島根へようこそ！
2018 Shimane Welcome Handbook
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Welcome To Shimane!

SHIMANE PREFECTURAL GOVERNMENT
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On behalf of the Shimane Prefectural Government and your Contracting Organization, congratulations on your placement in Shimane Prefecture! Shimane is a beautiful place to live and work; it is the home of Japanese mythology and tradition. The ocean, mountains, rivers, lakes, rice fields, farms, temples, and shrines give Shimane a rich natural and rural feel. In each city, town, and village you will find many friendly people - people who will become your friends, colleagues, and students over the next twelve months and beyond. We hope that you will enjoy your work and life in Shimane on the JET Programme.

Shimane Prefecture (population 680,437 as of July 2018) is made up of nineteen municipalities: eight cities, ten towns and one village. The capital city, Matsue, has 205,775 people, while the smallest village, Chibu, has just 635 people. There are currently about 7,689 foreign residents living in Shimane from many countries, including Brazil, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Korea.

In the summer 2018, there will be a total of 31 new JETs coming to Shimane; 24 ALTs and 7 CIRs from Canada, India, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The new JETs will join current JETs from many other countries including Australia, China, France, the Philippines, Russia, South Korea, and Vietnam. After both groups arrive in August 2018, there will be a total of 91 JETs (CIR: 28, ALT: 63) in Shimane Prefecture.

To better prepare you for your journey to Japan, below is a brief itinerary of your arrival.

**Group A:** You will arrive in Tokyo on **Sunday, July 29th.** You will attend Tokyo Orientation and then on **August 1st,** you will fly from Haneda Airport to Shimane Prefecture (about 1 hour). You will be met by your supervisor at the Izumo En-musubi Airport or the Hagi-Iwami Airport, and from there you will travel with them to your new home.

**Group B:** You will arrive in Tokyo on **Sunday, August 5th** You will attend Tokyo Orientation and then on **August 8th** you will fly from Haneda Airport to Shimane Prefecture (about 1 hour). You will be met by your supervisor at the Izumo En-musubi Airport or the Hagi-Iwami Airport, and from there you will travel with them to your new home.

The **Shimane Prefectural Orientation** will be held on August 23rd and 24th in Matsue City. This Orientation is run by Shimane JETs and is an invaluable chance to make friends and learn about your new home.
To make your transition easier, here are some things to take care of before you come to Shimane:

- Do a final visit to doctors and dentists before you come to Shimane. Although the medical care is adequate here, the processes may differ from your home country and not all doctors will speak fluent English. Please see ‘Medical Matters’ for further information. Make sure to check the requirements of any prescription medicine and fill out the appropriate paperwork before departing.

- We strongly recommend that you **obtain a driver’s license and an International Driver’s Permit, before arriving. In the past, JETs who arrived in Shimane without a license have later regretted their decision. Please read more in ‘Transport in Shimane’**.

- Information specific to your situation will be sent by your new Contracting Organizations and will be received separately from this Handbook. At this time, you will also receive a copy of the ‘JET Programme Terms and Conditions’ contract. This may differ slightly to the one you read during your application process, so **please read your contract carefully. If you have any questions or concerns about your contract, contact your Contracting Organization directly. Your supervisor there will be a valuable resource to you throughout your time on the Programme**.

- **Read the ‘JET Programme General Information Handbook’ in full** (available online here) before coming to Japan, and be sure to bring it with you. It is an excellent reference. Make sure to read all the Shimane-related information included in the Shimane Welcome Pack, as well.

- **US JETS**: US ALTs **MUST** apply to the IRS for a FORM 8802 before coming to Japan. The form may be downloaded from: [http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8802.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8802.pdf). Please contact either the IRS or your local JET consulate for further information. Other nationalities, please make sure you are aware of your tax responsibilities/loan responsibilities **before** you depart.

On the following pages you will find the Shimane Information Handbook. This guide was created by past and present Shimane JETs to assist you with your preparations for coming to Japan, and to give you information specific to Shimane that you will not find in official CLAIR materials. The Shimane JET community is quite diverse, and we have drawn upon this diversity to produce a broad view of life in Shimane. This book is an outline of what you can expect, but as each of us is unique, so too are each of our experiences in Japan. The answers to many questions can only be discovered through personally experiencing daily life in Shimane. That said, please don’t hesitate to ask questions! We hope you are looking forward to your new adventure and we look forward to meeting you!

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**Kaoru Yamamoto, Japanese PA (Prefectural Advisor)**  
Culture and International Affairs Division,  
Shimane Prefectural Government

**Miki Asano, Japanese PA (Prefectural Advisor)**  
Culture and International Affairs Division,  
Shimane Prefectural Government

**Oliver Marshall, CIR-PA (Prefectural Advisor)**  
Culture and International Affairs Division,  
Shimane Prefectural Government

**Enrique Jose Legaspi, ALT-PA (Prefectural Advisor)**  
Senior High School Planning Division,  
Shimane Prefectural Board of Education

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Hello! My name is **Shimanekko**!  
I am Shimane’s Tourism Mascot!  
Welcome to Shimane!
Prefectural Advisor System

The four Prefectural Advisors (PAs) in Shimane are here to provide support and counseling to all JET participants, as well as give useful information about everyday life in Japan. Although PAs are not professional counselors, we do receive training from professionals twice a year. JET participants can consult any of the four PAs about any issue confidentially (with the exception of illegal activities). Both Japanese PAs speak English well. We are all here to support you as best we can. Alex, Oliver, Kaoru and Miki are all looking forward to supporting your move to Japan and the transition into your new lives.

For more information on support for JETs see: [http://jetprogramme.org/en/support/](http://jetprogramme.org/en/support/)
Visit the Shimane PA Resources Website: [http://shimaneparesources.wordpress.com/](http://shimaneparesources.wordpress.com/)

Meet the PA team

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex Hart-Smith</td>
<td>Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) PA</td>
<td>Kia Ora! My name is Alex. I’m a fourth year ALT and second year PA hailing from Timaru, New Zealand. I’m most likely to be found in my native habitat, the outdoors. Feel free to contact me about any questions you may have. Although I am leaving Shimane this summer, I know you will be in safe hands with Oliver and my successor, E.J. Make the most of your time in Shimane, it will go by quickly!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Marshall</td>
<td>Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) PA</td>
<td>Hi everyone, and a big welcome to Shimane! :-( My name’s Oliver, and I’m a 2nd year JET from Winnipeg, in the wonderful (and often cold) land of maple syrup and hockey, Canada! I like exploring new places, trying locally-brewed sake, learning new languages and making new friends! As one of your PAs, please contact me anytime you have questions, concerns, or just want to chat! Your time in Shimane is going to be an adventure, and the JET community is here to help you every step of the way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaoru Yamamoto</td>
<td>Japanese PA</td>
<td>Hola! Welcome to Shimane! My name is Kaoru Yamamoto and I am one of the Japanese PAs. This is my 12th year doing this job! I lived in Columbia for several years with my husband and I have visited the United States. I speak Japanese, Spanish, and English. Please enjoy discovering all of the wonders that Shimane has to offer!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miki Asano</td>
<td>Japanese PA</td>
<td>Welcome to Shimane! This is my second year as PA. Work hard and play hard in this wonderful prefecture! Please do not hesitate to ask us anything.</td>
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Where Am I Going?

Shimane Prefecture is located in the southwest of Honshu, Japan’s largest island. It is located on the western coast of Japan facing the Sea of Japan, with Hiroshima to the South, Tottori to the East and Yamaguchi to the West. Shimane has a population of 692,539 people (as of January 2016), making it the second smallest out of the forty-seven prefectures, after its neighbor, Tottori (574,917 people), and it is the 18th largest prefecture by land-mass. Shimane is a rural prefecture with a vibrant, traditional culture.

The Prefecture is divided into 3 historic regions: Izumo in the East, Iwami in the West, and the Oki Islands, off the northern coast.

The Izumo Region ・出雲地方

Making up the eastern part of Shimane, the Izumo Region is also known as the “Land of the Gods”, as it is the setting of many traditional Japanese myths. The cultural highlight of this region is the Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, one of the most important Shinto shrines in Japan. Deities from across the country are said to gather here each November to discuss their plans for the world for the next year. This region is also home to beautiful Japanese gardens, art museums, as well as two of Japan’s largest lakes, Lake Shinji and the Nakaumi Lagoon.

