammar patterns, it will be pretty informal and will only be used to get an idea of the abilities of each person.
- During the prefectural meeting, you will get information about luggage transportation to Fukushima. You will most likely be taking a bus and they will probably ask you to bring your larger luggage down to a storage area on Tuesday night so they can start loading the bus early on Wednesday. Make sure you take out your business clothes before taking your bag down and make sure you have a place to store the last-minute things you'll need Tuesday night/Wednesday morning.
- If you don't have an embassy night on Tuesday, use that time to catch up on sleep and prepare for your trip to your new home on Wednesday morning.



Wednesday - Meeting Your CO

Bright and early, you will meet at a pre-designated point in the hotel to travel to Fukushima prefecture. Make sure you wear business clothes for this trip (even if it's really hot outside), as you'll be meeting your supervisor and maybe your principal today, and you want to make a good first impression!

Wednesday Tips and Tricks

- Allow plenty of time to get to the meeting place on Wednesday morning. Many different prefectural groups leave around the same time, so the meeting areas can get pretty crowded.
- Prepare a basic self-introduction in Japanese for when you meet your supervisor (see the Basic Phrases and Vocabulary section if you need some pointers.) Even if they speak English, they will be impressed and pleased that you have made the effort to talk to them in Japanese, and a good first impression can never hurt.
- Before you say goodbye to your supervisor for the day, make sure you know where you are supposed to go on Thursday (and how to get there), where the nearest supermarket or convenience store is so you can get something for dinner/breakfast, and whether you need to bring anything with you to work the next day.

Once you land in Tokyo, there will be people to help you along every step of the way. If you have any questions, no matter how silly they may seem, don't hesitate to talk to someone. If you are feeling stressed or homesick, seek someone out! There are plenty of people who want to help you and make your first few days in Japan as enjoyable as possible!



Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

There are many special interest groups (SIGs) available to JETs in Japan.

These can revolve around anything from nationality to lifestyle to hobbies and travel. Many countries have their own groups dedicated to nationals living in Japan, so look up what's available for you! Most group activities are centered on the group's Facebook page, but many have meet ups and trips together. They're also a great way for you to learn more about a new hobby or topic that you might not have been exposed to before. However, please always remember to be respectful of differing opinions and keep an open ear, for these groups are a great way to understand the many different ALTs and CIRs that call Japan home.

In the meantime, here are a couple of the bigger organizations (by no means an exhaustive list!) you might find useful.

Special Interest Groups Connect, Share, and Learn

Day to Day Life

AJET Block 2: Yamagata, Miyagi, Niigata Fukushima is a group for information and events taking part in the AJET Block 2 region.

Stonewall Japan is a group that has provided a support network and safe zone for the LGBTQ community in Japan, both foreign and Japanese, for over twenty years. They maintain an active presence online as well as offline, and their website and wiki are full of useful articles on a variety of topics related to LGBTQ life in Japan. Be sure to also check out their local chapter page **Stonewall Hokkaido&Tohoku**.

VegJET aims to help you find ways to make living in Japan as a vegetarian or vegan easier. Look them up to find useful resources, recipe ideas, events, helpful advice, restaurant recommendations and more!

Gluten-Free Expats Japan is a group for information and support to help make a gluten free diet easier in Japan. A great source for recipes, advice and resources.

JET Programme Couples and Families is for JETs coming with partners or children to Japan. You can also check out the Facebook group to ask questions or discuss situations that might not apply to single JETs.

JET Christian Fellowship JCF exists to help Christian participants on the JET program connect with local churches and other Christians in Japan.

JET Ladies+ Wondering if other female JETs are having the same issues/experiences as you? Need another woman to bounce an idea/ issue off? From finding the right products, our bodies attempting to adjust to the new environment, to women's roles in Japanese culture, and perhaps, dating... the topics are endless. The Facebook group is a place to discuss and debate, share resources, tips and experiences for making life as a woman easier in Japan.

JTR: Japan Teaching Resources is a group for advice, sharing lesson ideas, brainstorming, and discussing all things teaching-related in Japan.



Recreation

JETfood is a group all about what we feed our JETs! Feel free to use this group as a means to:

- Trade recipes
- Give reviews of restaurants
- Discuss food history and information
- Share photos of your own JETfood!

JET Artists is a group for participants of the JET Programme who find themselves artistically inclined. Hobbyists, professionals, and beginners are all welcome! Whether you're into watercolor, sewing, digital creations, or woodworking, feel free to join and share your work - related to Japan or not.

Fukushima Snowboarders and Skiers! is a ragtag misfit collective of snowboarders and skiers living in or around the Northern Tohoku region, mostly Fukushima. If you want to try out a mountain, coordinate something, or ask questions about the sport or available equipment in Japan, join us! We're cool beans! The coolest beans!

Gamers in Fukushima and **JET Gaming Enjoy!** are similar groups for gamers of all sorts. From video games to dice rolling to cards and board games, these two groups have you covered. Use them to:

- Swap gamer tags
- Swap strategies, help each other out
- Swap games when finished, like the world's greatest lending library
- Arrange times to play together
- Praise/speculate/rant about games

JET-setters is a group for those of us that the travel bug has bitten. Share great travel deals, trip ideas, tips, and experiences. For travelling both in and out of Japan! If there is somewhere you want to visit, chances are there is a person in the group who has been there and can share their insight th you!

JET - FEST (Festivals, Events, Sights & Traditions) Since JETs span all of Japan, through cities, towns and villages, this group is a great place to share all the Festivals, Events, Sights & Traditions (FEST) that can be seen or participated in near your area. A great way to find out about smaller events.

Community

¡Hola! JETs! ¡Hola! This Special Interest Group for JETs of Latin and Hispanic descent is open to all and focuses on topics related to JETs of Hispanic/Latino descent, and hopes to create a community in which one can find peer support, find useful resources, as well as to spread cultural understanding and knowledge within Japan. Open to anyone who is interested and wishes to experience the Hispanic/Latino culture through social events, discussions, activities, etc.

Asian Pacific Islander AJET (API AJET) The mission of the Asian Pacific Islander Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (API AJET) is to provide peer support for the Asian Pacific Islander (API) community in Japan, as well as to raise local and global awareness about the diverse range of issues that face this community. Open to any and all who wish to share experiences and/or promote cross-cultural understanding through discussions, events, activities, etc.

JETs of African Descent (JETs AD) JETs AD is a group is open to all and focuses on topics related to JETs African Descent. A platform for discussion, support, and announcements relating to the JET community at-large. We aim to provide useful information and share resources on hard-to-find hair and beauty products, foreign foods, events, ways to stay connected, and other topics relevant to our demographic. We also plan nationwide and region-specific events. Join this group to stay up-to-date on all the happenings in the JETs AD community.



Nunobiki Highlands Wind Farm



Packing for Japan

At this stage, you're probably wondering how to pack enough for a year (or more!) in beautiful Fukushima. Hopefully these insider tips will help you efficiently pack your bags!

To start, make sure to check your baggage allowance with your respective airline. You can pay to bring excess luggage with you, but check first to see if it's cheaper to send things ahead by mail. It will probably be best to send your winter clothes, books, and other assorted items to your BOE or house beforehand. You can always send them later, too. Check with your supervisor or predecessor to see if it is feasible. It can take around two months for sea mail to arrive, so plan ahead. There are many transport companies with different rates so shop around instead of heading directly to your local post office when shipping out your packages. Check with your successor or take a gander at the Facebook group 'Fukushima ALTs' to crowdsource recommendations.

Here are some guidelines on things you should think about bringing or leaving behind.

What to Leave

Camping, exercise, or ski/snowboarding equipment: you can buy them here or ship them if you can't. Excessive amounts of random souvenirs. Too many books or Japanese study materials: you can buy them online or swap with your fellow FuJETs. Dishes and cutlery: most things like this will be left behind by your predecessor, or can be bought at the 100 yen store. Any omyage that will melt in your bag!

What to Bring to Fukushima

Clothing

You'll want to pack clothing appropriate to the climate. Upon arrival, Tokyo and Fukushima are steeped in sticky temperatures: 35-40°C/90-100°F. It is also the rainy season, so a light jacket might be helpful. Actual rain gear can be easily bought here. Don't pack an umbrella; they're super cheap and can be purchased almost anywhere! Bring cool, lightweight clothing for the summer. Undershirts or camisoles help wick away sweat. Polos, tees, and shorts are great for your own time. And don't forget to bring a swimsuit! We have some picturesque rivers, lakes and beaches here in Fukushima, as well as Spa Resort Hawaiians in Iwaki, which has waterslides and swimming pools, and the FuJET Canyoning trip to Gunma in September.

Winters are very cold, both indoors and outdoors, in Fukushima. While Nakadori and Hamadori have more mild winters than Aizu, schools and homes are mostly heated with kerosene heaters. Most buildings lack insulation and central heating of any kind, so indoor and outdoor temperatures will be close to the same in a lot of cases. You can buy outerwear and boots here, but not always in larger sizes. Layers will help keep you warm, so bring your sweaters, etc. If you really hate the cold, bring some thermals, too! Also bring a couple of hats, scarves, and mittens as well. If your bags are close to the weight limit, consider sending your winter gear later on, as it won't get really cold until late October.

Work Attire

In the summer, you will be wearing "cool biz" attire, and your office most likely won't have air conditioning. It's OK to wear breathable clothing to beat the heat. For men, this can be defined as short sleeves without a tie or jacket, paired with slacks. A proper suit is required for Tokyo Orientation; luckily the Keio Plaza is completely air conditioned. For women, "cool biz" can range from light cardigans and cute blouses, to (sensible, below-the-knee) skirts and capri pants. Some Japanese teachers show up to school dressed to

the nines in a suit, but many of them change into their tracksuits throughout the day. The best thing to do is overdress on your first few days, and adjust your own work attire according to what your coworkers are wearing. Following your vice-principal is a good way to go if you're not sure. There will be a few other occasions when you will need to dress up, such as your first and last days at school, formal work parties, and school graduation ceremonies. Bring a couple of suits to look your best. On most work days "business casual" is acceptable. Cardigans and sweaters over work attire can help keep you warm in the winter. The most important piece of business clothing you can bring, for both men and women, is a simple black blazer or suit jacket.

Use common sense when packing and you'll be fine. Don't pack a lot of jeans, skirts that fall above the knee, sleeveless tops, or low necklines. For women, consider trying out the 'bow test'. If you bow (which you'll be doing a lot of) and your cleavage is visible, chances are this top isn't the most appropriate for work. Remember, you'll be at work five (or sometimes more) days a week. For days off, also remember that Japanese standards of modesty are somewhat more conservative than Western ones. It's a good idea to ask your predecessor if it's acceptable to wear jewelry, perfume, nail polish, or other accessories at school.

If you will be working at elementary schools, you might prefer wearing casual clothes. You'll be running and jumping around a lot. Sports attire, like tracksuits, will be your friend here. Again, if you're uncertain of what's best, you can follow what the other teachers are wearing.

One last word on clothing: remember that you are a public employee representing your country, the JET Programme, and foreigners overall. Try and always be mindful of how you present yourself in public, in both clothing and manner.

Laundry in Japan

Washing machines only use cold water, and tend to be hard on fabrics. To protect your delicates, you can buy net washing bags from the 100-yen store. Most ALTs find themselves hang-drying clothes throughout the year, since most of us don't have dryers. Most towns will have coin laundries with dryers, if you prefer. Japanese detergents also tend to be less powerful so adding a quarter cup of either white, rice, or apple vinegar to your wash boosts cleaning power. Don't worry, the smell washes away and you won't spend your day smelling of gherkins.

Buying Clothes in Japan

Sizes tend to be a smaller fit for both men and women. For women, clothing sizes will mostly go up to a US size 8, or a UK/AUS size 10-12. In general, larger sizes are tough to find. For tall women (5'7"/170cm and up), it might be a hassle to find pants. For men, pants generally go up to 38" waist and a decent length (for up to about 6'0"/183cm tall). Shirt sizes don't always come in bigger sizes. If you want Western-brand clothing and sizes (like Zara, H&M, The Gap), you'll have to go to the closest metropolitan cities like Tokyo, Sendai, or Niigata.

Shoes

It's a Japanese custom to take your shoes off when indoors. Bring shoes that can easily be slipped on and off. Women's sizes generally go up to around 24-25cm (US 7, UK 6, AU 8 or EU 38). Men's sizes go up to around 27cm, sometimes 28-29cm (US 10.5, UK 10, EUR 44). Bring dress shoes, sandals, outdoor sneakers, and flip-flops for the summer if you're concerned about not being able to find anything here. You will need indoor shoes for school. Trainers, Birkenstocks, dress shoes, and sneakers work as indoor shoes. When you take a look around the staff room, you'll notice that a fine suit might be paired with a pair of Pumas. Basically, the priority is comfort, and being able to quickly put them on or take them off. Keep a pair of indoor and outdoor shoes in your school locker, if you want to play sports with the kids. If you want to join a local gym (or even in your school's gym), you will need a separate pair of indoor-only sports shoes.

