

# 2023/2024 Training Program for Teachers of Japanese in Urawa (Japanese Language)

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*Figure 1: Ready to try Taiko Drumming*

It has been 10 years exactly since I was last in Japan. Getting the opportunity to travel to Japan again to study Japanese language and culture in more depth over the summer is amazing! I was so lucky to be able to visit the Japan Foundation Center in Urawa, Japan located north of Tokyo in Saitama Prefecture. Along with 31 other Japanese instructors from around the world, we spend 6 weeks becoming immersed in Japanese language practice as well as cultural experiences.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> week, we were introduced to the staff at the center and our fellow classmates, and given a placement assessment that included reading, writing, listening, and speaking parts to best break us into leveled groups for the rest of the program. The staff and teachers are so helpful and quickly made us all feel at ease and got us practicing Japanese in no time with fun icebreaker activities and tours around the building.



*Figure 2 32 Teachers from Around the World: Indonesia, Thailand, Philippians, Laos, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Hungary, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Algeria, Ivory Coast*

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, we got to go out and explore Kita-Urawa (the town around the center) with a Japanese volunteer in small groups with our classmates. Each group was tasked with discovering a few unique locations and interacting with the people in that area in a purposeful way to explore not only the town but also the people that live there. This was a wonderful activity as we got to experience Japan in a real way with a helpful Japanese speaker to guide us through the activity. Afterward, we presented what we noticed and questions we still had about the city, people, and things we experienced.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, we were split into 3 level groups and given textbooks to use both in class and outside of class. Each group was about 10 people, which made for a lot of great conversation and practice within the classes. The classes themselves were a mix of reading, writing, speaking, pronunciation, resource sharing, and listening. From weeks 3-5, we had a new teacher each week to guide us through a thematic unit, as well as specialized break-out classes on a particular focus.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> week, we got ready to celebrate Tanabata on July 7<sup>th</sup>. This was a wonderful opportunity to take part in a Japanese festival. In the later part of the week, we went on a group trip to Kanazawa via Shinkansen (bullet train). Kanazawa is a city known for its historic buildings, traditional foods (like macha and wagashi), as well as gold-leaf. We got to practice “kinpaku” which is where gold leaf is applied to a plate or dish in a design. Afterward, we could also try gold-leaf ice cream in the Geisha

Tea District. We also visited Kanazawa Castle as well as Ken-roku-en, one of the top 3 gardens in Japan. This is an unforgettable cultural experience for me and I am so excited to share my experiences with my students.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> week, we experienced several cultural workshops like wearing yukata and Shodo (calligraphy). For the yukata wearing, we learned about different kimonos for different events (like weddings), genders (male vs female coloring), and ages (adult and child designs). We also learned how to fold a yukata properly before getting to wear a yukata and geta (traditional sandals) for a photo shoot. For the Shudo, we spent time learning about calligraphy in Japan as well as Japanese people's attitudes toward this traditional art form. We then practiced several times before writing our favorite kanji on a small fan called Uchiwa. Afterward, we created large banners in small groups that are now displayed in the center's lobby. The weekend of the 5<sup>th</sup> week was a homestay experience as well for individuals who wanted to get the experience to live with a Japanese family and experience their life for a weekend.

During the 6<sup>th</sup> week, we listened to a live Taiko performance and also go to try playing in beat as well. Most of the week was taken up by a group project. For the group project, we expressed interest in a topic that we wished to learn more about in greater depth. This year the groups chose topics such as onsen, fashion, station stamps, marriage rates, clean bathrooms, tea, and vending machines. Each group created a focus question, researched on the internet, interviewed people in Japanese, and then created a presentation to share their research and findings. A volunteer also accompanied each group to help assist each group with their research and interviewing. This was a great way to focus on Japanese culture and go deeper than surface-level observations.

My best memory of the trip is definitely the friends I made and the conversations about Japan, our countries, and the teaching that we shared throughout the trip. It was amazing to learn about all the different ways other teachers are using to teach Japanese and our own struggles to practice and increase our proficiency. The teachers were also a great memory as their help and insight are something I have learned from and will use in my own teaching. They are excellent models for how to enthusiastically get learners engaged and learning about the Japanese language and culture.



I highly recommend all teachers apply for this 6-week Japanese language and culture course. It has been an amazing experience with so much packed into a few weeks. If you are considering practicing Japanese some more and want to get first-hand experience with Japanese culture, this is the best program for that as you get to do all of this while in Japan!



*Figure 3 Using Gold-Leaf in Kanazawa, Japan*



*Figure 4 Finished Kinpaku dishes!*





*Figure 5 Everyone wearing a yukata and ready for a summer matsuri!*



*Figure 6 Level 2 class with one of our amazing teachers*





*Figure 7 Visiting Japanese High School*



*Figure 8 Working with Japanese volunteers to explore the center and town*