The Iwami Region ・石見地方

Shimane’s western region, Iwami, is where you will find the picturesque Mt. Sanbe (1126m) and the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine, an UNESCO World Heritage Site, a mine that had global importance in the 16th and 17th centuries. Tsuwano, in the far west of the prefecture, is a former castle town with many preserved historical sites, museums, and rituals. The region is also well-known for Iwami Kagura, a traditional style of ritual dance. There is also the Aquas Aquarium, which features penguins, seals, and beluga whales.

The Oki Islands ・隠岐諸島

The Oki Islands are approximately 60km off the northern coast of Shimane Prefecture. Oki is comprised of four inhabited islands, all of which have been designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark. The islands were once used as a place of exile for nobles and emperors who were found guilty of political offences. Due to the islands’ isolation and proximity to the Korean Peninsula, the local rituals and arts are unique. The coastlines, forests, and caves are spectacular. The islands are also well known for fresh, delicious seafood, rice, sake, and beef.
Shimane JET Participants 2018-2019

Updated 19 July 2018
Shimane’s Municipalities

Each participant will encounter differing circumstances upon arrival. Rural life may be different to what you are used to at home, and comes with a set of pros and cons. On that note, here is a very brief introduction to each of Shimane’s municipalities. Towns and cities with a star next to them are welcoming new JETs in August. Note that the Japanese definition of city, town, and village generally refers to a municipality’s population and thus may differ from Western definitions.
※’JET Pop.’ indicates the population of JET participants, including new arrivals and all CIRs.

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<tr>
<th>Ama Town ・海士町</th>
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<td>Part of the Oki Islands and home to about 2,361 people, this small island is home to several temples and shrines and is great place to try diving or sea-kayaking. (JET Pop.: 1)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Chibu Village ・知夫村</th>
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<td>Another of the Oki Islands, with a population of just 590 people, this is Shimane’s only village. It is said to be the smallest community in Japan with a JET. Chibu is home to Sekihiki or red cliff and Mt. Akahage that boasts some of the best views in the Oki Islands. (JET Pop.: 1)</td>
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<tr>
<th>★Gōtsu City ・江津市</th>
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<td>Located in the Iwami Region, this is Shimane’s smallest city (24,491 people) but it has some spectacular beaches. The Gono River is host to a firework festival each year. (JET Pop.: 4)</td>
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<tr>
<th>★Hamada City ・浜田市</th>
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<td>Home to The University of Shimane, the ‘Aquas’ aquarium, castle ruins and some amazing cafes, bars, and restaurants, this city of 59,587 people is famous for Iwami Kagura, a style of traditional story-telling told through dance. (JET Pop.: 5)</td>
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<th>★Iinan Town ・飯南町</th>
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<td>This picturesque town of 5,182 features the former Akana Castle site and Mt. Kotobiki. Although it can get quite cold in Winter, Iinan is full of natural beauty and plenty of opportunities to become involved in local community events. (JET Pop.: 3)</td>
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<th>★Izumo City ・出雲市</th>
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<td>With over 175,000 people, Izumo is Shimane’s second largest city and is home to the important Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine. It is also home to a history museum, a domestic airport, a sports dome, a winery, and the largest shopping mall in Shimane. (JET Pop.: 12)</td>
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<th>Kawamoto Town ・川本町</th>
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<td>Kawamoto is the smallest mainland town, both in area and population (3,579 people), but its central location means that you’re never too far from the rest of the prefecture. The locals love having foreign residents participate in the town’s events. (JET Pop.: 3)</td>
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<th>★Masuda City ・益田市</th>
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<td>48,410 people call Masuda home, the westernmost city in Shimane. It hosts a yearly marathon that attracts a few thousand people and is home to a domestic airport, the Grand Toit Concert Hall, and many delicious restaurants, bars and cafes. (JET Pop: 5)</td>
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Matsue City ・松江市
The capital of Shimane Prefecture, Matsue, is the prefecture's largest city, with a population of around 206,414. It is built on the banks of Lake Shinji, Japan’s 7th largest lake, and the surrounding rivers. From Shinji’s beautiful sunset, to Matsue Castle – the city offers plenty of action, but also remains relatively peaceful. (JET Pop.: 17)

Misato Town ・美郷町
Steeped in local traditions, the small town of Misato (4,958 people) is a quiet town where you can kick back, relax, and enjoy nature. You’ll find village festivals and kagura shows on weekends. (JET Pop.: 2)

Nishinoshima Town ・西ノ島町
Located on the second largest islands of Oki’s islands and the home of 2,952. You can find amazing natural sights, like Candle Rock, or the high cliffs, and experience diving and kayaking. (JET Pop.: 3)

★Ōda City ・大田市
Ōda, with a population of 36,062, is home to some of the most spectacular tourist destinations in Shimane – from Mt Sanbe, one of the prefecture's tallest mountains, and the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine. Its central location makes it popular for JET events and parties. (JET Pop.: 3)

★Okinoshima Town ・隠岐の島町
14,628 people call the largest island in Oki, Dougo, home. It is the home of bull-sumo, a yearly 100km marathon, and some of the most beautiful scenery in all of Shimane. (JET Pop.: 7)

Okuizumo Town ・奥出雲町
Up in the mountains, this town, with a population of 13,536 people, gets the most snow in Shimane. Oku-izumo offers golfing, camping, hiking, skiing, and hot springs. (JET Pop.: 2)

★Ōnan Town ・邑南町
This town of 11,272 people is the place to be in Shimane for skiing and snowboarding. You can also find hot springs, some beautiful valleys, and gorges. (JET Pop.: 2)

Tsuwano Town ・津和野町
The medieval castle town of Tsuwano is the home of 7,812 people and has many art galleries, temples and castle ruins. It holds many festivals and events, including a horseback archery festival in the Spring. (JET Pop.: 1)

★Unnan City ・雲南市
Unnan is the home of 39,593 people and some amazing hot springs and parks (and don’t forget their yakisoba (fried buckwheat noodles)). Unnan is a quiet, beautiful city with a tight-knit JET community. (JET Pop.: 8)

★Yasugi City ・安来市
Yasugi City is not only home to 40,013 people, but also the Adachi Museum of Art and its beautiful gardens, as well as some castle ruins, an annual marathon and Lake Nakumi, Japan’s 5th largest lake. (JET Pop.: 5)

Yoshika Town ・吉賀町
6,405 people live in Yoshika, the south-westernmost town in Shimane, bordering on Yamaguchi Prefecture. Some spectacular natural sites are to be found here from rivers, to mountains and forests. (JET Pop.: 0)
The Weather

Summer • 夏

The rainy season begins in June, with rain almost every day. July and August are hot (35℃/95°F) with a high level of humidity throughout the prefecture. There is an occasional typhoon. We recommend you wear non-synthetic materials, like linen or cotton, as these will help keep you cool. Regardless, be prepared to sweat – not every school has air-conditioning in classrooms.

Autumn/Fall • 秋

Autumn is generally cooler and less humid than Summer. It can still be quite warm in September, but usually it gets cold by the middle of November. The changing of the leaves is beautiful and many consider this the perfect time for mountain-climbing and camping.

Winter • 冬

At the height of Winter the temperature hovers around 0℃/32°F, but can get lower in some areas. Snow falls in much of the prefecture, especially in January. The mountains receive about 1M (3ft) of snow, the costal Western Region about 15cm (6in), and the Eastern Region about 30cm (12in). Japanese houses have minimal insulation and generally no central heating, so being inside may be colder than it is in your home country. Using many layers of clothing and portable heaters to keep warm is a good idea.

Spring • 春

From early March, the cold begins to recede and warmth is slowly restored. Cherry blossoms bloom in early April, and having a picnic under the trees with friends is a popular cultural tradition called ‘hanami’. Some places even hold special festivals to celebrate. It starts to get humid towards the middle of May, signaling the return of Summer.
The Shimane Life

Shimane Prefecture is full of history, culture, natural beauty and the following is just a small sampling of what Shimane has to offer.

For many JETs, interaction with other participants is an important part of their life in Shimane. Shimane AJET organizes events that give JETs and non-JETs the opportunity to meet and interact throughout the year. Always remember that other JETs are only a phone call away.

Beaches・海
Shimane is full of beautiful beaches. The official beach season runs from mid-July to mid-August and during this period they can be crowded. It is ok to swim outside of the official season, but you may find you have the beach to yourself. Be aware that many jellyfish do come into the warm waters too, especially after the official season ends (not because they know that the official season has ended, probably because they like the warmer waters).