Unmentionables

Bring a stockpile of underwear, bras, and other underclothes (undershirts, socks, stockings). Bras in Japan are generally smaller and heavily padded. Men's and women's underwear both run a bit smaller as well. Finally, make sure your socks are presentable – no holes! You'll most likely be in your socks more often here than you were at home.

Toiletries

There are aisles upon aisles of skin care products, hair products, and body care products available here, including Western brands such as Biore, Dove, and Pantene. If you have some preferred products that you can't live without, bring them. Liquid and bar soap is widely available, but pay attention, as some bar soap contains skin-whitening agents. For women, you may want to bring your preferred brand of sanitary products. Western brands are not available in Japan, and choices are extremely limited. Popular Western cosmetics (like MAC, Clinique, Lancome, or Anna Sui) are available in bigger cities, although they mostly offer shades suited for Asian skin tones. If you colour your hair, Japanese boxed hair dye might not be suitable for your hair. However, many FuJETs have gone to larger cities to salons experienced with foreign hair to have their hair taken care of. Good antiperspirant (especially solids), toothpaste with fluoride, dental floss, and strong pain relief pills are difficult to get in Fukushima, so bring some with you. Mouthwash is available in abundance here. If you run out of your favourite toiletries, you can have more shipped later during the year or even find your favourite product readily available on Amazon.co.jp.

Medicine

Carefully read the JET Handbook for more information about pharmaceuticals and customs regulations; some non-prescription drugs are not allowed in Japan. You can bring painkillers, antihistamines, antacids, sunscreen, insect bite lotion, cold and flu tablets, and vitamins. Just be careful with what you pack. You are allowed to bring a one-month

supply of prescription drugs (this includes birth control pills). If you want to bring more than the allowable amount, you have to obtain a Yakkan Shomei certificate from your nearest Japanese Embassy or Consulate. Your other options are to bring a prescription from a doctor from back home and take it to a doctor in Japan, who can provide you with a prescription for the Japanese equivalent, or you can have someone from back home ship you a one-month supply each month. You are allowed to bring a two-month supply of non-prescription medication, as long as it is legal in Japan. There have been recent legal changes which now allows Amazon.co.jp to carry foreign non-prescription medicines. Such medicines include: Clariten RediTabs, Benadryl Allergy, Advil Migraine, feminine hygiene products, and more. You can browse a long list of overseas medicines and other products by searching for this term; 海外直送品 – kaigai choku souhin. Condoms can be bought here, and although they run smaller on average, larger sizes can be found in most pharmacies.

Documents

Bring your International Driver's Permit (IDP), coupled with your national driver's license, one or two credit cards for emergencies, immunization records from your doctor (this helps with future travel plans), records of your banking details, international banking number, bills and loans from back home, spare passport photos, and photocopies of your passport/driver's license.

Electricity

Electricity in Japan is 100 volts. There are two cycles: 50Hz and 60Hz. In Fukushima, it's 50Hz. If you need to bring any appliances from your country, bring a converter plug. Most handheld electronics (game systems/iPods/etc.), will have chargers that can handle this. If you're really worried, consult the manufacturer. Many chargers will also say what their voltage range is (100V-240V for example).



3 Rules for Omiyage

Omiyage help to grease the wheels, but can be expensive. Some FUJETS regularly buy omiyage for all of their schools and board of education whenever they travel, while other times they buy for only one. Whatever you decide, it's up to you.

- A good rule of thumb is: the longer you are away for/the more schools you are absent from, the more omiyage you should buy. If you use nenkyuu/leave during a non-break holiday, it is highly recommended that you get omiyage for the schools you missed work at.

- If you benefit from someone else giving you omiyage, be sure to return the favour!

- It's okay to give to specific teachers or buy some presents specifically for certain teachers. (If you do that, you should still buy something small for everyone else, and give said special gift in a more private setting.)

The Gift of Omiyage and Tips for Your Self Intro Lesson

Omiyage. This Japanese word is much broader in scope than our English 'souvenir', and something that is much more ingrained in Japanese culture. Whenever someone travels, whether for work or pleasure, omiyage is all but expected with their return. Typically, Japanese omiyage is individually wrapped food from the area the person visited. It is such an important part of Japanese culture that you will see shops wherever you travel with sections just dedicated to the brightly coloured boxes of individually wrapped snacks. When you arrive to your new home and workplace, bringing omiyage from your home will not only make a nice first impression, but it will also be a small way of saying 'thanks' for the help you're bound to receive over the next few weeks.

Individualised omiyage should be reserved for three or four people at most: your direct supervisor (who has most likely contacted you already, or will soon do so), the superintendent of your board of education (if you are assigned to a board of education), and possibly the mayor of your village/

town/city. Space is a commodity in most Japanese households, and the last thing people here generally need is more knick-knacks. If possible, it's best when your omiyage is either practically useful, or edible.

Think of things that are both useful and indicative of your hometown, country, or culture. A souvenir book of your town heavy on the pictures and light on the difficult English could be nice. Some interesting stationery bearing some emblem or image typical of your country could also work. Try to be neutral in your gifts. A bottle of alcohol, for example, may not be such a great gift if your boss dislikes drinking. Bringing food is not a bad idea, but you should exercise caution. If you intend to bring boxes of candies or bags of snacks for your school(s) and office(s), bring only those which are individually wrapped. They're much easier to distribute, and seem more hygienic, since there is no chance of them being touched by others. For the most part, the omiyage that can be bought in almost every city in Japan follows this rule.

Self Introduction Lessons-- What to Bring?

Be prepared to do a self introduction lesson. A lot. Chances are that your kids have seen one before so don't be afraid to break out of the mold. Since you'll probably be doing it quite a bit, you may want to take it into consideration when packing.

Do you have a unique hobby? Is there a culturally important outfit to your country or background? Think about packing it. ALTs have skateboarded into class, taught some beginner beat-boxing, worn country specific clothing (such as kilts), etc. All of this makes for an unmatched impression.

- **Hobby Related Goods.** Not only will these be good for your introduction lesson, you'll probably appreciate having it around for your own downtime and having a little piece of home.
- **Family photos.** Your kids will go nuts for these. The goofier, the better. Don't forget about the furry members of your family. Or your car, house, or home town.
- **Sport equipment.** This may be similar to hobby related goods but maybe not. Canadian-- why not bring a hockey puck? (Or a stick, if you have the room) From the commonwealth? Why not a rugby or cricket ball?

****Several airlines allow a separate checked bag of sporting goods in addition to your luggage so bringing sporting goods with you may allow you to get away with bringing even more luggage! I mean, who is really going to say something about a few extra pair of underpants in your cricket bag along with your pads?****

International Associations A Place to Connect to Community

Local international associations can be a great resource. Oftentimes, they hold cheap or free Japanese language classes, multicultural events, have English versions of tourist information available, and more. Check in with your local international association to find out about ongoing events in your area.

Koriyama International Exchange Association (KIEA)

A brief message from Joost, the KIEA CIR! Congratulations on being placed in Fukushima Prefecture! This is Joost, CIR at Koriyama City Hall, in the biggest and most bustling city, square in the middle of the prefecture! Koriyama City is home to the **Koriyama International Exchange Association (KIEA)**, which organizes a number of great activities, aimed at foreign as well as Japanese residents interested in international exchange.

One important activity is the organizing of various classes, among which is the Japanese course for foreign residents. Many JETs take this course every year to improve their Japanese abilities and meet other local foreign residents. There are also counselling sessions available for foreign residents in English. Furthermore, KIEA offers a number of activities for foreign- and Japanese residents to get to know each other, such as bus tours to neighboring cities and regions with Japanese cultural activities, cooking classes, and intercultural exchange events.

So make the most of your JET experience and get to know the locals, improve your Japanese language skills and participate in everything KIEA has to offer! Feel free to drop by at the International Exchange Salon (main building, 2nd floor), or the International Policy Division (main building, 5th floor) at Koriyama City Hall!

Website:

<https://www.facebook.com/KoriyamaIEA>

Aizu Wakamatsu International Association (AWIA)

The AWIA is conveniently located on one of Wakamatsu's main streets, Shinmeidori. On the fifth floor of the Tsutaya building, the AWIA has an English library available to members, along with a variety of other resources available to you.

Their services include, but are not limited to:

- monthly newsletters
- English sightseeing information
- Japanese Classes
- Consultation Support for Foreigners and Locals
- Translation and Interpretation Services
- Introduction to Professional Organisations
- Volunteer and Outreach Opportunities
- Ongoing and Seasonal Events, Tours of local sightseeing spots in English (reservations required).

Website: <http://awia.jp/index.html>

Fukushima International Association (FIA)

Founded in 1988, the FIA aims to provide assistance and cultural exchange among the residents of Fukushima and the International Community.

Their services include but are not limited to:

- Japanese Classes
- Monthly newsletters
- International Salon with foreign language books and DVDs
- International Exchange events and activities
- World Cafe Event
- Foreign Citizen Interviews
- Counselling services for foreign residents
- General information on life in Fukushima
- Disaster information

Website:

<http://www.worldvillage.org/life/en>

Iwaki International Association (IIA)

A brief message from Ben, the IIA CIR! Congratulations on getting placed in the "Sunshine City" of Iwaki! Whilst this city is quite convenient and easy to live in, it can sometimes feel a bit isolated and quite troublesome for those who can only speak limited Japanese. And whilst the locals might try their best with a Hello (or even an Aloha if you're lucky!), English speakers aren't as common here as you might expect living Tokyo.

That is why we have the Iwaki International Association (IIA) to basically help you out when you have no idea what's going on or need assistance and or counselling for daily life issues from English, Chinese or Korean speakers. They also organise various events throughout the year including international cooking classes, as well as Japanese and other language classes.

Whether you need to seek advice, take a Japanese course or just want to get involved in some fun events, come and visit the IIA at any time!

Website:

<http://www.ii-fukushima.or.jp/>



Don't be afraid to get your feet wet!

Make Your Role!

You have a big say in how classes work and what responsibilities you shoulder. While team-teaching isn't always possible at ES due to busy teachers and lack of collaborative planning time, it is worth it to try! One way to approach responsibilities would be to consider the strong points of both the HRT and the ALT.

The ALT is a native speaker of English whose sole job is teaching English and cultural exchange.

The HRT has a deep relationship with their students and familiarity with the Japanese school system.

Ideally, it follows that an ALT may take responsibility for lesson plans, lesson and unit outlines, games, materials, and cultural outreach. The HRT may feel most comfortable managing the classroom, disciplining students, encouraging participation, joining ALT demonstrations, and modelling student behavior by being eager and positive. While this is not always possible, it is good to discuss these roles if you can. Though time often does not permit it, a short exchange with the HRT each lesson can build up into a mutual understanding of roles over time, to everyone's benefit.

Teaching in Elementary School

Tana Espinoza / Fukushima ALT

THE BASICS

The School

Elementary school (ES) in Japan comprises grades 1 through 6 (ages 6 – 12). While junior high (JHS) and senior high (SHS) are primarily seen to be test-focused, ES is often observed to be more about experiential learning and community building. School size will determine how many classes (*kumi*) there are per grade (*nen*), but your class size will be capped at 33 (30 for 1st and 2nd). The teachers in ES are called Home Room Teachers (HRT) and teach all basic subjects. HRTs usually have the same class for 2 to 6 years at a time. There will also be an *Eigo Tantou* – a teacher in charge of English classes (not necessarily your HRT, and not necessarily someone adept at English).

As an ES ALT

Where do you fit in all of this? Like a JHS or SHS ALT, you are a source of native English and an agent of cultural exchange in the classroom. You may or may not have a Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) who specializes in English to lead the class. When working with an HRT, the ALT themselves may be in charge of the classroom during English, and team-teaching is essentially a mirror-image of that shown at Tokyo Orientation: you are the main teacher, and the HRT is the assistant and support. It may seem like a daunting task to those who have never made a lesson plan or taught in a classroom. Experience is the best teacher, but here are some tips to keep in mind as you start at your new schools.

English in ES is called Foreign Language Activities (*Gaikokugo Katsudou*). At this level the experiential and communicative aspects of the language are the focus, as **the primary purpose is to instill an interest in English and a desire to use it to communicate with others around the world.** Therefore English activities in ES make use of **games, songs, and speaking activities**, with little stress on writing, reading, and grammar. The subject is not graded. As of 2019, grades 5 and 6 have a textbook called *We Can!* while grades 3 and 4 use *Let's Try!* which is produced by the Ministry of Education. Younger grades have no textbook, and may or may not have a curriculum to follow.

Know Your Tools

Your schools may let you use various tools for school materials. Here are some useful ones:

- Printer (いんさつき)
- Laminator (ラミネーター)
- Copier (コピーキ)
- Risograph (リソグラフ) *can print a classroom's worth of worksheets very quickly*
- Poster Printer (かくだいき) *copies a page to poster size*
- Paper Trimmer (さいだんき)
- Paper Cutter (せつだんき) *cuts a thick stack of paper in one go*

You can save documents and images on a USB to use at your schools. Not all school computers can take a USB, so ask your HRT, vice principal, or office teacher about computer usage rules. You may also use digital materials from the textbook (Hi, Friends!) DVD, or CDs from your own collection/the school's English collection. Many schools have an English supplies area. Familiarize yourself with it so you can take full advantage! Also ask them about the English budget –there may be one that you can use for materials or stickers/stamps for student prizes.

