



2011 JET-MIP ESSAY

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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE

THERESA TRAN

ALASKA

LATHROP HIGH SCHOOL

I was eating lunch with my Japanese teacher, Nagaoka sensei when he mentioned he received an email about a program that he wanted me to look into right away. Not knowing I had less than a week to apply and get my paperwork together, I hastily did it when I learned about the JET Memorial Invitation Program. A week after graduation, I received an email while on my break at work. It read, “Congratulations, Theresa!” with words of encouragement from my sensei that it brought me to tears. I could not believe it; I was really going to Japan. I could have never been as ecstatic as I did that moment. Traveling to Japan was only something I could dream of when I was younger and the cost had kept me from doing so. The JET program has given me that opportunity and this past summer was one that I could never forget.

Things were a bit hectic weeks prior to the trip with having to work, move homes, and before I knew it I was heading to Fairbanks International Airport to catch my flight to San Francisco. I was nervous since it was the first time flying without my parents. I was more nervous after landing in CA and learning that my flight was late so I missed the Japan Town tour with the other participants. I was relieved to find out that I wasn't the only one who was late and soon enough met the other participants at dinner. Little did I know at the time that the thirty one strangers who I've just met would become as close as we did, sharing our company and adventures together as 'Mippers' during our stay in Japan.

Upon arrival in Japan, I was in awe with the whole scene. I felt like it was a movie, the air itself was somehow different, of course everything was in Japanese and being foreigners, we got a lot of stares. But what struck me the most was how polite and kind everyone was. All the people I have met whether it was the gentlemen in uniform at the airport or the employees in stores, I saw this welcoming manner and kindness that lacked in the United States. I felt reassured knowing that even with the language and culture barriers, there were so many willing and helpful people and using body language did a great deed.

Every day during the two week trip was great. We stayed in Osaka but also visited Kyoto, Kobe, and Iwate. We did activities such as taiko drumming, yukata dressing, anime and manga learning, calligraphy, art, and music with the students at Senboku high school. Whether it was just orientation, visiting temples, spending time with our host families, or riding our bikes around the neighborhood, it was the most thrilling experience I've ever had.

Being in Japan had taught me a great deal. I've learned the customs and culture of the Japanese people. [Privacy - Terms](#)

by interacting and experiencing first-hand the ways of their country. I've learned how to use the traditional toilet, ways to bathe, manners when entering someone's home, and sitting in a proper manner as what they call the "seza" pose. It wasn't the most comfortable things to do since it was the first I've learned how to do such things. Although it was weird at first, it grew on me and it became fun to do.

I've met so many interesting people on this trip, many who have taught me and have influenced me in so many great ways. My fellow JET Mippers have given me so much joy spending time with them and I know a number of them will remain as lifetime friends. My host family has also given me a whole new insight of Japanese people. Thanks to my host mom, I learned how great drivers are in Japan. The students and teachers I've met at Senboku and Kozukata high school are such hard working and inspiring individuals. Also, the staff at the Kansai institute along with the staff at the Japan Foundation was so accommodating and generous.

My understanding for Japan and the Japanese people have been broadened and I couldn't have asked for more. The experience I had will always be cherished and I hope that one day I will be able to return to Japan and give back to the Japanese people. I would like to become that bridge between Japan and the United States. Until then, I hope to gain more knowledge and be prepared when I apply for the JET program! This time, to become an ALT. Thank you oh so much for the wonderful experience! I will never forget it as long as I live.

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5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100

Los Angeles, CA 90036

P. 323.761.7510

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