Winter Sports・ウィンタースポーツ
You will never be far away from a place to ski or snowboard, especially in the Iwami Region. For those in Eastern Shimane, there is Mt. Daisen in Tottori Prefecture, only an hour drive away from Matsue. The fields may be smaller than what you are used to, but skiing or snowboarding are good ways of spending the winter months. Although finding large boots may be a problem, you can buy the required gear here. If you have gear already, you can always bring or send it. Ice-skating is also an option, but ice-hockey is largely unknown.

Onsen・温泉
These are Japanese-style public baths/spas used for relaxation. Depending on where you go, you may be expected to bathe naked. Generally, men and women have separate bathing areas. No matter where you go you will come out feeling relaxed and refreshed. Many hot springs have outdoor baths so you can experience nature while you relax and many claim to provide health benefits. People with tattoos may be refused entry, although you may be able to get in if you can cover them with a band-aid or taping.

Museums and Art Galleries・博物館と美術館
For those interested in art, there’s The Shimane Art Museum in Matsue, The Adachi Museum of Art in Yasugi, the Grand Toit in Masuda and The Children’s Museum of Art in Hamada and many more galleries around. There are plenty of historical museums too, such as the Shimane Museum of Anicent Izumo, next to Izumo Taisha, The Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum in Matsue City, and the Mt. Sanbe Nature Museum in Ōda City and many other smaller museums.

Discounts for foreigners are available at many locations.
Things To Do

What you do in Shimane will depend on where you live, on how social you are, and on what you’re into. For Shimane JETs, JET and non-JET friends form an important part of their experience in Japan and are a valuable source of support as you adapt to your new homes. There’s plenty to discover in Shimane and even JETS who have been here for three, four, or five years still discover new things.

Sports ・スポーツ
Most sports are available in Shimane. Joining a sports club or team is a great way of getting to know people in your community. ALTs may even be able to join one of the club activities at their schools. Depending on the size of the school, there will be a variety of clubs to choose from. Participating in a club can also improve your relationships with students in the classroom.

Gyms/Pools: There are gyms throughout most of the prefecture, but the availability and age of the equipment can vary between them. Swimming pools are quite popular and can be found throughout most of Shimane.

Golf: There are many golf ranges and some great courses in Shimane. The facilities are kept in good condition, however, it might be difficult to find the luxury of a turf covered course.

Cycling: Cycling as a hobby is growing in popularity in Japan. As not every road has a bike lane, it is recommended you bring a bicycle helmet.

Running/Fun Runs: During the warmer months, there are plenty of marathons or ‘fun runs’, held throughout the prefecture for you to take part in, starting from 5km and going all the way to 100km marathons.

Hiking: There is good hiking throughout Shimane. JETs often hike up Mt. Sanbe, in Ōda City, or Mt. Daisen in Tottori Prefecture, especially in Spring and Autumn/Fall. The Chugoku mountain range along the Hiroshima-border offers stunning views, as well as multiple shrine trails in every town.

JETs also participate in other sports such as kendō, rugby, karate, soccer, tennis, basketball, frisbee and rowing.

Hobbies ・趣味
Almost everyone in Japan has at least one hobby and you will probably be asked many times about your own hobby. If you have a hobby at home, ask around once you’re here to see if it is available in your area. Starting a Japanese hobby such as calligraphy, taiko (Japanese drumming), ikebana (flower arranging), shakuhachi, tea-ceremony, or cooking is also popular among JETs.

Cafes ・カフェ
Shimane is home to many cafes. Although there is a limited number of chains, such as Starbucks, there are an abundance of smaller individual cafes. Many of these smaller places have a theme to attract guests, for example there is a cat café in Matsue.

Camping ・キャンプ
Whether it is on the Oki Islands, or in Misato Town, JETs will often get together to go camping for a night, or two, on the weekends. If you pitch your own tent, site rental can be quite cheap.
Festivals • 祭り
Festivals occur frequently in Shimane, especially in summer. You may even be invited to participate in one of them! There are many types of festivals including taiko drumming, rice harvesting, fireworks, and cherry blossom viewing. These festivals are a great way to experience traditional Japanese culture. Japanese people and JETs love going to festivals, so they are also a great way to socialize with people in your community.

Clubs, Bars, & Restaurants • クラブ、バー、レストラン
There are plenty of restaurants and bars in each city, town, and village in which to socialize.

Club Scene: There are a couple of nightclubs in Matsue City. Some of the other cities might occasionally have one-off dance events, but do not have regular clubbing venues. Live music from smaller, local bands can be found throughout Shimane, it is just a matter of asking around. For big city clubbing or music action, you can head to Hiroshima or Okayama, which may only be two to three hours away.

Izakaya: Restaurants that serve a wide range of easily prepared food with cheap drinks. In the summer, some izakayas offer an outdoor ‘beer garden’ to enjoy the warm summer nights. Restaurants: Shimane is full of restaurants, from hole-in-the-wall places to family restaurant chains, such as Gusto or Joyfull. It’s not just Japanese food, either; there are Brazilian, Indian, Korean, Chinese, French, Italian, and burger restaurants scattered throughout the prefecture as well. Karaoke: A popular form of entertainment in Japan where people get together and sing, but don’t feel obligated to. Karaoke is found at many bars, but there are also karaoke boxes where you can rent a private room by the hour. Many English songs are available as well, so even those who can’t or do not sing in Japanese can join in.

Snack Bars: These are generally small bars attended by one or two friendly bartenders. Snacks and excellent service are provided but be aware that these bars usually include a ‘sitting fee’. Generally, the bill is paid in one sum at the end, rather than ‘pay-as-you-go.’

Work Parties/Enkais • 宴会
Work parties, or enkai, are parties that you will be asked to attend with your colleagues. They are often held at a restaurant or Izakaya with plenty of food and alcohol. Not everyone who goes will drink alcohol (the most common replacement is tea), so there is no need to worry if you choose not.
Welcome to Shimane!
From the 2016-17 Shimane AJET Committee

Shimane is the 18th biggest prefecture in Japan! We have stunning sandy beaches, beautiful mountains, innumerable rice paddies and even a couple of islands. Do you like hiking? You can get to some pretty amazing peaks in Shimane. Do you like scuba diving? Head over to the Oki Islands, you can even get certified! Do you like skiing? Shimane has got you covered on that as well. And those are just a few things that this stunning prefecture has in store.

The best part of Shimane is that it looks like it’s straight out of a Ghibli movie. It’s a pretty rural prefecture that boasts myths, culture, and history. You interact with traditional Japan in a way that is much more intimate than people who live in Tokyo and Osaka. The people here are so kind and make you feel like a celebrity! In Shimane, you can see the second most important temple in all of Japan. You can also see Iwami Kagura, a type of local storytelling told through dance (picture lots of dragons). The mountainsides have waterfalls and trees that are hundreds of years old. There’s an 800 year old World Heritage Site and a Geopark.

Shimane also has a plethora of friendly people who aren’t necessarily used to seeing foreign faces. This means that there are many people excited to meet you.

Shimane’s beautiful surroundings, amazing people, and even more amazing ALTs and CIRs are the main reason why JETs decide to stay so long. Shimane AJET brings all of these things together once a month to make sure everyone is fully taking advantage of Shimane life.

SAJET is a volunteer-based organization (open to anyone who wants to join) that plans events around the prefecture including: parties, road trips, sightseeing, BBQs, weekends away, and anything else you need to keep you busy on the weekend.

Here is a sneak peek of some of our events from this year:

**Apple Picking**
In October we went apple picking in Iinan. We enjoyed all-you-can-eat apples and a beautiful bike ride through the countryside.
**Ski Weekend**
In January we hit up the slopes at Mizuho Highland in Ohnan. It is the largest ski resort in the Chugoku region! There are runs from beginner all the way to advanced, and we had lessons for our beginner skiers and snowboarders. After shredding all day we relaxed in a nearby hot spring.

**Thug Forest Hike**
In April we went on a Ninja Obstacle Course in Gotsu. We had to face over 20 obstacles and see if we had what it took to be the next *Ninja Warrior.*

**World Music Fest**
Every year in May we hold a Luau themed music festival, full of live music, food and the Japanese community. This is our biggest event of the year and all funds go toward the Shimane AJET Scholarship Fund.

**Day trip to Tsuwano**
In November we went to Tsuwano known as (Little Kyoto). We saw to the famous Taikodaniinari Shrine and rode a single rider chairlift to the castle ruins and enjoyed the gorgeous views.

**But wait! There’s more!**
In addition to all of our events, we also have a Shimane AJET Scholarship Fund. Using money donated during various, annual fundraising events, the SASF provides financial scholarships to highly motivated Junior and Senior High School students to study abroad in English-speaking countries. We sent 3 students from Shimane abroad in 2016 and 2 students in 2017.