Make Your Lesson

Consider writing a lesson plan which includes the aim, time allotment, unit outline (lesson X/4), materials, and a post-class reflection on your lesson. It is also helpful to write your and the HRTs role for each activity/game. This is a good way to convey to HRTs what kind of support you need. Keep these lesson plans in a folder for future reference. When lesson planning, ask yourself:

<p>What is the aim? Students must feel like there is a point</p>	<p>How many and what level? Are your activities practical with this number of students? Are they a good challenge, or confidence-busting?</p>	<p>What kind of students? Ask the HRT: Do you have any students with physical impairments or emotional issues? Are there students that will be sensitive to the content?</p>	<p>Do you have a good mix of quiet and energetic activities? Without variation, students lose interest</p>
<p>Do you have the materials you'll need? Do you have to ask the HRT for anything (TV, computer, CD player) ahead of time?</p>	<p>What roles do the HRT and ALT play? If the HRT is engaged, students are more likely to be as well</p>	<p>Is there enough practice? Kids need some structured practice – grade their lesson and support them</p>	<p>Is there a chance for creative usage? Are students just repeating? Or is there some time for free expression?</p>

Remember, your goal is to get them interested in communicating – that means keeping them engaged! Asking these questions, and changing your plan as necessary, can help you avoid a potentially difficult lesson.

Extra Hints

CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

Your textbook isn't the be-all-end-all! Feel free to work outside of the textbook and integrate other activities. Don't be afraid to break from the curriculum with crafts, your childhood games, and other activities for cultural exchange. Make your own picture cards. Encourage the kids to talk to each other, help each other, and puzzle out answers. Community learning is student-centered learning!



Useful Links and Resources

For Images (for your posters, karuta cards, worksheets, etc.)

- Fumira: <http://www.fumira.jp/cut/>
- Irasuto-ya: <http://www.irasutoya.com>
- Wikipedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

CHOOSING GAMES

Not all games are equal. Think about the focus of the game. Are they producing the language? Are they responding to it? Can they interact creatively and produce something on their own, or is the game more rigid and repetitive? Students need a variety of activities to stay engaged. Make sure you have a good balance of listening/speaking, quiet/active, individual/group, repeat/produce games. This ensures that all of your students can enjoy your lesson.

OUTSIDE CLASS

Start a letter box to learn more about your students, and use their interests in your lessons. Put on a hat and get out on that playground during recess. Start a bulletin board and teach students about your home country, or start an English contest there to engage any grades you don't teach. Ask your school about eating lunch with the students, if you don't already.

Having Trouble?

Teaching kids is hard. Sometimes they act up. Sometimes they don't seem to be interested in your lessons. At these times, it's best to discuss your problems with someone. Try the HRT, other teachers at the school, and fellow ALTs. Sometimes, it's them - student issues make it difficult for you to get through to them. Sometimes it's you - you'll find a flaw in your approach. Keep an open mind and stay communicative. Do your best not to let the frustration show during the class, and do not lose your temper. Speaking earnestly to a student is more effective than yelling at them. Stay positive, smile, and communicate with your HRT about your students after lessons. While some roles may fall to either the ALT or HRT, class discipline is best left to the HRT.

English Note (predecessor to We Can!):

- <https://www.eigonoteblog.com>
- Internet TESL Journal:** <http://iteslj.org/games/>
- Kids' Games:** *childhood games that can be modified for your classroom* <http://www.gameskidsplay.net>
- Pinterest:** *ideas for crafts, games, bulletin boards, and English Room decorations* <https://www.pinterest.com>



Tips for Attending & Participating in Club Activities & Student Sport Events

If you are able to, participating with students in their club activities after school is an excellent experience. It will help you build relationships with your students and teachers, and will include you further in your school community. It also gives students the opportunities to show you their strengths and talents outside of the English classroom.

Additionally, showing up to weekend tournaments to cheer for you students will often make your students very happy. They spend a lot of their time working very hard in club practice, and it means a lot to them that you are there to support them.

If you hear about a student or a team winning an event or competition of any description, make a point to congratulate the students. They will *always* appreciate it.

Teaching Junior High School

Mimi Evans / Fukushima ALT

Teaching junior high school kids is a fantastic experience. You will have little moments every day where your students will surprise, delight, upset, disappoint, amaze, confuse, bemuse, and surpass you.

The 12-15 age range is a pretty amazing time, where students are growing and maturing at an incredible rate. The tiny round faced students you will meet as first years will almost feel like entirely different people by the time they graduate three years later. I know that you will come to adore your students (it's pretty hard not to) but for those of you feeling a bit intimidated and nervous about teaching teenagers for the first time, I've put together some tips.

Be patient. Some students just need time to piece information together. Some are shy. Don't jump in too quickly with the answer; instead repeat the question more clearly, or in a different way.

Don't compare students to each other. A student is always able to improve on their own past performances, but trying to beat someone else's performance is spirit-crushing.

Be clear and specific when giving instructions. Be sure to keep them simple, clear and easy to follow. Keep sentences limited to one idea or command at a time.

Give praise generously. Berating a student for poor behavior has no lasting benefits. Praise the student for doing things well, even if it was just for smiling today. It builds up the student's self-worth and encourages involvement in the classroom. Seriously, they're insecure teenagers going through puberty. Cut them some slack.

Encourage mistakes. Be positive and encouraging in the face of students' mistakes. Praise the attempt, before making a correction. Help students realise that making mistakes is just a part of the learning process. Give points for trying as well as points for being correct.

Down Time?
 -Make an English board
 -Study Japanese
 -Create new activities for upcoming units of the textbooks
 -Observe other teacher's classes (with their pre-expressed permission)



When you encounter difficult students (which you will) try to not take it personally. Students are rarely acting out for the sake of acting out. A student is less likely to be able to focus on learning or to behave well in class if they're hungry, anxious, feel unsafe, feel unwanted, have low self-worth, etc. Additionally, be aware of the impact of the Failure Cycle. The failure cycle works like this;

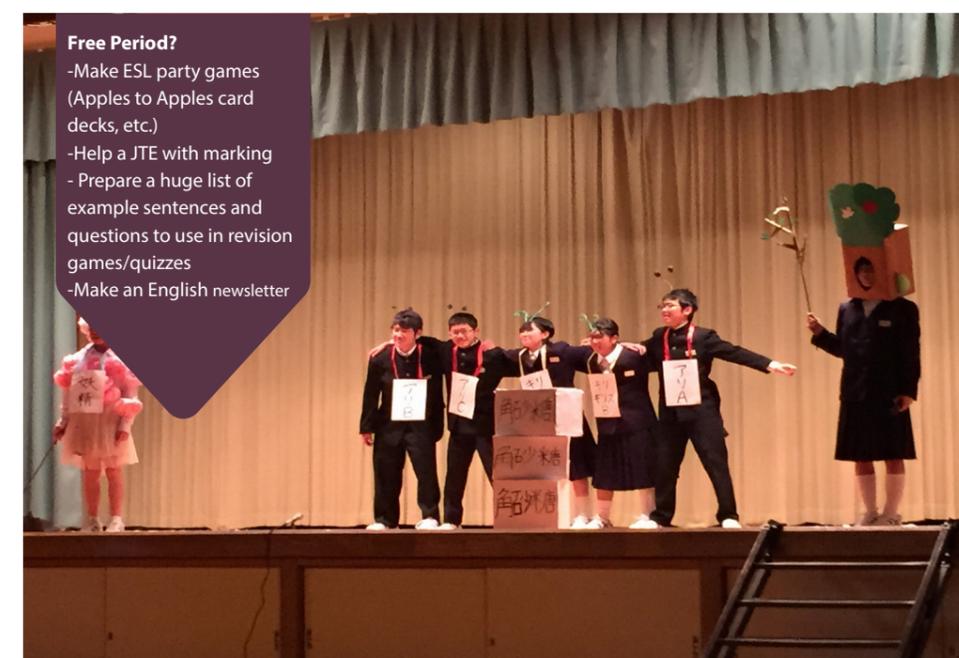
I don't like English -> so I'll avoid English if possible -> I miss out on practice so I don't improve -> my teacher and parents are always criticizing my English -> I had to speak English in class and everyone laughed -> I HATE English -> so I avoid English if possible etc.

The Failure Cycle has a huge impact on student behavior. Students often would rather have failed because they didn't try than to have tried their hardest and failed anyway. As an ALT, when working with reluctant students like these, just be encouraging, be supportive, smile, and praise effort over achievements. Focus on what students did well, not their mistakes.

Remember that teenagers are still learning to talk appropriately with adults, so please try to be patient and understanding. They may on occasion say rude or inappropriate things to you. Tell them that it was rude and put an end to that conversation, but do not hold a grudge or excessively punish their actions. Reject the behavior, not the student.

Tips for learning names: In the early days, it's totally okay to just ask the students to tell you their names. You can also request that

Free Period?
 -Make ESL party games (Apples to Apples card decks, etc.)
 -Help a JTE with marking
 -Prepare a huge list of example sentences and questions to use in revision games/quizzes
 -Make an English newsletter



Just be encouraging, be supportive, smile, praise effort over achievements

students make and wear English name tags to wear or display on their desks. But outside of these tips, and your own personal techniques for learning names, your schools will usually have seating charts and class name lists. Ask your teachers for a copy of the class name lists and study them before you encounter the students in classes. Being familiar with their names already will make it easier to attach them to faces. Once you have learnt a name, use it often when talking to the student! It will help it solidify/stick in your mind.

Regarding photo rolls: your schools being happy to provide you with these is not guaranteed, but they do exist to help the teachers in the schools quickly learn students' names. Ask if you can look at or receive a copy, but be understanding if they say no. Remember that lists of students' names and photos of their faces are highly confidential information.

Tips for conversations outside of class time:

Eating lunch with students is an excellent opportunity to speak with them in English in a more relaxed atmosphere than the English classroom allows. Students can be shy and reluctant to speak with you though, so ask them about their interests and what they do in their free time. I often ask my kids about what time they went to bed last night and then what on earth were they doing until 1am. I've been recommended a lot of mobile phone games doing this. The best motivator for students to talk to you in English is giving them the opportunity to rave at you about their favourite things and passions. Always ask students to tell you more. Why do you like it? What is the anime you like about? Who is your favourite character? Why do you like them? Etc.



English Club

English Club is for students interested in English to practice after school hours. This is a great way to interact with your students personally and really focus lessons on eager students. English Club meetings depend on your school, but can run from once a week to a few times a week. If your school requests that you teach the English Club solo, or you would like to start one, figuring out where to start can be difficult.

I try to focus my English Club around my students. I usually pass around a sheet with what kind of lessons they are interested in (for example: speaking, culture, games) and have them check what interests them.

Have fun with your English Club! I remind my students to treat English like a sport which requires practice every day, so I am not too focused on shoving learning down their throats for an hour once a week. Some activities I have done include teaching them classic American card games such as Go Fish and Spoons, writing holiday cards for Mother's Day and Father's Day, and other various activities I find on ESL websites.

Some schools have an English board which their ALT puts together every once in a while for special holidays and events. Don't be afraid to have your English Club work on the English board for you. You will be amazed at their creativity, art skill, and the enjoyment they get out of doing something that will be appreciated by the whole school.

Teaching Senior High School

Sarah Chaney / Fukushima ALT

High school JETs usually see more responsibility – and freedom! – in their classes than JHS and ES ALTs. Although teaching your own classes is exciting, it is important to know that high school will show you the largest language gap between students who have grown up eager about English, and those who have been indifferent. However, don't let you discourage you! Your job is a way for students to interact with foreigners and spark an interest in other cultures.

High school education, which lasts three years, is non-compulsory even though most students attend high school. There are two main types of schools in Japan.

1. Academic school – Most students will move on to university

2. Vocational/Agriculture schools – Most students will study specific trades and move straight into the work force. These students generally have a lower level of English ability.