**Lastly,** at the moment, you’re probably worried about things like your school, apartment, and a million other questions about moving to Japan. Our biggest piece of advice would be to relax and enjoy the time you have left with friends and family. Seriously, put Japan out of your mind until there’s a week to go. Everything will fall into place when you get here. We can’t wait to meet you! Feel free to join our facebook page and we will be happy to answer any of your questions. [https://www.facebook.com/groups/42446990352/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/42446990352/)

For **more information** about Shimane AJET, visit the Shimane PA Resources website at [https://shimaneparesources.wordpress.com/](https://shimaneparesources.wordpress.com/) or send us an e-mail at shimaneajet@gmail.com. For more information about AJET in general, visit the National AJET website at [www.ajet.net](http://www.ajet.net).
The People

~The Shimane Spirit~

Shimane’s population is one with a strong sense of tradition and culture. The people here, like any place, vary, but they are generally friendly and mostly open to talking with foreigners. That being said, Shimane has a relatively small, decreasing population, as much of its youth leaves to attend university or find work in larger cities. As many of these young people do not return the ratio of people over sixty-five years old now sits at over 30%. This is the second highest ratio in Japan (First is Akita Prefecture). However, if you look, there are still young people to be found – in even the smallest towns! And old people aren’t so bad.

In an effort to increase the population, Shimane offers assistance in finding suitable partners, and housing for people who wish to live long-term in Shimane. Financial assistance is sometimes provided for people from outside Shimane who are coming for work experience. Recently there are also more and more people moving to (or returning to) Shimane to escape the busier, or more stressful, lifestyle of the larger cities.

The locals lovingly refer to Shimane as “inaka” (田舎, country-side) as it is a largely agricultural prefecture, separated from most of Japan by its mountain ranges. It is stunningly beautiful though, and the people, both young and old, you find here often have fascinating stories to tell. Forming close Japanese friendships may take some time, but the rewards are worth it. Some of the local people are naturally reserved, and as such, a close relationship can be slow to develop. On the other hand, many people are very interested in other countries and cultures, so you may make friends very quickly! For many of Shimane’s residents, you may be one of only a handful of foreigners they have ever met (or even the first!) and they could be curious about your home or culture. Many of their views of the world outside of Japan may have been colored by what they have seen at the movies and on TV. You may be asked questions that seem naïve or to which the answer seems obvious. You may be praised for being able to use chop sticks by the same person every time you share a meal with them. But remember, that’s why you’re coming: to educate. Be patient and explain clearly and people will respect and be appreciative of your explanation.

One of the main goals of the JET Programme is to foster innovation within the English educational system and promote internationalization. Shimane Prefecture is one of the prefectures which can benefit from these goals the most.
Transport In Shimane

Shimane is waiting for you to explore it. Here’s a brief guide to transport around Shimane.

**Driver’s License/Driving • 運転免許、運転**
It is highly recommended that you obtain and bring an International Driver’s License (IDP) before you come to Japan, even if you do not currently plan on driving. IDPs are valid for twelve (12) months from your arrival date and must be obtained in your home country. After twelve months you will need to obtain a Japanese license. When applying for a Japanese license you will need to prove that you have held a license for at least three months before leaving your home country and that the license has not expired. Basic procedure is an interview (in Japanese – interpreters are available), followed by a driving test, although some countries require only an interview. If you think your JET journey might last longer than a year, consider taking any former recent-renewed licences/documents with you in order to obtain a Japanese licence.

Almost every JET in Shimane has a license/IDP and the majority have their own cars. We are a rural prefecture and, although you may be able to reach your school(s) or office on foot or by bike, in order to socialize and shop you may need to drive. We advise you to contact your predecessor and/or Contracting Organization and ask them if you will need a car for work and how far away you will be living from public transport. Note that some JETs may receive a car from their Contracting Organization, but it is not common.

In Japan, cars drive on the left-hand side of the road. If you are used to driving on the right-hand side, there may be an adjustment period, but it is much easier than many perceive. As for road signs, most of them have English written on them, or are pictograms, so that too should be little cause for concern. Snow tires/chains are required in the winter months (December-February). It is illegal to operate a vehicle with any alcohol in your system. Speed limits vary between 40-50km/h (25-30mph) for regular roads and 70-80km/h (43-50mph) for expressways/highways.

**Cost of a Car • 自動車の値段**
Cars are divided into two types; the yellow plate, or ‘keijidosha’ (軽自動, light car) and the white plate car, or ‘futsusha’ (普通車, regular car). Yellow plates are small cars with low-powered engines, while white plate cars are larger with more powerful engines. A yellow-plate is cheaper (initial cost, tax, fuel and so on), however, white plates generally have better safety features, should you get into an accident.

**Costs Associated With Owning A Car in Japan:**
**Petrol/Gas:** The average cost is approximately 127yen/liter (March 2017). Price varies depending on whether the station is a self-service or a staffed station, where the gas is pumped for you.

**Car Insurance:** Insurance will probably be around ¥ 70,000/year, depending on a variety of factors. It is considerably cheaper if you are over 30 years old. Your CO or predecessor can provide you with advice on insurance.

**Shaken:** Shaken (車検) is equivalent to a road registration fee and is due every two years. It is illegal to drive a vehicle without up-to-date shaken. The average cost ranges between ¥ 60,000 and ¥ 150,000, with the amount differing based on things like age and size of the vehicle. Ask the previous owner to get a general idea of when and how much you will be expected to pay.

**Tax:** There is both a national tax and a prefectural tax imposed on car owners each year around June. Typically, a yellow plate is around ¥7,500 yen and a white plate around ¥33,000.

**Car Parking:** Before you can buy a futsusha you must provide proof that you have a place in which to park it within one kilometer of your home. Depending on your accommodation, you may have to pay for a
parking space yourself. Ask your CO about this before buying a car.

**Disposal:** If the time comes where you have to dispose of your car, costs in the range of ¥10,000 - ¥30,000 could be involved, depending on how much of the process you are prepared to do yourself. Try asking your supervisor for help, though as some wreckers may even pay you for disposing of it.

**Obtaining A Car ・自動車の取得**

You can ask your predecessor if they are selling their car, or know of anybody trying to. Although there have been very few problems with this in the past, it's important to ask questions about any problems, or when shaken is due and how much it costs. It is also a good idea to request photos. You are under no obligation to purchase your predecessor’s, or another JET’s, vehicle. You can also purchase a car from a car dealership.

Alternatively, there are a few places you can lease a car from, for a monthly fee. There is one in Izumo City that is quite popular among JETs. The leasing fee generally covers fees, taxes, shaken, oil changes and snow-tire changes, but this varies by agreement. Always check insurance information, as it maybe different to what you have in your home country.

**Trains ・電車**

The JR Sanin Railway Line follows the coast from Yasugi City to Tsuwano Town and there are trains to Yamaguchi, Okayama, Hiroshima, and Tottori. Regular trains take about the same amount of time as driving within Shimane, although there are more expensive Special Express Trains you can use. Express trains can cost up to twice as much as a regular train, however, they can cut 40 minutes or more off of a long journey. Note that trains may stop at smaller stations only a few times per day. There is also the Ichibata train line, which connects Matsue City with Izumo Taisha and Izumo City.

You can use ICOCA or Suica cards on some trains in Shimane (however some gates are manned, not automatic). Between Izumo and Tsuwano, the trains run on diesel fuel, rather than electricity. Do not be surprised if there are only one or two carriages to a train, this is normal.

**Buses ・バス**

Each municipality has its own local bus system. While convenient, you may need some Japanese skills in order to ride them successfully as there is generally little English information available. Night-buses and express busses to larger cities (Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Tokyo) are available from Izumo, Matsue, Hamada, and Masuda Cities. In addition, there is currently a highway bus promotion for foreign visitors running between Matsue and Hiroshima for 500 Yen- Good option for visitors from home.

**Bicycles ・自転車**

Some JET participants are provided with a bicycle by their CO for convenience. Bicycles are ridden on the side of the road or the sidewalk in Japan and helmets are not required for adults. You cannot ride your bicycle if you have alcohol in your system, it is treated as driving a vehicle and the penalties are just as heavy.

If you have any questions, please contact a PA:

- **Oliver Marshall:** shimaneicirpa@gmail.com
- **Alexander Hart-Smith:** shimane-altpa-advisor@shimanet.onmicrosoft.com
Getting to the Oki Islands
～隠岐諸島へ行こう～

If you’ve been placed on the Oki Islands you’re in for a treat. While your predecessor will be able to explain the situation best for you, here is a rough guide to your transport options to and from the islands. For those who aren’t placed in Oki, going to the Oki Islands can be quite an experience, whether it’s the 50 or 100km ultra marathon, the amazing scenery, bull-sumo, work-related, or simply for the experience.

Sea・フェリー
The most common means of getting to, from and around the islands is the ferry service. There are three large ferries. They run between the four inhabited islands and two ports on the mainland. The two mainland ports (Sakaiminato and Shichirui) can be reached by car or bus from Matsue City. Free parking lots are available at both ports. On the large ferries a trip can take anywhere from two and a half to five hours and costs about ¥3,000 each way. Since 2016 however, a subsidy was implemented for Oki residents (including JETs) that has reduced the return ferry to the mainland to 2,650 yen. In addition to the ferries, there is a smaller hydrofoil which will get you to Oki in less than half the time, but at twice the cost (5,630 yen). Be aware, however, the hydrofoil does not run during the winter and is cancelled frequently in times of bad weather. There is also a small, high-speed boat service that runs regularly between the Douzen Islands (Chibu, Nishinoshima and Ama). This service runs into the evening and only costs 300 yen per trip taking 10-15 minutes, making it a great way to do some island hopping. Additionally, if there are waves over four meters forecast, none of the ferries for that day run. Cancellations aren’t overly frequent but happen much more often in the winter months and the typhoon season, although occasionally can happen in other seasons too. If you’ve got onward connections you must make, Air (from Dougo) is your safest route. The ferry website is here.

Air・飛行機
There is a small airport on Dougo Island which has daily flights to Itami Airport (Osaka) and Izumo En-musubi Airport in Shimane. Oki residents are eligible for a discount Booking two to three months in advance, flying to Osaka is similarly priced to ferry and bus travel and much more convenient and if you’ve got planned transport connections (especially in Winter) it can be cancelled but is generally more reliable than the ferry. However, usually this method is significantly more expensive than the ferries. Dozen JETs wishing to use the airport can get the morning fast ferry/rainbow to Dougo the morning their flight leaves.

Car・車
Obviously you can’t get to the islands by car, but the islands are bigger than you might expect and you will probably need one to see everything once you’re there. Transporting your car on the ferry costs between ¥15,000 and ¥30,000 each way depending on the car’s size, so we recommend making use of the car rental services on the islands and sightseeing tours which can be arranged in advance.

Oki is an unforgettable place, and well worth the visit once you’ve settled in to Shimane.

If you have any questions, please contact a PA:
Alexander Hart-Smith (Former Oki Dogo ALT): shimane-altpa-advisor@shimanet.onmicrosoft.com
Oliver Marshall: shimanecirpa@gmail.com
Packing
How to Fit a Life in a Suitcase

Packing up your life into a suitcase or two and a few boxes can be tough. While it may be difficult to leave things behind, be careful not to pack too much. Discuss with your predecessor how much space you have in your new accommodation, what will be left for you, and what, if anything, they are willing to sell to you. Bear in mind that you are under no obligation to buy anything from your predecessor.

**Clothes • 洋服**
- It is recommended that you only pack summer clothes in your suitcase(s) and arrange for winter clothes to be sent separately. If you’re coming in April it may still be a little cold, but it will quickly get warm once you’ve arrived.
- If you wear large size clothes, be aware that sizes in Japanese will be generally smaller than in your home country. There are plus sized stores and sections in department stores, but the selection may be limited. This can especially be issue for people with broad shoulders, large breasts, or wide hips.
- 100% natural fiber clothing is generally difficult to find here, so bring some from home if it is important to you.
- Bring at least one suit. Business attire is required at both the Tokyo and the Shimane Orientations. While not all ALTs may not be required to wear them everyday at work, suits will still be expected at several events throughout the school year.
- If you wear larger shoe sizes (males over US size 10, females over US size 8), or have wide feet, you may have difficulty fitting into shoes (and slippers) in Shimane.
- Shoes that can be easily taken off and put on are best, as it will happen a lot – especially for school.

**Suggested Items to Bring/Send:**
- Skiwear (although you can rent everything)
- Long underwear/thermals for winter (although ‘heat-tech’ products are reasonably priced here)
- At least one formal suit and several ‘formal-wear’ outfits
- Bras as they are often padded here
- Swimming wear
- Here is a recommended list of shoes you’ll need: Indoor shoes (to wear at work), Indoor gym shoes, Outdoor shoes (for sports), shoes you will wear during non-work hours, Sandals, flip-flops/thongs/sandals, hiking boots (if you plan to hike)
- Small pocket towels – Summer is hot and having a towel handy can help to keep you dry.

**Toiletries • 日用品**
Most things are available in Japan, but consider the following:
- **Sunscreen:** Japanese sunscreen tends to have alcohol as an ingredient.
- **Deodorant:** Is generally not anti-perspirant, although roll-on varieties are usually available at drug stores all year round. Spray-on anti-perspirant in general is much more commonly found in summer.
- **Prescription medicine/prescriptions:** ask your JET coordinator about the necessary forms.
- **Tampons:** they are slightly different here.
Contact Lens Solution: Western brands are available, but the solution does not always contain the enzyme to remove protein. JETs have had problems with contacts becoming foggy, scratchy and small tears forming on the lenses.

Toothpaste: Many popular brands do not contain fluoride, and some contain sugar. Given that there is also no fluoride in the water here, you may want to bring a supply of toothpaste with you. Otherwise, looking for フッ素 (fusso) in the list of ingredients is your best option.

Face Wash/Moisturizer: Be aware that, although most do not, some brands contain whitening ingredients.

Food ・食べ物
Nowadays, many supermarkets carry Western foods, or foods you can use for Western meals. Before you pack food, bear in mind you may be able to order foreign food online, find it in a supermarket or in one of the foreign food stores in Matsue or Izumo. There are also foreign restaurants and larger foreign food stores in nearby cities such as Hiroshima, Kobe, or Osaka. You can always ask your predecessor, or one of your PAs, about the availability of specific food items or ingredients.

Suggestions for Work ・仕事
Photos: Photos of your family, friends, pets, neighbors, town and so on for introducing yourself.
Holiday Decorations: Small decorations/cards from Halloween, Christmas, Valentine’s Day, etc.
English Grammar Reference: May prove useful when asked specific questions on grammar.
Small ‘Prizes’: Small items such as pens, pencils, stickers are popular prizes to give to students.
English/Japanese Dictionary: May prove valuable in communicating with staff or students.

Electronics ・電子機器
Laptop: Be sure to bring your manuals and disks, in case you have to reformat.
3-to-2 prong converter: most electrical outlets in Japan have TWO prongs, not three. Although the voltage is different, the Japanese 2-prong outlets can take 2-prong North American plugs. Always check the adapters on appliances to ensure the voltage/current in Japan will work.

The most important things to pack are an open mind, patience and flexibility!

**Tokyo Orientation**
At Tokyo Orientation you will receive a lot of extra material - books, handouts, and general freebies. Please be sure to leave space in your bag to put these handouts and books!
Souvenirs

The purchase of souvenirs is often a small, yet stressful point for new JETs. Shimane JETs have worked together to create a list of souvenirs from their home countries that were well received. This is a guide to provide you with ideas, should you be struggling with ideas for what to buy. Your colleagues will be very appreciative of anything you give, so spending a large amount of money on gifts is unnecessary. These gifts are meant to be tokens of your respect. Ideally, you should distribute them soon after your arrival at your CO but nobody will mind if you wait for a few days. Ideally, bring something for your direct supervisor, your principal(s) and a joint gift for the rest of the staff. If you find that you have many schools, you may need to rethink present size, or reconsider giving something to everyone. If you’re a CIR, it’s a good idea to find out from your predecessor who should be getting gifts from your office.

Alcohol is a fine gift, but remember not everyone drinks. It is best to reserve small gifts such as postcards, coins or stickers for prizes in class. Some schools will not allow you to give out candy so check with your predecessor before bringing a large supply with you. Avoid foods that will melt (it’ll be hot), extremely sweet foods (Japanese people tend not to like them), and beef jerky (readily available here and usually a snack while drinking alcohol). If you’re stuck for ideas, stick to the most common souvenir in Japan: get some sort of food that is individually wrapped.