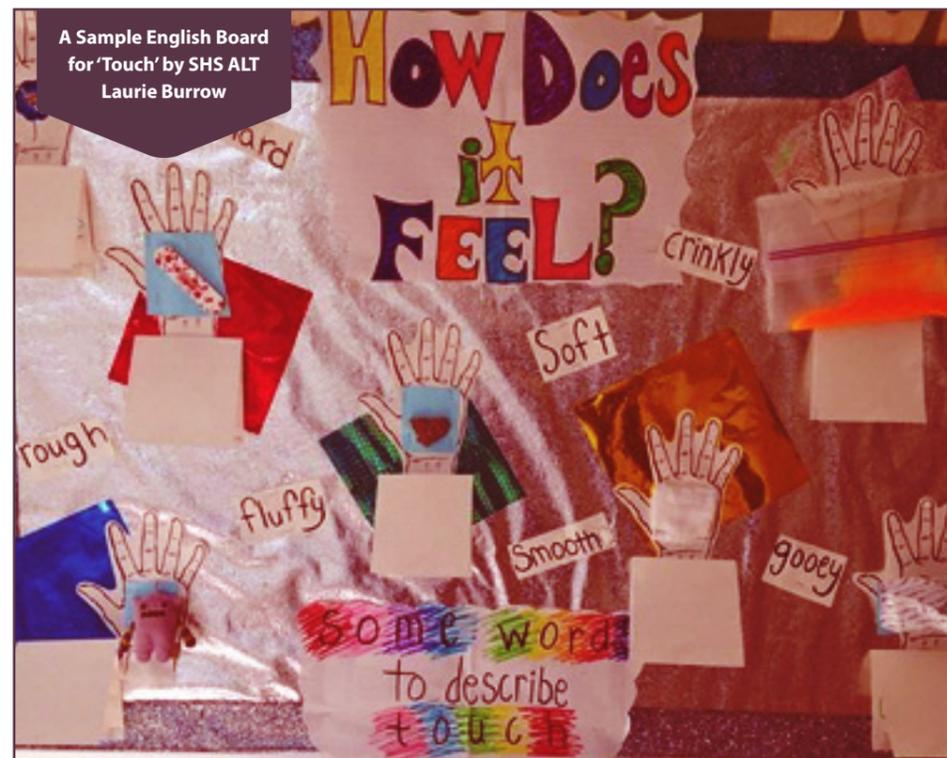
Since the English level of these schools can vary greatly, you may have to modify your lessons to accommodate. If most of your students are not receptive

to English conversation, focus more on culture and English games where they can learn not just about language, but about a new culture.

Pulling together teaching resources.

Chances are your predecessor left behind lesson plans. Some may be outdated, and some may not interest you. Feel free to throw out old lesson plans, talk with your JTE about how your predecessor used to teach, and decide if that style works for you.

If you are looking for a specific type of lesson plan, the internet is a gold mine. Apples to Apples and Clue(do) adapted to ESL learners are just a few of the games that can be found online. Don't feel like you have to start from scratch! It may be a good idea to hang onto the lessons you do in class, with notes on how it went and what you would change. You can use these plans again for next year, or pass them on to your successor. Don't be afraid to reuse your lessons with other schools, even if you have to tweak them slightly to adjust for English ability!



A Sample English Board for 'Touch' by SHS ALT Laurie Burrow

Lesson planning

The amount of classes you will be teaching and how those classes will be taught will differ from school to school. If you are placed at more than one school, you may be expected to create your own lesson plans, while other schools may ask you to create a lesson plan based upon a textbook of their choice. Some JTEs will be more hands-on with lesson planning, while others may just show up to class with you.

If you don't have confidence about your lesson plan, do not be afraid to ask your JTE for input, even if they do not reach out to you first. However, please give them advance warning because they are also quite busy with classes and clubs after school.

Workload

There are often times you will find yourself with nothing to do at your desk. Try to fill in that time by asking teachers what you can do to help, offering to go to class for a few minutes for pronunciation practice, or offering the opportunity for eager students to write journals to you outside of class.

On the other hand, you may find yourself very busy with classes. While this is normal, be aware of your limit. Some schools may feel the need to have you teach as many classes as possible since you only visit their school once a week (or less), but they may not realize how taxing those classes are on you. You may feel pressured to always say "yes" and "I am okay," but that is not helpful to either party if you burn out, or start to dread going to that school.

In the end, it is important to find a balance, and make the effort to manage your time wisely. Your students and JTEs will appreciate your dedication and hard work!

Difficult students and schools

There may be a student or class that gives you a hard time. Before you realize it, it has snowballed until you dread that entire school completely, even when you aren't teaching that particular class

or student. When you begin to dread something, it affects other parts of your life, including the days leading up to that day, and it can affect your attitude toward the students.

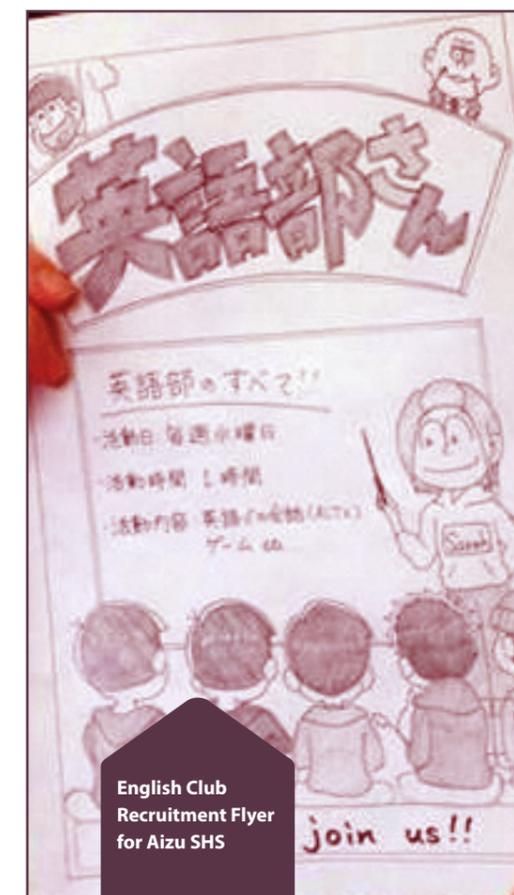
If this happens, take a step back and try to figure out why you feel that way. Is it really an entire school you dislike? An entire class? Figure out what the root of your problem is, and work from there.

A problem student? Depending on if it is harassment or just not following directions, it may be worth a try to either involve them more, or simply sit them out until they are willing to participate. It may be a good idea to get advice from your JTE who handles this student on a daily basis and can help you.

A problem class? If it has to do with an unmanageable class size, talk to the JTE about splitting the class into two separate classes. Figure out what they enjoy and build classes around that without worrying too much about drilling English into them. They don't speak up in class? Do more pair work, or games that focus on small groups rather than singling out one person out of the entire class. Do they cheat when you play games? Find games that make it difficult to cheat. Instead of trying to force students to conform to your lesson plans, work with them to find something that they enjoy.

While it is natural to enjoy some classes more than others, don't let yourself start to dread other classes. In the end, you are the one who will walk away from this experience with a sour taste in your mouth. Don't let it ruin this wonderful experience for you!

If you find yourself struggling, don't forget that you are surrounded by friends and people willing to help you when you are in trouble. Utilize JET Facebook groups, we have one for practically everything!



English Club Recruitment Flyer for Aizu SHS

Have fun

You may think that the elementary and middle school teachers have all the fun. Well, you are WRONG! These students may be shy at first, but they usually have the expectation that high school is the place where they buckle down and get serious. Please show them they are wrong. The best way to learn is to have fun learning it.

Jump around, change the intonation of your voice, throw in bits of pop culture, keep them wondering what will happen next. Smash your shin into the table? Laugh it off. Drop your chalk and watch it shatter all over the floor? Pick up the smallest piece and theatrically continue writing. The students will be shocked to see that you are just as human as they are, which is a very important part of our job as foreign teachers. We are not aliens from another planet – we are humans who laugh, make mistakes, have fun, and enjoy making friends.



International Driving Permits & License Transferral

Foreigners can drive in Japan with an International Driving Permit (IDP) for a maximum of one year, even if the IDP is valid for a longer period. It is not possible to drive on an International Driving Permit again unless you return to your home country for at least three consecutive months in between.

International driving permits are not issued in Japan and should be obtained in your home country in advance. They are usually issued through your country's national automobile association for a small fee.

After a year, you will need to obtain a Japanese driver's license. Japan has bilateral agreements with more than twenty countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, where if you hold a valid driver's license from one of these countries you can get a Japanese license without taking a written or practical exam. *Please note that the United States does not have such an agreement with Japan.*

Go to your local license center with an official translation of your license (obtainable from the Japan Automobile Federation in advance), your passport, and proof that you held your license for at least three months in the issuing country before coming to Japan. After an eye and physical test, you will be issued a new license on the same day.

Driving & Cars in Fukushima

Buying and Owning a Car

Japanese cars are classified into regular and light (*keijidosha*) cars, which are subject to different taxes and regulations. *Keijidosha*, or kei cars, have yellow license plates and are smaller vehicles. They must conform to strict size, weight and power restrictions. In return, they enjoy several tax and toll breaks, and relaxed ownership regulations that make them cheaper and easier to own than regular cars, which have white license plates.

Owning and operating a car involves numerous expenses, including compulsory inspections (*shaken*) every two to three years, yearly automobile taxes, seasonal tyres, mandatory and optional insurance, parking fees, toll expressways and fuel costs.

Shaken is a compulsory safety inspection, which cars in Japan have to undergo every two years. *Shaken* typically costs between 100,000 and 200,000 yen. Mandatory insurance does not provide full coverage, and it is recommended to purchase additional, secondary car insurance. There is an

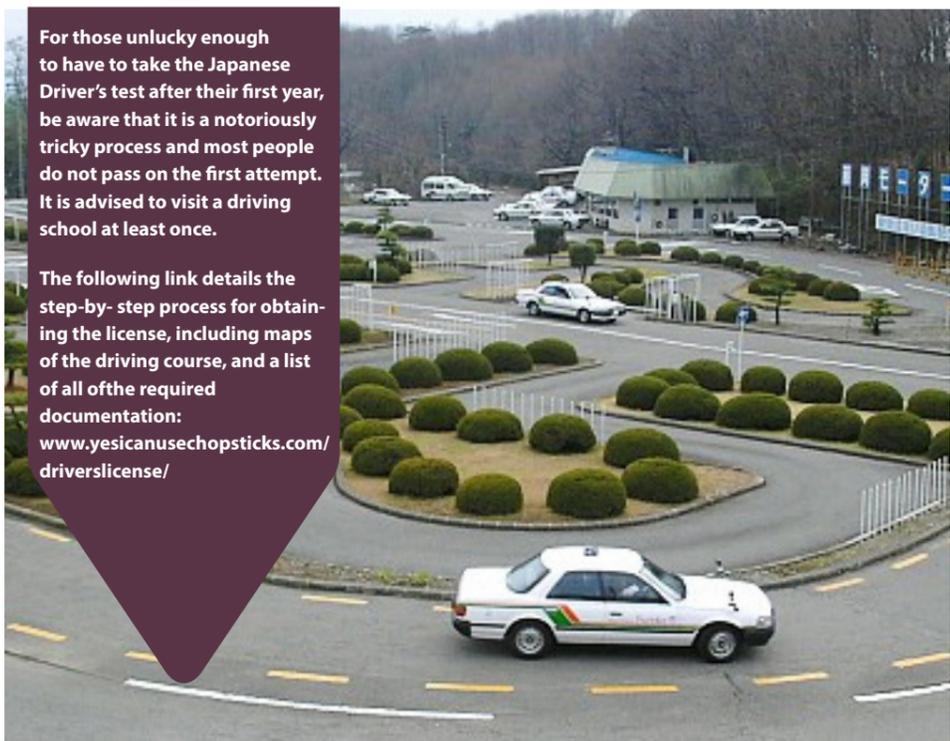
annual automobile tax, which depends on the engine size and typically costs between 10,000 and 50,000 yen.

Many documents are needed to purchase a car, including registration forms, a form from your local police station to verify ownership of a parking space and a transfer of ownership. Kei cars have a slightly easier transfer process. If you buy a car through a dealer, they will handle most of the paperwork for you, which you will need to sign with your registered, personal stamp (*inkan*).

Prior to arrival, your predecessor or another ALT may be selling their car. Do not feel under any obligation to buy the car. Make sure to research the vehicle and ask many questions. Is it a white or yellow plate? How old is it and how much *shaken* is left? What kind of tyres does it have and how old are they? If you're in a snowy region or plan on taking up winter sports, a white plate might be the best car for you. There are a handful of dealers in Fukushima with English speakers, so don't worry if you decide you want to buy a car after you arrive.

For those unlucky enough to have to take the Japanese Driver's test after their first year, be aware that it is a notoriously tricky process and most people do not pass on the first attempt. It is advised to visit a driving school at least once.

The following link details the step-by-step process for obtaining the license, including maps of the driving course, and a list of all of the required documentation:
www.yesicanusechopsticks.com/driverslicense/



We all come to Japan with different levels of language ability. In some placements it's easier to get by without strong Japanese skills than in others, but no matter where you are, there will be opportunities to learn. You'll probably find yourself getting better simply from being in a primarily Japanese environment, but for those of you who want to actively work on improving your Japanese while on JET, here are a few of the many resources available to you!

- Consider taking the JLPT if you need motivation! You'll have the opportunity to sit it twice a year, in July and December, although applications are due much earlier. It's possible to do it in Fukushima, so you don't need to go far, and there are usually at least a few others who will be taking it with you.

- If you're already at the N1 level and looking for a new goal, the J Test examination tests to a higher level of Japanese proficiency than the JLPT does, and also includes a writing component.

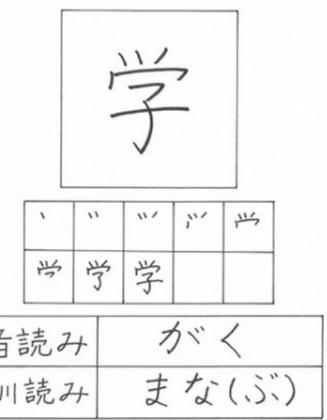
- Do you have a local international association? If you do, it might be worth it to stop by – some offer Japanese language classes from time to time, or can set you up with a private tutor.