If you would like any tips, suggestions, or advice on what souvenirs to bring, please contact Alex or Oliver.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The U.S.A.</td>
<td><strong>Food:</strong> Candy, wine, dried fruits, tins of Jelly Belly’s that are individually wrapped inside and coffee from local grinders. <strong>Other:</strong> Baseball, NBA, NFL items, magazines, picture books, postcards, stamps, coins, plastic replicas of the Statue of Liberty/White House, shot glasses with logos, Bath Shop lotions, soaps, perfume or cosmetic samples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Anything food individually wrapped and featuring a Kiwi, honey, wine, magazines, photo calendars, Marmite (although not always liked by Japanese people), posters, stuffed Kiwi, Maori storybooks, postcards, other Maori items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The U.K.</td>
<td>Anything with a Union Jack or the Royal Family on it, flags, postcards, magnets, soccer-related items, The Beatles paraphernalia, kilts, bagpipes, shortbread, stamps, coins, miniature Big Ben or Buckingham Palace figures.</td>
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Computers & Internet

Computer and internet access at work・仕事でパソコン
You may have some access to computers at work, although the age, speed, and capacity of the machine will vary between workplaces. For ALTs, computer access varies greatly. You may find you have to share a computer, or internet access with several staff. Some people bring their own computers to use. Some people are not allowed to use the school’s internet service. Check with your predecessor for the specifics of your situation. CIRs typically have access to their own office computer with (sometimes restricted) internet access, as many offices consider computer access essential for CIRs to complete their duties.

Computers in Japan・日本のパソコン
• You may be wondering whether you should bring a computer from home, buy a new one before you come, or wait until you get to Japan? We can’t answer that for you, but here are some tips/reminders if you’re bringing a computer:
  • Japanese electrical current runs at 100V 50/60Hz. Check your computer’s power adapter and if it reads “AC 100V-240V” it will work, assuming the plug fits into Japanese socket.
  • Japanese sockets are parallel two-pronged, identical to North American sockets. Otherwise, you will need an adaptor. There is no ‘third prong’ in Japan.
  • For non Mac-users, Global IME software can be downloaded free of charge from the Microsoft Downloads website or from Google, allowing you to read and input Japanese characters on your computer or use English keystrokes on a Japanese keyboard.
  • Remember to bring the ‘system restore’ disks and any personal software you frequently use (including software keys, licenses and passwords) in case any problems arise while you are in Japan.

Now for some tips for if you plan on buying a computer after your arrival:
• Good deals can be found on the internet. For example, as a JET you will be entitled to an education discount for a number of Apple products and they deliver to anywhere in Japan: www.apple.jp
• While English software can be used on Japanese computers, unless you buy and install an English operating system, the start menu and other Windows menus, error messages, and so on will be in Japanese.
• Japanese keyboards differ to non-Japanese ones in placement of certain buttons and button size, among other things.
Stores in Shimane are unaccustomed to dealing with customers who want English operating systems and software installed on their computer. You may find it easier to organize this in larger cities, like Hiroshima, Osaka, or Tokyo.

Internet Access at Home・自宅でインターネット
Please be aware internet connections can involve a lot of paperwork and take a long time to get set up in Japan. Some former JETs have waited as long as 1-2 months for a connection. Contact your predecessor for more information.

Broadband Connection:
Fibre internet (Often labeled Hikari Fibre) is the most common way Shimane JETs access the internet, no phone line is required and the service can be established via NTT West’s English helpline. Costs are typically around ¥5,000 a month but can be cheaper when combined with a cellphone plan. Installation costs vary from ¥0 to ¥8,000 (depending on contract length) and monthly charges range from ¥3,000 to ¥8,000. This price usually includes equipment rental, in addition to the basic ¥1500 – ¥3000 charge.
Cable Internet Access: ‘Hikari Faiba’ (ファイバー, Fibre Optic) access can be more expensive than ADSL and may not be available in more rural areas. You may also be required to obtain permission from your landlord in order to have this installed, if it is not already installed in your building.

Mobile Phones・ケータイ電話
Mobile internet reception can vary quite a bit across Shimane depending on the provider (4G/LTE are most common now). In terms of overall coverage, the company Docomo has the best coverage, Au by KDDI a close second, and SoftBank third (particularly poor in Oki) but each has different phone models available. Check with your supervisor or local JETs about which company they recommend for your area.

Costs and plans vary by provider as well. Most phone models will have English menu options available, so if it’s important to you, be sure to confirm with a sales representative before making a purchase. Obtaining a phone can take several hours in Japan and often requires quite complex Japanese to fully understand what you are signing up for, so your supervisor or another JET may offer to go with you to assist.

MNVOs, or budget providers are significantly cheaper than the big providers, however they remain uncommon among the Japanese populace and to use them you will probably need to set up the connection yourself using Japanese without help from your supervisor who may be unfamiliar with the process. If you want to use this method, ensure your phone from home is unlocked and will work on the networks in Japan.

See everything you need to know about cellphones here.

Public Terminals・インターネットカフェなど
Facilities where you can use the internet such as internet cafes, public libraries, and government centres are available in cities, towns, and villages around Shimane. Please ask the locals in your area after you arrive.

For more specific questions and details, please e-mail the PAs at:
Oliver Marshall: shimanecirpa@gmail.com
Alexander Hart-Smith: shimane-altpa-advisor@shimanet.onmicrosoft.com
Advice for ALTs

Advice For Elementary School (ES) ALTs
By former Ōda ALT Erin Gosselin
Many Junior High School (JHS) ALTs visit elementary schools at least once a month, and the number of ES-only ALTs is on the rise. Your responsibilities at ES may or may not involve lesson planning, but teachers will often ask for advice regarding target vocabulary, sentences, and games. Unlike JHS and Senior High School (SHS), ES teachers rarely speak much English and must rely heavily on the ALT for English classes. Sometimes you may be asked to lead a class on your own or with little assistance from the Home Room Teacher (HRT). You may be asked to speak about customs, holidays, and school life in your home country. You may also be asked to sing, dance, and run around with the children. Compared to JHS and SHS ALTs, ES ALTs have relatively few responsibilities. However, your most important responsibility is to be energetic! Your students will be excited to see you, so smile, relax, and don't be afraid to act a little silly.

Advice for Junior High School (JHS) ALTs
By former Izumo ALT Edward Phillips
Most JHS ALTs will have multiple schools that they visit. The number and frequency of the schools visited varies depending on the Contracting Agency. The JHS ALT’s responsibilities at school vary widely. The most common classroom responsibility is pronunciation practice. This can be a challenging task, as many people want to do more. Other responsibilities can include, but aren’t limited to, making and updating English boards, checking papers, one-on-one speaking tests, and speech contest practice. The place that many JHS ALTs feel they contribute the most is games and activities. I highly recommend buying a notebook and filling it with easy games and activities, as you never know when you will be asked if you have a game to take up 5 or so minutes. You may even be asked for an activity in class. One thing to note, though, is that the level of your students will vary, but don’t expect super students who can follow any and everything said in English. There will be students who excel, but there will also be students who don’t care. Most of the students, however, will try, but don’t have the ability to do anything complex, especially if there’s no time for you to demonstrate your instructions. The best advice I can give is to remember that you are an assistant and your job is to assist your JTEs. They may be very busy and their time to talk with you is generally very limited. It helps to clearly understand your and your JTEs’ responsibilities and expectations. Be proactive and find your own niche and you will have an edifying and enlightening experience.

Advice For Senior High School (SHS) ALTs
By former Matsue ALT Sarah-Jane Blenkhorn
As an ALT in senior high school, your workload may involve planning lessons or class syllabuses, organizing special class projects, making tests, recording listening material, assisting JTEs with questions about English usage and grammar, teaching English classes, running an English club and helping students prepare for speeches, interviews, special tests, debates and the like. You will often have more responsibility than your ES and JHS counterparts. It’s important to be adaptable. Keep notes about your lessons and other activities (what you did, how it went, who you taught with, etc.), especially if you work in multiple schools or with multiple JTEs. It’s a useful reflective tool for remembering what worked and what didn’t.

Don’t hesitate to ask questions and get clarification about your job, schedule and work environment when you need it, but be aware that your co-workers are usually very busy and you need to have initiative. The respect and trust of your coworkers is something that is earned, so stay positive and professional, and offer respect in return. If you’re organized and diligent in your work, it will be noticed and appreciated. Have a vision for what your students will accomplish, and create a structure for your classes. Accept that some of your ideas won’t be used and some activities you try won’t work, but don’t let it bother you. As long as you’re trying to stimulate your students in a way that’s engaging and positive, then go for it!

Be sure to get involved in the school community and attend school events as well. Creating an interactive environment and showing students the practical use of English (not just as a subject) should be a priority for ALTs.

There are 17 SHS ALTs in Shimane, all with unique perspectives and valuable experience to share. Ask us if you need help, advice, or a sympathetic ear. This document here, gives some further perspectives from Shimane SHS ALTs.
JTEs & ALTs: A Working Relationship

JTEs’ Busy Schedules
Japanese Teachers of English (JTE) are extremely busy. Many would like more time to speak with ALTs, but it can be difficult due to their many responsibilities at the school. In addition to preparing and teaching classes, they are also responsible for administrative work, student discipline, and coaching clubs. Often, teachers who are busy during the school day would like to meet with ALTs after 4 o’clock, but are hesitant to ask due to ALT’s contracted hours.

Relationships with your JTEs
You may expect, upon arrival at your new job, to receive a work manual or detailed supervision from a colleague. However, this is rarely the case in Japan. The ALT’s role will be influenced by the JTE’s teaching style, the relationship between the ALT and JTE, and the abilities of both. Classes are most successful when the JTE and ALT understand each others’ teaching styles and methods. In some cases, it may take a few months or even longer to acquire that level of understanding. Some JTEs are frustrated with the infrequency of ALT visits to their school. Planning for schools you visit infrequently can require some forethought and preparation on your behalf. Please, try to be patient and work hard to foster positive relationships with your colleagues.

Input from ALTs
Generally, JTEs will have more teaching experience than ALTs, especially at first. JTEs appreciate it when ALTs make an effort to adjust to the Japanese school system. Although some JTEs may seem unwilling to implement ideas they perceive as difficult, if you have a good relationship, you may be able to persuade some teachers. However, at the same time, it is important not to take advantage of a good relationship and to realize when to accept no as an answer.

Professionalism
Teachers in Japan generally have a lot of respect for taking on the responsibilities of a teaching position. They take these responsibilities very seriously, and ALTs are expected to do the same. Some teachers in Japan have a negative view of the JET Programme because previous participants’ behavior has given an impression of coming to Japan for fun or money, with no real interest in their job. Professionalism in all aspects can go a long way towards dispelling this negative view.

Communication
You may find, especially at first, that you have a lot of time to sit idle at your desk. JTEs may have any number of tasks they would appreciate help with, but are hesitant to ask, so try offering your help. JTEs may be unable to incorporate all of your ideas for lessons, and may become uncomfortable if you push rejected ideas too strongly, as most Japanese people tend to avoid argument and conflict. JTEs also appreciate participation in lunch breaks, after school events, and ‘corridor conversations’ with the students.

Sensitivity
In Japan direct instructions are not always given. So, being able to read a situation will be a valuable asset. Sometimes volunteering is helpful, and sometimes it is obtrusive. While this may seem like a form of mind reading at first, as you acclimate to the culture, you will begin to recognize social cues that will make this easier to do. Do not be afraid to ask questions, often your supervisor and teachers may assume you know about something when you don’t.
Advice for CIRs

In August 2018, there will be 26 CIRs in Shimane Prefecture – the most of any Prefecture in Japan. CIRs in Shimane come from China, South Korea, India, Ireland, Poland, Australia, the United States of America, the UK, Russia, France, and Finland. This range of nationalities allows for a variety of international events throughout the prefecture. Despite Shimane being one of the most rural prefectures in Japan, or perhaps because of it, the prefecture and its municipalities tend to encourage local communities to increase their international knowledge through exchange experiences with foreign residents. Shimane also has friendship ties with 14 areas in China and 8 in Korea, as well as a number of cities in other countries around the world, as seen below.

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<th>Shimane Municipality</th>
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<td>Izumo City (Taki Town)</td>
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<td>Shimane Prefecture</td>
<td>Jilin Province (China), Ningxia-Hui Autonomous Region (China), Primorsky Territory (Russia)</td>
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Life as a CIR in Shimane・島根の国際交流員の生活
CIRs in Shimane are placed in various offices such as town halls and government offices. The type of work CIRs are assigned depends largely on their Contracting Organization and what emphasis the CO places on internationalization. As such, the budgets, work hours, and expectations you will experience differ greatly between workplaces. The best source of information is your predecessor. Contact them to find out about your responsibilities, office staff, scheduled events, and so on. Doing so will help you form a realistic idea of what to expect.
Self-Planned Events ・自主企画
Your CO may expect you to plan a certain number of events each year, which you may have to suggest yourself. Or, events may be discouraged. Budgets play a large role in these expectations, but when planning an event the content is generally decided by the CIR. These are great opportunities to encourage your office to be adventurous. While your supervisors may be hesitant to approve events that differ from your predecessor’s, if your first few events go well, your supervisor may be more eager to approve future events.

Workload ・仕事量
Throughout the year, your workload can fluctuate drastically. If you find yourself with a lack of work, it is a good idea to take advantage of the down time to plan new projects, work on presentation resources, study Japanese, and so on.

Expectations ・期待
An important factor that needs mentioning is the expectations of the community. Shimane is a rural Prefecture and, although there are around 6,000 ‘foreign’ residents (of which 85 are JET participants), we are still a rare sight for some people. You may experience periods where you feel isolated. On the other hand, in rural Japan, you can not help but be surrounded by the warmth and genuine kindness of people who want to get to know you. It is important to build a solid network of both Japanese and foreign friends.

Your first few weeks in the office may be slow due to people taking their Golden Week holidays, or not wanting to overload you with too much work. Take this time to read your predecessor’s files, hone your Japanese skills, and acclimatize to your new environment. Once you have a better idea of your job’s requirements you can start to take on more responsibilities. Your supervisor will probably want you to enjoy work and initiate ideas and events. It may take some time to get settled into your new office, but be patient as there are many rewards!

Things to Bring ・持ってくるもの
Photos/ posters/ postcards/ picture books/ videos: These can be invaluable to use at school visits or presentations. Pictures of family, friends, school life, weddings, famous cities, landscapes, festivals, animals, and so on are great for introducing your culture and country.
Maps/flags/coins/notes/stamps: Props or items to see, hold, and examine can give presentations a more lasting impression.
Gifts/ Prizes: It is a good idea to bring small souvenirs to hand out at events you may organize or at schools, such as stickers, pins, or pencils.
Costumes/Traditional Dress: These can be worn or shown at presentations, school visits, and festivals.
Music: Your country’s National Anthem, Christmas carols, nursery rhymes, traditional songs, or popular music from home on a CD or MP3 player.
Recipes: You may be asked or expected to cook a meal or two from your home country.
Japanese textbooks and dictionaries: These can be invaluable while translating or interpreting and also a useful study tool, especially if you aim to pass a Japanese Language test while living in Japan.
Attire ・洋服
You probably will not need more than one or two suits, although make sure they are in a dark colour. Suits are generally worn at JET/CLAIR conferences and when interpreting or at formal events. Several nice skirts/pants and some business shirts will be sufficient for most offices. Offices generally follow ‘Cool Biz’, which allows more informal clothing (short sleeves, no necktie) during the Summer months. The best advice is to ask your predecessor for what sort of appearance is expected in your new office.

Japanese Ability ・日本語能力
CIRs have differing nationalities, ages, educational backgrounds and work experiences. Naturally, each person’s cultural understanding and language ability will vary. CLAIR provides a language textbook for CIRs that can be very useful, especially if you’ve never worked in a professional Japanese work environment before. Three major dialects are spoken in Shimane (one for each region: Izumo-ben, Iwami-ben, Oki-ben), although office conversations generally take place in standard Japanese. Don’t worry, though, as you will soon adjust to the dialect of your region.

As you begin to adjust to the language and culture, your co-workers may assume that you understand everything and expect you to act as a perfect Japanese person. This can cause both miscommunication and frustration. Remember, you are here to internationalize, so do not be afraid to be yourself. If you do not feel like you are not being completely understood or informed ask someone in your office (or one of the PAs). Doing so will avoid problems down the road. Always remember that you have passed the selection process and so your Japanese ability has been deemed sufficient to complete your job. Have confidence in yourself and your abilities; if you always aim to improve, you should find work much easier.

If you have any questions about working as a CIR in Shimane, please contact:
Oliver Marshall, CIR-PA: shimanecirpa@gmail.com
Food Tips & Advice

There are many traditional foods in Shimane – including plenty of seafood. Many supermarkets and stores sell foreign foods and there are plenty of ethnic restaurants. The selection of foreign foods in Shimane is limited, when compared to the larger cities, but has been growing in recent years. Even the tiniest village grocery store will have a spaghetti and sauce section. You can always be adventurous and try cooking some Japanese meals!

Places to buy foreign food

**Jupiter:** Your best bet for foreign food in Shimane. Located in Matsue-shi JR Station, you’ll find muesli, curry paste, confectionary, wine, spices, spreads, coffee and cheese.