- Speaking of tutors, the JETs in your area might also happen to know someone who can help you. It's not unheard of for the same local person to teach a number of different ALTs over the years.

- CLAIR offers a selection of Japanese language courses to JET participants. People wishing to study at the beginning or intermediate level will be able to take online e-course, with content specifically targeted to the kind of language they can expect to encounter at work. Those with a higher level of Japanese will have to the opportunity to take a course in interpreting and translation if they pass the qualifying exam.

Tips for Improving Your Japanese

Merran Eby



- If you're planning on getting a smartphone, a good dictionary should be your first download. Apps like *Japanese, imiwa*, and *Obenkyo* are all solid choices, and allow you to make lists, write notes, or star important entries. (Not to mention that being able to look up kanji on the spot can be a lifesaver!)

- Apps are also a great way to study when you have a few minutes to kill in between classes or while on the train. Study-focused ones like *Kanjibox* (which quizzes you on vocabulary and kanji by JLPT level) or some vocabulary-based flashcard apps can help you track your progress.

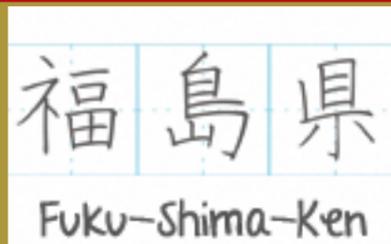
- If you're not planning to bring any textbooks with you, and you're not in a particular rush, keep an eye on the Facebook groups this summer in case there are any leaving JETs looking to sell theirs. Asking around once you get here (especially just after the JLPT exams) may also yield a cheap deal on study materials.

- Don't forget that there's more ways to learn than from a book! Meet people. Make friends. Watch Japanese TV. Listen to Japanese music. Go out to school events, festivals, bars, restaurants, concerts, staff parties, volunteering opportunities; there's so much to do here, and people will likely be curious about you anyway when they learn you're an ALT, so use that to your advantage!

- If you don't know a word, find a way around it to get to what you mean. (Not sure how to say aquarium? Call it a fish zoo!) People will generally want to understand you, and they'll try to guess what you want to say, so just keep at it! (Pro tip: if all else fails, pronouncing the word you want as if it were written in katakana can lead to success more often than you might expect...)

- If you don't know it already, you'll probably pick up classroom and general school Japanese fairly quickly if you're smart about listening to when things are said, since things get regularly repeated all the time. But being smart about listening doesn't just apply to work! If a word or phrase keeps popping up, look it up or write it down, and use it if you can. You'll recognize it the next time it comes around. It can take time, but slowly the pieces will start to come together.

If you want to improve your Japanese, you need to use it. Every day. Even (or especially!) if you're not confident in your skills. Your primary goal should be communication, not perfection. The important thing is to get out there and use what Japanese you do know, however elementary; of course it won't be perfect, but that's something that comes with time, and you'll still have had a meaningful interaction that's also helped to hammer in what you've already got. You may not realize the progress you've made for a bit, but it does happen. The better you can connect with people, the better you'll be able to get involved with and make sense of what's happening around you, and the more you'll ultimately get out of your time here!



At Work

-Sensei 先生
Teacher

-Seito 生徒
Student

-Youchien 幼稚園
Preschool

-Shougakkou 小学校
Elementary school

-Chuugakkou 中学校
Junior high school

-Koukou 高校
High school

-Kouchou-sensei 校長先生
Principal (also the way of addressing this person)

-Kyoutou-sensei 教頭先生
Vice-principal (also the way of addressing this person)

-Shokuinshitsu 職員室
Teachers room

-Kyoushitsu 教室
Classroom

-Jimushitsu 事務室
School administration office

-Eigo no sensei 英語の先生
English Teacher

Japanese Phrases &

Useful Vocabulary

Greetings

-Ohayou gozaimasu おはようございます
Good morning (polite)

-Konnichiwa/konbanwa こんにちは・こんばんは
Good afternoon/evening

-Hajimemashite はじめまして Nice to meet you

-Yoroshiku onegai shimasu よろしくお願ひします
Please regard me favorably (Make sure you say this when you have introduced yourself to anyone or ask for a favor!)

Other Expressions

-Hai/lie はい・いいえ Yes/No

-Chigaimasu 違います That's wrong

-Wakarimasen わかりません I don't understand

-Wakarimasu/wakarimashita わかります・わかりました
I understand/understood

Taking Leave

-Sayounara さようなら Goodbye

-Osaki ni shitsurei shimasu お先に失礼します
Goodbye (used when you leave any place ahead of other people (especially work))

-Otsukaresama deshita おつかれさまでした Reply to osaki ni shitsureishimasu, means "thank you for working hard"

Outside of Work

-Enkai 宴会 Formal dinner parties, often for work

-Nomikai 飲み会 Drinking party

-Nijikai 二次会 Second party after an enkai

-Kampai 乾杯 Cheers!

(Don't drink until after "kanpai" has been said, especially at an enkai)

-Kore o kudasai これをください I'll have this please

-Biiru ビール Beer

-Osake お酒 Liquor/alcohol

-Yopparau 酔っぱらう Drunk

Expressing Gratitude and Apologizing

-Arigatou gozaimasu ありがとうございます Thank you

-Gokurousama deshita ご苦労様でした
Thanks for doing that

-Omatase shimashita お待たせしました
Sorry for making you wait

-Gomen nasai ごめんなさい Forgive me/I'm sorry

-Sumimasen すみません Excuse me/I'm sorry

-Shitsurei shimasu 失礼します Pardon my rudeness

-Ojama shimasu お邪魔します
Said when entering someone's house

Basic Self-Introduction Structure

Hajimemashite. (Pleased to meet you.)

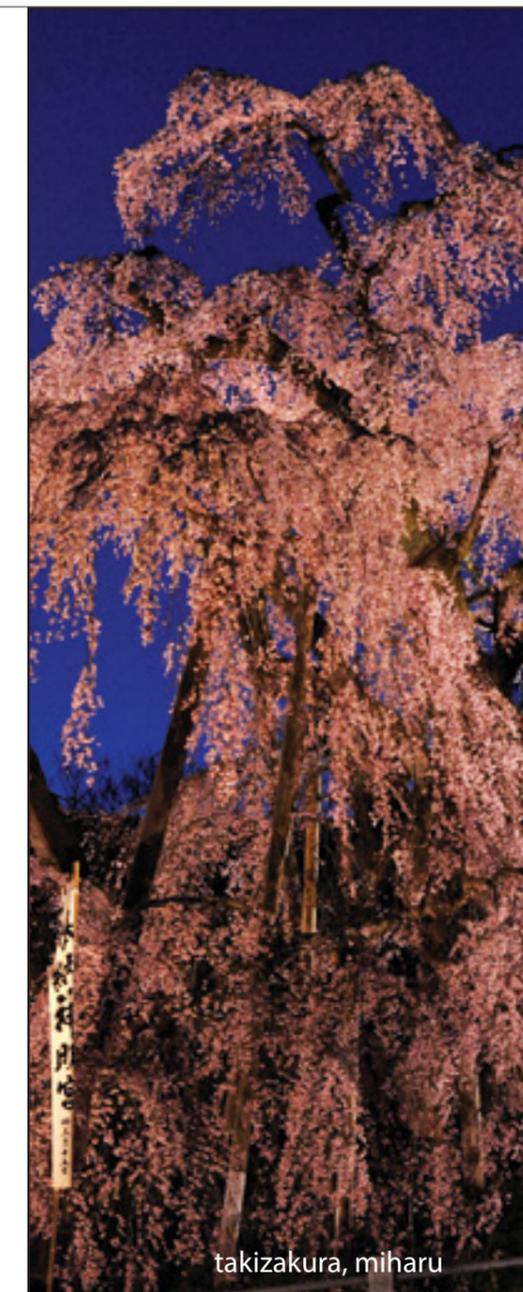
Watashi wa Jon Sumisu to moushimasu. (My name is John Smith.)

Amerika kara kimashita. (I came from America.)

Korekara ganbarimasu node, yoroshiku onegai shimasu. (From here on in I am going to try my hardest, so please take me into your favor.)

This is your basic self-introduction: name, where you're from, and a 'Yoroshiku!' at the end.

In English is fine, but do try your best to at least memorize these three sentences in Japanese- it will make an amazing first impression! Try to say your name very clearly and with a definite pause between first and last names. Depending on your Japanese level, talk about what you did before you came, how old you are (you will get asked either way), interests, or what you want to do in Japan. Don't make it too long if it's at work, as chances are you're interrupting. At the end of your self-introduction, even if it is all in English, do not forget to say yoroshiku onegai shimasu!



takizakura, miharu



Make the Most of Your Time and Money in Fukushima!

For many, Japan can seem very expensive when you first arrive, but since you get paid in yen, and not your local currency, it'll be easier to consider all of your costs in yen. Here are a few things to consider when budgeting, both before and after arrival.

Remember, take it as a given that you will burn through more than a few man (10,000 yen notes, not people!) in Tokyo and while you're settling in. You're new to this! While we're on the topic of notes, the currency in Japan includes coins up to ¥500. Depending on your home country, you may just toss coins around like nothing, but it's easy to spend a few thousand yen in coins (especially in arcades..)! Keep an eye on it.

Fun With Your Money

Xan Wetherall with Current & Former ALTs

Salary

As outlined on the JET Programme website, first-year JETs earn ¥280,000/month. However, your host institution will deduct various dues from your monthly remission (insurance, inhabitant taxes, pension fees, etc.), so you'll end up with around ¥240,000 each month. Also, you will get your first paycheck towards the end of August, so make sure you bring enough money to survive the first month. Your predecessor and/or supervisor may be able to give you a clearer idea of what you can expect to be paying for when you first arrive, but we suggest around ¥200,000. This may seem a bit much, but it's better to be safe than sorry. I brought about ¥100,000 over, and was out before the 14th because I wanted to get in on all the awesome FuJET trips and activities! Don't let this happen to you!

Rent

The size of your apartment and the amount of rent you will be required to pay are relative to your location in the prefecture, or even just your location in your city. Be fully prepared to pay anything from ¥0 to ¥60,000/month. You may or may not also have to pay "key money" upon arrival. This is a 'deposit' that people must pay their landlord upon entering a rental agreement in Japan. In this case, the concept of a deposit is somewhat different in that you don't get it back. Key money is more of a gift, a "thank you so much for letting me give you money" payment. Make sure to check before you leave on whether or not you'll be responsible for paying key money or other move-in fees.

Utilities

Your utility bills will vary according to the size of your apartment, whether or not you are a conservative consumer, the season, and various other reasons. You will be responsible for paying your

water (avg. ¥2,500), gas (avg. ¥2,500), and electricity (avg. ¥4,000) on a monthly basis. Oil for heating is another cost some will encounter, and although it's only theoretically necessary from the fall to early spring months, some (people with bad circulation, the entirety of Aizu) will argue otherwise. Landline phone, cell phone, internet, and TV fees depend on whether or not you use those services.

It is easiest if you get your bills paid straight out of your bank account automatically, as it ensures that you pay them on time. Your BOE or a senior JET should be able to help you with setting this up.

Telephone

A landline really isn't needed, especially as landline calls anywhere other than the very local area are expensive. Some BOEs insist that you have a landline however, so the monthly rental comes to around ¥2,500. One benefit: after an earthquake, they still work! An expensive, but reliable contact. The best way to make international calls is through Skype. Those calling to North America can also use Google Voice via a Gmail account to call any North American phone for free. For cell phones, referred to as keitai denwa (or just "keitai" for short), you can choose from three major companies: Softbank, Docomo and AU. Each has their pros and cons (try ask your neighbours which is best for service in your area.) Expect to be paying from ¥2,000 to ¥10,000 a month depending on your plan. Phones can cost you anywhere from a few thousand yen to more than ¥60,000 (for the newest iPhone or Android.) If you sign up for a two-year contract, you can typically subsidize the cost of your phone into your monthly bill, although sometimes you might be asked to pay the full cost up front. As soon as you have your cell, you can email home even if you don't have internet in your apartment yet.

Television

It's the law that anyone who owns a TV must pay ¥2,800 to NHK every two months. You can have it so that it is deducted from your bank account automatically, as with all other charges. Something for you to consider is that there is no actual punishment for breaking this law... if you get what I mean... SkyPerfect offers Sky TV for around ¥5,000 a month.

Food and Entertainment

Eating out in Japan is relatively cheap, and you can find a vast variety of food around the prefecture. You can find various nomihodai (all-you-can drink) places in all the cities for around ¥2,000, and buying beer from stores will cost about ¥1,000 for a sixpack. There are also tabehodai (all-you-can eat) places. On the other hand, buying food and cooking for yourself may take a bit more time, but will save some cash. Get yourself a point card for the local supermarket, and keep on the lookout for late-night discounts! Usually about an hour before closing, grocery stores discount a lot of their products.

In terms of entertainment, your location and budget will be the determining factors in whether or not you have a fast-paced social life. That, and what you prefer in the way of entertainment! Those who like to party or travel will find themselves out of pocket a little quicker than others. If you're placed in or near a city, you'll have ample opportunity to take advantage of the nightlife. Karaoke joints abound, as do dance clubs and bar lounges. There are movie theaters as well, if you're willing to shell out the cash, and bigger cities will often have movies available in English with Japanese subtitles. Those of you placed in a small town may be hard-pressed to find a lot of the above-mentioned delights, but there's always someone who knows where the fun's at!

Official Functions

Be prepared at various times throughout the year to spend ridiculous amounts of money on enkai (work parties). An enkai usually consists of a set-course meal and all-you-can-drink

ESID - The Eternal Mantra!

It's always important to note that

EVERY SITUATION IS DIFFERENT!

To get an idea of your own expenses, get in contact your predecessor. They'll know the specifics. Definitely give some thought to budgeting early on, as it would be a shame to miss out on all the fun activities just because you didn't bring enough cash, or went on a spending spree in Ginza the second you hit Tokyo.

Remember: watch what you're spending, but don't be afraid to use it! Finally, have fun and 日本へようこそ!

liquor. The cost for one can vary from ¥3,000 to ¥7,000 or higher. You'll be probably be hit hard in December (the end of the calendar year), and in March/April when the infamous annual job transfers occur. Even though they're expensive, try to go as often as you can. It's a great chance to talk to your coworkers outside of work.

Banking

Your bank will probably be chosen for you by your BOE, but many FuJETs will either have a post office account, a local bank account such as TOHO, or both. You won't earn much (if any) interest on your accounts in Japan, so if you're looking to make a mint, consider either sending it home or setting up an account with a bank that offers online and international banking options. Bank ATMs can be a pain and often close on national holidays and weekends, so be careful to get money out before any days off, or be prepared to suffer the ¥210 charge of your local convenience store's general-use ATM! There are two common options for sending money home. There's GoRemit transfers, which you do via furikomi (bank transfer). You have to apply to GoRemit initially. It takes about one day for your money to get there, but the service charges add up, running around ¥4,000 each time. Money-conscious

FuJETs tend to use the post office as the rates can be better and the service charges are minimal (around ¥2,500). The downside is that it can take about two weeks to get there!

Cars

This will be your biggest expense, if you choose to buy one. Some FuJETs are given BOE cars, whilst others have to buy their own. For a decent car which has full shaken (MOT/Car Examination), road tax, mandatory parking space, and all the spare parts, expect to pay over ¥200,000. First off, ask your predecessor, or see if any FuJETs are leaving the same time you're coming in, since some may be looking to sell. Alternately, ask teachers and your BOE, as it is likely that someone can help. If you don't have enough money to pay for it all at once, it is fairly simple to get a loan which you can pay off within a year, and will only cost around ¥10,000 in interest for the whole loan. Fukushima is a big place, and while a car can be expensive, it's definitely a benefit! There are quite a few locations which can be hard to access using public transport, and often carpooling can be cheaper than everyone shelling out for individual train tickets. It also gives you the liberty of arriving and leaving when you wish, as the last trains home are usually before 11:00 pm, and most trains only run every hour or so.



Starbucks in Fukushima

Starbucks tends to be a bit of a divisive subject among coffee lovers. Even if they'll never be able to make a proper flat white, they are still a haven for some tasty drinks and free WiFi. As of May 2018, there are 8 Starbucks locations in Fukushima prefecture.

•**Fukushima Medical University Hospital**
Fukushima, Fukushima

•**Fukushima S-PAL**
Fukushima, Fukushima

•**Koriyama Asaka**
Koriyama, Fukushima

•**Koriyama Cosmos-dori**
Koriyama, Fukushima

•**Koriyama MOLTI**
Koriyama, Fukushima

•**Koriyama Eki**
Koriyama, Fukushima

•**Iwaki Kashima-kaido**
Iwaki, Fukushima

•**AEON Mall Onohama**
Iwaki, Fukushima

Shopping in Japan

Jon Dart with Current & Former ALTs

Shopping in Japan may seem intimidating at first, but have no fear! You can find almost anything you need, as long as you know where to look.

Food

York Benimaru (ヨークベニマル) and **Lion D'Or** are two of the major grocery chains that you will find in Fukushima. They both have a pretty good selection; Benimaru is partnered with 7-11, so you can find many inexpensive 7-11-brand items for sale that are decent and quite affordable. Lion D'Or can be a bit pricier but often has a small foreign snacks section. Depending on where you live, there may be other stores available as well. Local grocery stores or produce stores are great for cheap, local fruits and veggies. Your predecessor or another FuJET nearby will be able to tell you which ones are in your area.

Foreign Food

Jupiter is a foreign foods store located next to the main train station in both Fukushima and Koriyama. As soon as you start missing some macaroni and cheese, make your way here. Some

examples of the foods available here are cheeses, tortillas, sauces, foreign alcohol, breakfast foods, candy, and organic or whole wheat products, among many others.

Yamaya is similar to Jupiter, but it's much bigger and a little less expensive. They have locations in Aizu-wakamatsu, Koriyama, Fukushima, and Shirakawa. Usually if I can't find something at Jupiter I try here, or vice-versa. Yamaya is mainly a foreign liquor store. Missing Malibu Rum? This is the place to go. The selection is quite impressive, but leans toward the liquor-store side, with a smaller food section compared to Jupiter.

Costco here is almost exactly the same as the ones in western countries, from layout to products. A yearly membership is required for about 4,000 yen. If you have a Costco membership back from your home country, you'll be able to use your membership card at any Costco in Japan so don't forget to bring it! For when you want to get your bulk foreign-food buying on, the closest locations are in Yamagata, Gunma, and Ibaraki prefectures.



Online Shopping

Both the **Foreign Buyers Club** (<http://www.fbcusa.com/cs/>) and **The Flying Pig** (<http://www.theflyingpig.com>) offer foreign foods and goods (holiday decorations, cookware, etc). There is also **Amazon Japan**, which has an English version of the site linked at the top-right of the home page. You can find a very large selection of English books, movies, games, etc. The selection may not be as good as it is at home, but you'll be surprised by how many things you can find for a reasonable price on the site. You can pay with a credit card, COD (cash on delivery), or even at the local conbini. The delivery times can be as short as 1-2 days. Also, in most cases, the shipping is free! When it's not free, it's less than \$3.

Are you a bookworm? Then don't rule out amazon.com altogether. You can install Kindle software on your PC, Mac, or smartphone, and download books in English. Before the Kindle came out, many of us suffered from a lack of good English reading, and had to depend on other FuJETs passing around their hand-me-downs. Reading Kindle books on your computer (you can even get monthly magazines) will help you feel more connected to home without having to read a soy sauce-stained copy of Don Quixote for the umpteenth time. You can even loan Kindle books to one another through Amazon's website, and many books are available for free.

A couple of other good ones to know are **Rakuten** (<http://en.rakuten.co.jp/>) and **Kakaku** (<http://kakaku.com>). Rakuten has services similar to Amazon. Kakaku is the best website to check for deals on electronics.

If you are looking for health-related products (cosmetics, toiletries, supplements, etc), **Kenko** (<http://en.kenko.com>) and **iHerb** (<http://www.iherb.com>) are very useful sites. They also have a good selection of organic foods and spices that you may not be able to find in other places.

Clothing

Uniqlo is a good option for fashionable clothes at a reasonable price. Uniqlo is pretty much the Old Navy of Japan. They have stores throughout Fukushima, and their clothes will actually fit (most of) you. There are also men's and women's clothing stores, such as **Avail** and **Aoki Men's Plaza**, and any big box stores like **Aeon** and **Besia** will have a good selection of cheap clothes. **Shimamura**, which feels like a Japanese Marshalls or TK Maxx, offers clothing at cheap prices and also has a decently sized 'big size' section for those who don't normally fit in Japanese clothing. You can also find many deals at secondhand stores. For the bigger folks, there's **4LLLL**, which offers a big and tall selection. My recommendation for the bigger and taller folks coming in is to bring or ship the clothes you like and are used to. Same goes for shoes.

Day-to-Day

100-yen stores. You've probably heard of them, and you won't be disappointed. You can find them almost anywhere, and they have almost everything. Kitchen utensils, school supplies, food, dishware, towels, stickers and prizes to give out to your students, trash cans, hangers, cleaning supplies, air fresheners, toilet paper, and the list goes on. If there is something that your house is missing, this is the first place I would check, as there is a really good chance that they will have it, and that it will only be 100 yen!

Electronics

It goes without saying that Japan is somewhat famous for its electronics, and you'll find no shortage of places to buy the newest and shiniest toys. Aside from numerous small stores, you have two big chains: **Yodobashi Camera** and **Yamada Denki**. The Yodobashi in Fukushima is right next to the Koriyama train station, and offers several floors of any kind of electronics you're looking for (TVs, cameras, phones, etc.) Yamada Denki offers a smaller selection overall, but also has appliances, as well as more branches in Fukushima.

Home Centers

Cainz, **Daiyu 8**, **Plant 5**, and **Komeri** are the names of some popular home centers. Some of these centers, such as Plant 5, are grocery stores as well. You can find shelving units for storage, furniture, cleaning supplies, lighting, stationery, toys, clothing, indoor/outdoor shoes, gardening supplies, bedding and blankets, laundry racks and more. Get someone in your area to take you to one of these places early on in your stay if you can.

Malls

Never fear – while Fukushima might not have the giant super-malls you may be used to from back home, they do have quite a few offerings for those of you who like to spend a day browsing and shopping. The easiest one to spot is creatively named **The Mall**, and is located in Koriyama. This will be the most familiar type of mall, complete with a food court. There are several **Aeon** and **Ito Yokado** locations throughout Fukushima as well, and these also have a number of stores all jammed together in one big building. Aside from those, many cities in Fukushima will also have the **Mega Stage**, which is a chain of strip malls where you can find the big name stores anchored in.

Second-Hand Stores

Hard Off, **Book Off**, and **Second Street** are three very good stores. The prices are reasonable and the quality is usually pretty good. Hard Off carries electronics, furniture, sports equipment, musical instruments, home items like appliances or storage, and clothing. At Book Off you can find books (mostly in Japanese), manga, video games, and DVDs. Second Street is mostly used clothing. Second-hand stores in Japan are much different from the thrift stores you may be used to; the quality is much higher than I expected when I got here. Before buying that toaster you need or a bookcase for the apartment, why not check one of these stores first?



Don't Hermit!

During the winter it can become very tempting just to wrap yourself in a million blankets, set up shop underneath the kotatsu, and barely leave your apartment. However, this combined with a lack of sunshine can lead to isolation and depression. Make it a point to schedule events and go out with friends on a regular basis. Here are some activities and resources for getting out in the winter time!

• **Go hang out in restaurants and shopping centers** - take advantage of free heating and get a change of scenery!

• **Join a local sports club or hobby group**

• **Become active with your local International Association**

• **Schedule regular events with other ALT and CIR friends**

• **Make friends with local people in the community**

• **Get out of town** - go to a nearby city to mix things up! Most trains and main roads are still relatively easy to travel during the winter time. Make a point to get out of town on occasion to change up the pace.

• **Take part in winter festivals!** There are many winter festivals in Fukushima! Many are advertised on the Fukushima ALTs Facebook page.

If you get lonely, take advantage of

- The AJET Peer Support Group (<http://www.ajetpsg.com/>; phone 050-5534-5566 or Skype AJETPSG daily from 8:00pm-7:00 am)
- Tokyo English Life Line (03-5774-0992 daily from 09:00 until 23:00)
- CLAIR JET Online Counseling Service

Surviving & Thriving This Winter in Fukushima

Winters in Fukushima can be tough! Even if you're not in snow-laden Aizu or are coming from a snow-loving country yourself, lack of insulation and central heating can often make your apartment feel even colder inside than out! Combined with short days, you might feel as though you'll never warm up again. Japan, however, is prepared to keep you warm! Here are a few general tips to help you prepare to fight the winter chills!

Embrace Japan's warming winter goods!

Japan knows that Japanese winters can be tough. The good news is they have way more experience dealing with Japanese winters, and they have a variety of goods (often adorably designed) for you to bring with you to stay warm.

These include:

- **'kairo'** (カイロ), small body warmers that last a few hours. They come in many varieties!

- **lap blankets** (ひざかけ), which are exactly what they sound like. They also come in USB-powered electric blanket style too!

- **hot water bottles** (ゆたんぽ)

Old-fashioned, but they really work wonders. Have one on your lap at work or put it in your bed 30 minutes before bed time.



For Spot Heating
A. Carbon Heater
 カーボンヒーター
B. Ceramic Fan Heater
 セラミックファンヒーター
C. Infrared Heater
 遠赤外線ヒーター
D. Halogen Heater
 ハロゲンヒーター
E. Hot Carpet
 ホットカーペット
F. Kotatsu
 こたつ



Enjoy Warm Winter Foods!

- Winter is *nabe* season! ('Nabe' is a cooking pot. Japan often names food after what it is served or prepared in.) Nabe is a hot-pot style dish that comes in many flavours and is usually cooked directly at the table. The cooking of the nabe and eating of the hot soup warms both you and the room you're cooking in.

- Check out drink machines! In winter, drink vending machines offer both hot and hold drinks.

Get out!

Going out and spending time at a place that's warm and heated will get you warm and help reduce your power consumption at home!

- Find your local sento/bath (銭湯, せんと) or onsen/hot spring (温泉, おんせん). Sento and onsen are very inexpensive, normally less than 1000 yen if you're not staying overnight.

Most local sento and onsen also have relaxation areas. Take a bath then go to the relaxation room to read or study and then take a bath again. Be forewarned that you may bump into students or coworkers.

- Go to a family restaurant or cafe. Enjoy a coffee or the drink bar and spend some time there studying in the luxurious heat.

Stay Active!

This is common sense, but it's worth repeating. With the winter chill, the short days, and the death grip of your lovely kotatsu, it can be hard to find the motivation. But nothing works so well to warm your bones as some exercise or getting involved in a local sport! Fukushima is home to so many wonderful winter ski slopes and mountains, why not beat winter at its own game and spend your

For Area Heating
A. Air Conditioner
 エアコン
B. Kerosene Fan Heater
 石油ファンヒーター
C. Kerosene Stove
 石油ストーブ
D. Oil Heater
 オイルヒーター



Brace yourselves... Winter is Coming.

days skiing down a mountain or snowshoeing through the back country?

Dress Yourself for Winter!

When dressing for winter weather, the key is many thin layers. It is so important that it is worth repeating-- layer, layer, layer! During winter, most Japanese clothing stores sell heat-insulating clothing (*perhaps most famously is Uniqlo with their Heat Tech line*). These are life savers and relatively inexpensive to stock up. Jackets and coats might be harder to find. If you have some from home, have friends or family send them along to you when winter begins to approach. If you need to buy new boots or gloves, there are many wonderful online shops to help.

Dress Your Apartment for Winter!

-Insulate your apartment. Even if it isn't insulated when you get there, that doesn't mean that you can't help insulate it yourself with winter arrives. Simple fixes include placing weather stripping on doors and windows as well as taping bubble wrap to your windows to help trap heat inside!
 -There are many kinds of heaters in Japan. All have pros and cons. While the air conditioner is great at heating up your apartment, it will drive up your power bill. Ask your supervisor with help understanding the different heaters that you'll have-- many have built-in timers so that they will turn off after X minutes or come on at a certain time in the morning so you don't wake up to a frigid apartment.



Tourism in Fukushima

If you're looking for ways to spend your weekends exploring your new home when you arrive, you should have absolutely no trouble filling up your calendar! In fact, you might have real trouble fitting everything in!

Fukushima is the third-largest prefecture in Japan, with mountains and beaches and everything in between, and it has a huge range of attractions, activities, and eats for you to discover and enjoy. (Even better, if you come out to FuJET's events and meet your fellow ALTs and CIRs, you'll have people to stay with all over the prefecture who'll be eager to share their town with you!)

Here are just a few of Fukushima's best-known attractions!

Sights for Every Season

Touring the Lucky Island

Hamadori

Spa Resort Hawaiians:

After its rise to fame in the wake of the critically acclaimed 2006 film *Hula Girls*, Spa Resort Hawaiians has become one of Fukushima's most popular tourist destinations. Founded in the 1960s after the collapse of the local coal mining industry, this huge Hawaiian-themed resort has taken advantage of the abundant natural hot spring water in the area to create an extensive water park that includes its vibrant Polynesian dance shows, water slides, and the largest outdoor bath in the world.

Aquamarine Fukushima:

Iwaki also has a beautifully designed aquarium situated right on the Pacific coast which makes for an extremely pleasant day trip destination. Besides an impressive display of fish of every size and shape, it boasts an iconic underwater tunnel, several titanic sea lions, a coelacanth exhibit, and a desert display with a little posse of fennec foxes donated from Kuwait. The aquarium also offers free behind-the-scenes tours that take visitors through the labyrinth of tanks and feeding areas hidden from the general public.

Nakadori

Abukuma Limestone Caves:

Said to be some of the most impressive limestone caves in Asia, the Abukuma cave system located between Iwaki and Koriyama stays approximately the same temperature all year round and is a great place to visit anytime with a group of adventurous friends. The route through the caves takes you past ancient limestone formations in all sorts of fantastical shapes, all carefully illuminated to look their best, and occasionally requires a bit of dexterity to navigate. A very neat and very unusual place to visit!

Aizu

Oze National Park:

Famous for the wild beauty of its mountain scenery and its wide highland marshes seasonally carpeted with flowers, this giant national park is actually shared between three separate prefectures. As Fukushima's portion

lies far to the northwest, it's virtually impossible to reach without a car, but anyone willing to make the trek out into the far reaches of Aizu will be well rewarded by its spectacular natural sights and its many hiking options. FuJET organizes a trip here every year, so don't miss out!

Mount Bandai:

Lake Inawashiro: One of Japan's biggest lakes, Inawashiro is also surely one of its beautiful, and in the winter is known for harbouring the many swans that migrate there from Russia every year. It lies at the foot of Mount Bandai, in the heart of Fukushima, and its small but lovely beaches are a great place for summer barbecues and swimming.

Aizuwakamatsu City:

Aizuwakamatsu's nickname of the "Samurai City" is well-earned. The Aizu clan that used to rule the area played a major role in the Boshin War, and the famous, tragic story of the Byakkotai, a group of young warriors who committed mass suicide in the face of their defeat, finds its origin here. Its castle, Tsuruga-jo, is the most famous in Fukushima, and recently updated its museum exhibit to include extensive English translations of the information and items on display.

Morohashi Museum of Art:

For the art lovers, an unexpected find: the Morohashi Museum of Art houses one of the best collections of works by Salvador Dali in the world. Along with its more than 300 pieces by Dali, its permanent collection also includes original works by such famous European names as Matisse, Cézanne, and Picasso.

Ouchi-juku:

The double line of traditional thatched house that line the main street of this historic village date back to the Edo period of Japanese history. They now house many small shops selling local handicrafts, and if you stay for lunch, don't miss out on the negi soba - a delicious noodle dish that your servers will gleefully place in front of you with a single stick of negi (green onion) to eat with, instead of a pair of chopsticks.

Sakura Spots

Tsuruga Castle:

The castle in Aizuwakamatsu is one of the best places for viewing cherry blossoms in the prefecture. The castle grounds are always crowded with people on the weekends, and an evening projection light show is also shown on the white walls of the castle at the height of the season. This is perhaps the most popular hanami destination for FuJETs, and many come every year to meet up with their friends, share food, and have clouds of sakura petals fall into their drinks and their shoes.

Komine Castle:

This small castle in the town of Shirakawa may not be as impressive as Tsuruga Castle, but the sweeping field in front of it is a perfect place for hanami, and is generally less crowded than Aizuwakamatsu. There is generally a large contingent of JETs that make a pilgrimage here every year to eat, drink, and be merry.

Miharu Takizakura:

This giant, 1000-year-old weeping cherry tree has been ranked in multiple surveys as the greatest tree to be found anywhere in Japan. Its towering branches reach a height of twelve metres, from which cascades of pale pink flowers are draped waterfall-like in the spring. It may only be one single tree, but its fame means that it draws more than fifteen times the entire population of the town of Miharu every April.

Evening Illuminations at Tsuruga-jo



In the cherry blossom's shade, there is no such thing as a stranger.

-Kobayashi Issa

Fall Colours

Shiramizu Amidado:

If you come to Iwaki in early November, you will be able to see Fukushima's only National Treasure at its very best. Shiramizu Amidado is a serene Heian-period oasis nestled in the hills of central Iwaki, and it has been delighting visitors for over eight and a half centuries. The inner sanctum is only opened to the public a few times a year, but one of those times is during the temple's award-winning night illuminations in the fall. Carefully hidden lights make the changing colours of the leaves around the temple seem to glow in the darkness, and the mirror-like quality of the surrounding artificial lake lends the whole scene an eerie, unearthly beauty. Shutterbugs, get your night photography skills on!

Goshiki-numa:

Goshiki-numa, also known as the Five Coloured Lakes, is a series of five volcanic lakes created in the aftermath of the violent eruption of Mount Bandai in 1888. The colours of the lakes, which can range from warm green to dark blue, change throughout the year, and are a result of the different mineral deposits that ended up in their waters. The lakes are worth a visit at any time of the year, but are at their most beautiful when the fall colours of the trees are out in force, contrasting brightly with the lakes and the mountains that form their backdrop.



Akabeko

If you live in Fukushima, you may have noticed a proliferation of references to the akabeko, or red cow, but what exactly is this akabeko, and why is it so popular? Keep reading to learn more about the akabeko that has become a symbol of Fukushima.

The Toy

The akabeko is a traditional toy from the western Aizu region of Fukushima. It is made from two pieces of wood covered in papier-mâché, which are then painted to look like a red cow or ox. The larger piece forms the main body, and the smaller the head and neck. The head hangs from a string that is suspended inside the hollow body such that, when the toy is moved, the head bobs around (just like an old-school bobblehead!)

The Legend

Aizu legend claims that the toys are based on a real cow that lived in the early 9th century. According to the story, a monk named Tokiuchi Daishi was supervising the construction of a temple in Yanaizu called Enzo-ji. A village up the river had just donated a large amount of timber to the project, but transporting it turned out to be extremely difficult. While people were struggling to carry the timber, a herd of cattle suddenly appeared to help. With their assistance, the workers were able to complete the project. It is said that these mysterious animals - which were red in colour - laboured almost to the point of collapse in their efforts. In recognition of this, upon the temple's completion the local people enshrined a stone statue of a cow on the temple precincts, which can still be visited today. It is considered a symbol of good fortune, as well as of strength, patience, and great devotion to the Buddha. Another version of the story claims that there was but one cow who was involved in the temple's construction. When the building was finished, varying accounts claim either that it gave its soul to the Buddha and turned to stone, or that instead it refused to leave the temple grounds and became a permanent fixture there. The red cow was called Akabeko, beko/bego (meaning 'cow') in the dialect of the Tohoku region.

Hands On in Fukushima

Touring the Lucky Island

Fruit:

Fukushima is known as one of the great fruit baskets of Japan, and it's possible to pick your own almost anytime throughout the year. Fukushima is perhaps best known for its succulent peaches, but there are many opportunities to gather strawberries, cherries, apples, pears, and grapes as well.

Pottery:

Fukushima's best-known pottery style is Soma-yaki, hailing from the towns on the Pacific shoreline. Soma-yaki's most distinctive marker is the stylized motif of a running horse, a nod to Soma's long history as a breeding ground for samurai horses. This traditional handicraft was dealt a serious blow in the March 2011 disasters, as many workshops were forced to close or relocate away from the coast. One workshop has since reopened in the town of Nishigo, and offers pottery workshops for anyone who is interested in making their own Soma-yaki. (They have at least one English-speaking staff member, too!)

Ski Resorts:

Fukushima has a grand total of 26 different ski resorts scattered across the prefecture. The 3 most popular resorts with FuJETs tend to be Nekoma, Bandai ALTS, and Gran Deco. Whether you're a seasoned skier or boarder, or you're interested in learning, you'll be covered. You can connect with other skiers and boarders in Fukushima with the facebook group **'Fukushima Snowboarders and Skiers!'**. You can also check out a full listing of all of the resorts at: <http://www.skiresort.info/ski-resorts/asia/japan/fukushima-prefecture/> Get ready to enjoy that pow-pow!

Ramen:

Fukushima is home to one of Japan's three great types of ramen: Kitakata! It would be a crying shame not to give this a go at least once while you're here. Kitakata City has the highest number of ramen shops per capita in Japan, and its famous ramen is characterized by distinctive curly noodles, which are generally served in a pork-based broth.

Akabeko painting:

Akabekos, which are little red cow bobbleheads, are probably one of the first things a Japanese person will mention if you ask them about Fukushima. A traditional toy that was believed to protect children from smallpox (the spots are smallpox marks), they're plastered all over the souvenirs here, especially in their home region of Aizu; a giant bobbling akabeko even welcomes tourists just outside of Aizuwakamatsu Station. You can pick out and paint your own 'beko - white, black, or the traditional red - at the giant handicraft and local product marketplace a few minutes' walk from Tsuruga Castle. A great activity idea for visiting family and friends, and a great souvenir to take home as well!



Notable Festivals

Again, due to the effects of the pandemic some festivals may be changed or cancelled.

Yanaizu Naked Man Festival:

To try and earn good luck for rest of the year, local men race up the steep steps of Yanaizu's Enzo-ji temple and into the temple to fight up a rope and ring a bell at the top. Oh, and did we mention that they do this while only dressed in a fundoshi, a Japanese loincloth? The Hadaka Matsuri ('Naked Festival'), is held every January 7th in Yanaizu and welcomes all who wish to participate. Why not test your luck and strength and show your fellow FuJETs (quite literally) everything you've got?

Shirakawa Daruma Market:

Shirakawa is famous for handmade daruma and ramen. Early in February, local daruma craftsmen sell their wares down the main street of Shirakawa. Come get a lucky charm and then warm up from the winter weather with a big bowl of ramen!

Soma Nomaoui:

The Soma Nomaoui, or wild horse festival, is one of northeastern Japan's most famous festivals, and draws huge crowds to the town of Minamisoma every July. Hundreds of people put on their family's samurai armour, fly family banners, and parade on their horses through the city's streets. Those same people then compete later on in the day in horse races and a mad field competition to catch shrine streamers shot high into the air.

Fukushima Waraji Festival:

Named after the traditional 'waraj' straw sandals, Fukushima's annual festival to mark the summer kicks off in early August. While you therefore understandably might see

a lot of straw sandals on display, the centrepiece is the 12 m long, 2 ton giant version hoisted down the street to mark the parade's opening. This is Fukushima's entry into the 'Tohoku Roku' -- 6 big summer festivals that take place in a week's span across all of the Tohoku region.

Iwaki Fireworks Festival:

One of two big summer fireworks festivals in Fukushima, along with the one in Sukagawa. Iwaki's takes place during the first week of August, in the coastal town of Onahama, where the fireworks are shot off over the Pacific ocean. Any Group A newcomers will find the impressive show and the festive atmosphere a great introduction to Japan's summer festival season!

Sukagawa Fireworks Festival:

The second of Fukushima's two notable fireworks festivals, this one is located in the Nakadori town of Sukagawa. Its more central location and later time means that people from all over the prefecture often come to watch. A great time to bust out your festival finery and meet many of your fellow FuJETs!

Aizu Festival:

A three day long festival with the main event occurring every

September 23rd, the Aizu Festival celebrates Aizu Wakamatsu's long and storied samurai history. The main event is the Aizu Hango Gyoretsu, a parade of the Aizu domain lords. History literally fills the streets and you are transported back in time.

Nihonmatsu Lantern Festival:

One of the three largest lantern festivals in Japan, the Nihonmatsu Lantern festival has a history dating back more than 300 years, and takes place every year from October 4th to 6th. After a daytime blessing, seven 8-metre high floats wind through the city streets, pulled by groups in traditional clothing with accompanying taiko drummers. With streets lined with festival stalls, you're sure to have a magically lit evening.

Taimatsu Akashi:

This spectacular November festival, commemorating the many people who lost their lives in a war over four centuries ago, is one of the top three fire festivals in Japan. Dozens of towering straw pillars are set on fire on the crown of a hill, and slowly collapse and burn to the ground over the course of hours to the sound of shouts and taiko drums. Even on rainy nights, this is one of the most impressive sights Fukushima has to offer!



Sukagawa
Taimatsu Akashi



Going Further Abroad

As FuJETs, we do get a few extended breaks that we can use to travel further abroad, like the New Year holidays and Golden Week. Some JETs use this time to go home and see their families, but many others also choose to take the opportunity to visit places in Japan or around Asia that take a little more than a long weekend to explore. Within reasonable distance via public transportation are major tourist destinations like Kyoto, Osaka, and Nara; while shinkansen tickets to places like these are generally easy to come by, overnight buses will generally require a reservation to be made, and popular dates like Golden Week may sell out weeks or even months in advance, so make sure you don't wait too long to plan your trip!

For places further away, airports offer many cheap flights to places like Okinawa or Hokkaido, as well as to other nearby countries like South Korea, Taiwan, or the Philippines. Just make sure your visas are in order before you go, since some places like China may require quite a long time to process your request!

Whether you're planning to stay within Japan or venture a little further afield, consider joining the JETsetters Facebook group to ask for advice. It's a meeting point for many other travel-loving ALTs, and they can be a great source of advice and experience to help you make the most out of your time away. Safe travels!

Travelling Out of Fukushima

Destinations and Adventures

Tochigi Prefecture

One of the must-see day or weekend trips you should consider making is out to **Toshogu Shrine**, located in **Nikko, Tochigi**. A designated UNESCO World Heritage Site for good reason, this spectacular complex boasts some of the most intricately carved and vividly painted shrine architecture to be found anywhere in Japan. Its grounds are vast and carefully tended, and it is the original source of the famous motif of the 'three wise monkeys,' *Mizaru*, *Kikazaru*, and *Iwazaru* - best known as the embodiment of the saying "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" - who are carved over the door of the stable.

If you head south to the highlands of Tochigi prefecture in early May, you can check out **Ashikaga Flower Park**, which is considered one of the best places to see wisteria in the country. Wisteria, called *fuji* in Japanese (the kanji differs from the famed Mt. Fuji), are beautiful trees with long, delicate trailing branches covered in flowers in all hues of pale blue and purple, and places like **Ashikaga** that specialize in them draw huge crowds of tourists every year during the height of the season.

Another spring travel destination in **Tochigi** is **Nasu Flower World**. The park has flowers on display in all seasons except for winter, but its most famous draw is the 220,000 tulips that bloom here in mid-May.



Hitachi Seaside Park, Ibaraki in Spring

Ibaraki Prefecture

One of the main draws to the prefecture of **Ibaraki**, on Fukushima's southern border, is **Hitachi Seaside Park**. A popular destination for school trips, it has many different varieties of flowers blooming constantly throughout the year. Its most impressive display happens in late April, when millions of tiny *nemophila* flowers carpet an entire hillside in a soft wash of periwinkle blue. Almost as impressive is its fall exhibit, which exchanges blue for brilliant scarlet blooms. There is more to the park than flowers, however; there are forest walks and bike rentals for people who want to take their time to enjoy all it has to offer.

The seaside town of **Mito, Ibaraki** is home to **Kairakuen**, considered one of the three great gardens of Japan. While it's a beautiful at any time of year, the best time to pay it a visit is in the early spring, when its three thousand flowering plum trees all burst into bloom at once. The season runs nearly a month, peaking in early to mid-March, and festival stalls line the paths leading to the entrance. About four years ago, a new festival was created that, over the course of several days, showcases *umeshu* (sweet plum wine) from producers all over Japan, ranging from brands locally produced in Mito to tangy Okinawan wines incorporating tropical citrus fruits.

Miyagi

Matsushima, off the coast of **Miyagi** prefecture to the north, is famous as one of the "Three Great Views" of Japan. The coastline here is dotted with hundreds of tiny, pine-covered islets, and is just as beautiful on misty days as sunny ones. At only a half-hour train ride from central **Sendai**, it's an easy trip to make even for those without cars, and visitors can easily find ways to make a weekend of exploring both.

Not too far from Matsushima is a curious place called **Tashirojima**, which has in recent years come to be known as both **Manga Island** and **Cat Island**. The local Japanese population is small and shrinking, but nevertheless draws surprising numbers of tourists due both to the high numbers of stray cats that inhabit the island (outnumbering the people, in fact), and to the charming cat-shaped cabins designed by a famous Miyagi-born manga artist that overlook the sea. If this appeals to you, **Miyagi AJET** organizes an annual weekend trip out to **Tashirojima** around the beginning of June, where they stay in the cabins, explore the island, and befriend the kitties!

Held in the first week of August, the famous **Sendai Tanabata Festival** is the most famous of the *Tanabata* festivals held across Japan. Most are held in July, but some Japanese cities, like **Sendai** and **Iwaki**, hold theirs one month later in accordance with an old lunar calendar that was used before the Meiji Restoration in the mid-19th century. During this festival, which has a 400-year history, the downtown area is lavishly decorated with brightly-coloured traditional streamers made of paper and bamboo. Many events like concerts and parades are held during the day, and at night fireworks displays are set off for visitors to enjoy.

Yamagata

When winter rolls around, many FuJETs rejoice - it's the start of the ski and snowboarding season! Fukushima has many offerings, but for those looking to explore a bit further afield, it doesn't get much better than **Yamagata's Mount Zao**, the largest ski resort in Tohoku. **Yamagata AJET** hosts a ski weekend here every year, where ALTs and CIRs from all over come to stay in a sleepy little onsen village at the foot of the slopes. Even those who aren't huge fans of winter sports will find something to do here, because one of Zao's main attractions is its *juhyou* (樹氷), which are trees completely enveloped in snow blown over the mountains in a rare meteorological confluence. Their bizarre and oddly humanoid shapes have earned them the nickname "snow monsters" from visitors, and for several weeks at the peak of the season the side of the mountain is lit up after dark, making them look like long lines of hunched-over wintry soldiers.

For those willing to make the trek out to **Yamagata**, the **Yonezawa Uesugi Matsuri** in May might be one of the more unusual and entertaining events in which you can participate during your time in Japan. Part festival and part historical re-enactment, it has a parade, a huge portable shrine, and the highlight - hundreds of participants dressed up in samurai armour who take part in a mock battle, swords and all. The fight is based on the famous battles of *Kawanakajima* that took place in the sixteenth century between two major warlords, **Takeda Shingen** and **Uesugi Kenshin**. Their fame is due in part to a military plot that involved sending a secret detachment of soldiers on a surprise attack mission that involved fording a river, but that ultimately ended in disaster. Upwards of several dozen ALTs have taken part in this festival in the past, and are generally assigned to the river-fording regiment, meaning that if you've ever wanted to die a spectacular fake death in battle in front of a large cheering crowd, few opportunities come along that are better than this one.

Niigata

Niigata is famous all over Japan for the high quality of its locally produced rice, and - more to the point - its sake. Started in 2004 in celebration of the fifty-year anniversary of the *Niigata Sake Brewers Association*, and drawing inspiration from Germany's Oktoberfest, the **Sake no Jin** festival in **Niigata City** proudly offers the public the chance to try more than 500 different kinds of sake over the course of two days. Local Niigata foods and products are also featured, along with seminars and live performances.

In May in **Niigata**, there is the **Fox Bride Festival of Tsugawa**. A real bride made up to look like a fox walks to the main site of the festival with her 108 attendants. Her actual wedding rites are performed when she arrives at where her husband-to-be is waiting for her, and as the sun sets, lanterns are lit along the streets as she progresses from the shrine to a nearby park to celebrate. Everyone else who attends this festival also has the opportunity to put on fox makeup for the day!

Fruit

Fukushima is one of Japan's 'fruit basket' prefectures, and for good reason, but don't feel like you have to limit yourself! If **strawberries** are your thing (and you're far from Iwaki or Soma), **Tochigi** is a major producer, while **Yamagata's** most iconic fruit are the **cherries** that make up a full 70% of Japan's total production. Both offer plenty of pick-your-own options, and would make great day trips for any fruit lovers who find themselves within visiting distance!





Volunteer Opportunities in Fukushima

Volunteering is a great way to give back and connect with the community! Whether it be volunteering time to help those affected by the Great East Japan earthquake, or helping out at the local animal shelter, there are many great opportunities for volunteering in Fukushima! Here a list of several volunteering organizations that are active in Fukushima Prefecture. In addition to these, FuJETs can also volunteer their time within their community at the local level by helping out with things such as participating at events at International Associations and helping out in different ways at schools. So, there are tons of ways to give back in your community and within the prefecture! Volunteer events and activities are also periodically shared on the Facebook group **Fukushima ALTs**, so please keep a look out if you are interested in volunteering!

If you have questions about volunteering in Fukushima, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, at: volunteer@fujet.org

Fukushima Volunteering

Minamisoma Odaka Volunteering Center *(Japanese Only)

The Minamisoma Volunteer Center is an NPO commissioned by the Minamisoma Council of Welfare, which aims to provide a network of support for disaster relief and reconstruction. There are volunteer opportunities available every weekend; however, there is typically a group organized once a month to go out and help as well. Stay tuned for information on future dates.

English Speaking Contact person:

Sarah F. Jones

Sarah's Contact info:

sfjones@ezweb.ne.jp

Site:

<http://ameblo.jp/v-home-net>



Habitat for Humanity Japan

Habitat for Humanity mobilizes local leadership and resources to expand access for all people to decent, affordable shelter. Typically, volunteers and home partners work together through Habitat for Humanity affiliates to build or renovate houses. In this process, Habitat forgoes making a profit on loans through interest, putting value instead on meeting human need. Long-term housing security for a family, typically homeownership, is the expected result.

Habitat for Humanity Japan

301 Assorti Shinjuku 5, 5-11-25 Shinjuku Shinjuku-ku,

Tokyo 160-0022 Japan

TEL: +81-(3)-6709-8780

E-mail: info@habitatjp.org

URL: <http://habitatjp.org/en/>



Save Minamisoma Project *(limited attendance, contact first)

Our current efforts focus on delivering food and safe drinking water to residents of the temporary housing units who lost their houses due to the tsunami and forced evacuation due to the radiation from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plants. Currently, a group comes from Tokyo to help those who are still living in temporary housing.

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/SaveMinamisomaProject

E-mail:

saveminamisoma@gmail.com



WWOOF Japan

WWOOF Japan members can get below the veneer of tourism and away from their daily grind, and have genuine and meaningful experiences with people, society and culture, in all kinds of walks of life, in hundreds of locations all over Japan. Eat and think organically!

In Fukushima, the volunteer sites are typically at farms, and they expect you to volunteer for about 1 week.

Site: <http://www.wwoofjapan.com/home/index.php?lang=en>



sunrise in odaka, minamisoma



sunrise minamisoma coast, 2009