**Lapin:** With four stores in Matsue City, you can find spices, muesli, Doritos, chili, tacos, chocolate, Indian curry, lentils, tortillas, and more.

**Kaldi:** Located at Youme Town in Izumo City, you can find guacamole powder, chocolate, bagels, tacos, chocolate, imported wines, cheese, Vegemite, Tim Tams, and coffee.

**Other supermarkets:** Across Shimane supermarkets have been known to stock various foreign foods, too – taco shells, naan, spices, tortillas, and mozzarella cheese, for example. You’ll be surprised what you might find!

**Hiroshima:** Down south, the big department stores in Hiroshima City have a decent selection of foreign foods in their basements. You can also check out Peter Pan in the Hondori Arcade or Jupiter at the train station and also the bus centre for foreign goodness.

**Foreign Buyer’s Club:** Based in Kobe, orders are sent by delivery service within 2-5 days. Dry, cool and frozen foods are available. For more information visit their website: [http://www.fbcusa.com](http://www.fbcusa.com)

**Tengu Natural Foods:** A variety of organic foods, gluten free, fair trade food can be ordered online at: [http://store.alishan.jp/index.php?main_page=index&language=en](http://store.alishan.jp/index.php?main_page=index&language=en)

**Flying Pig:** Independent site offering access to Costco Wharehouses through online shopping found at: [https://www.theflyingpig.com/](https://www.theflyingpig.com/)

**Costco:** There’s a store in Fukuoka and Hiroshima. The Hiroshima store charges ¥3,000 for parking, but it is free if you spend more than ¥10,000 in-store.

**Amazon JP:** Amazon(and their Japanese competitor, Rakuten) has pretty much everything you could ever ask for including a good selection of foreign food, check it out at: [http://www.amazon.co.jp](http://www.amazon.co.jp) and [http://www.rakuten.co.jp](http://www.rakuten.co.jp)

Foreign Restaurants

Shimane is home to a variety of Italian, French, Korean, Chinese, Thai, Indian, and Sri Lankan restaurants as well as pizza and burger restaurants, McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, Starbucks, Baskin Robins, and Tulley’s. We have no Subway, or any Mexican restaurants that JETs are aware of (although several places sell tacos and/or quesadillas). However, if you live in a smaller town/village, you may have to travel to one of the larger cities to enjoy non-Japanese food at a restaurant.

Staples

You should have little issues in finding the following staples in your local supermarkets: yogurt, cheese, bottled water, low-fat milk, mustard/ketchup/mayo, soft drinks, fresh vegetables, eggs, butter/margarine, chicken/pork/beef/fish, breads, flour, sugar, baking soda, and fruits. Prices may be more or less expensive than back home, however.
Japanese Foods
Some popular Japanese foods that we recommend you try:

**Donburi 丼**: Rice served in a deep bowl, topped with a meat, such as chicken or pork, with a sauce poured over the top.

**Okonomiyaki お好み焼き**: Batter is poured onto a mixture of meat, seafood, noodles and cabbage and prepared like an omelette. A sweet-tangy sauce, along with mayonnaise is spread on top.

**Sushi 寿司**: Fresh raw pieces of fish are placed on a small mound of rice seasoned with vinegar. These pieces are then dipped into a mixture of soy sauce and wasabi, with ginger as a garnish.

**Sukiyaki すき焼き**: This is a popular winter dish where sliced beef, vegetables and noodles, are simmered in a mixture of soy sauce, sugar and sake.

**Tempura 天ぷら**: A variety of fish and vegetables that are dipped in a light batter and fried to a golden brown. A light dipping sauce is served on the side.

**Tonkatsu トンカツ**: Crumbed pork cutlets fried golden brown, served on a bed of shredded cabbage. A sesame flavoured sauce is poured on top. Usually accompanied by a bowl of rice and miso soup.

**Yakiniku 焼き肉**: Popular in summer, these thin slices of beef, chicken, pork and various vegetables are grilled on a BBQ and then dipped into a tangy sauce.

**Yakitori 焼き鳥**: Pieces of chicken, beef, pork and vegetables are grilled on a bamboo skewer with a sauce poured lightly over the skewers.

Unusual, but tasty Japanese foods:

**Natto 納豆**: Fermented soybeans, usually eaten with rice at breakfast.

**Umeboshi 梅干**: A sour pinkish-red picked plum, often eaten on rice.

**Tsukemono 漬物**: A variety of pickled vegetables, served as a side dish.

**Konnyaku コンニャク**: Also known as ‘devil’s tongue’, this jelly-like food is made from taro root. Usually greyish-brown in colour, it can come in the shape of blocks and noodles. It is very healthy, contains no calories and is often used in soups.

Japanese Ingredients
If you are into Japanese cooking, below is a list of some commonly used ingredients.

**Dashi ダシ**: This is a stock made from dried fish shavings and kelp that is used as a base in most soups and dipping sauces.

**Miso 味噌**: A thick paste made from fermented soybeans, used to make miso soup, salad dressings and other sauces for meat and tofu.

**Noodles 麺**: Most often made from flour or buckwheat, some of the better known types include: udon, soba, ramen, and sōmen.

**Sake 酒**: Dry rice wine that is added to stir-fried vegetables or soup.

**Nori ノリ**: Dried seaweed is used for sushi, onigiri (rice ball) and sometimes crushed and sprinkled on top of rice.

**Wakame ワカメ**: Seaweed that is found in miso soup.

*These are just a few of the hundreds of Japanese dishes that you can try during your stay in Japan. Always remember, you do not have to eat anything you are uncomfortable eating. Japanese people tend to be very understanding about other people’s likes and dislikes.*
Being A Vegetarian In Japan

Maintaining a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle in Japan is achievable. However, it is likely to be more difficult than in your home country. It is by no means impossible; it just takes a little more work. There is an increasing awareness of vegetarianism in rural Japan, and while it is usually met with curiosity, there may also be some confusion. Because the term “vegetarian” has different meanings to different people, it’s often more helpful to state specifically what you choose and choose not to eat. Many JETs use these opportunities to teach people about being a vegetarian or vegan.

A tremendous resource for living as a vegetarian or vegan in Japan is the AJET special interest group, VegJET. Check out their Facebook page here for guides to Japanese foods and ingredient translations, for restaurant recommendations, and to ask questions and get advice.

Eating Out • 外食
As is true with anywhere you go, food you don’t prepare yourself will be the most problematic. Be aware that nearly all dishes, regardless of how “meat-free” they look, will have been prepared using a meat or fish stock. You must be very specific when asking questions about the menu. Simply saying “I’m a vegetarian” is usually insufficient. The terms “vegetarian,” “meat” and “animal” may all be interpreted differently by different people. It isn’t uncommon to ask for a salad with no meat and get one covered in tuna and bonito flakes. It’s also important to be careful with the wording of your question, although many dishes might not contain meat they may be used with meat products (eg. Meat-flavoured broth) it is important to determine the “~’dashi’ eg. nikudashi means meat broth.

If you haven’t already, you should learn the words for different types of meat (with pork, remember to specify ham and bacon), seafood (fish, crab, octopus, etc.), and other animal products (milk, eggs, shortening, whey, etc) because you may have to list some of these things when explaining your dietary restrictions. Another way to describe yourself is “saishoku-shugisha,” a term referring to the traditional Buddhist monk’s diet. However, because they also avoid garlic and onion, this may put more limitations on what you can eat than you intended.

Don’t forget to ask whether or not your dish includes katsuo, or bonito flakes. These fish flakes, often sprinkled atop the unlikeliest of foods, may ruin a perfectly good meatless dish.

School Lunch • 給食
As a junior high school ALT, and sometimes as a CIR, you will be offered school lunches to eat with the staff and students. If you decide to try school lunches, you will find that most of them will have a substantial amount of meat or fish, either as a dish or mixed in with soups and salads. On some days you may only be able to eat a bowl of rice or a piece of bread. Most vegetarians and vegans opt to bring their own lunches to school, however, keep in mind that any food you bring is expected to be healthy.

Enkais (Work Parties) • 宴会
When you attend an enkai with your colleagues, it shouldn’t be a problem for the restaurant to prepare a special vegetarian meal for you. Just remind your supervisor of your specific dietary restrictions in advance of the enkai so they can give the restaurant sufficient advance notice. Usually, restaurants will prepare a nice meal for you with a great selection of foods. However, it is always possible for a piece of fish or meat to be overlooked, so ask questions if you’re unsure of something on your plate. The same can be done when the school or office orders in bento (box lunches) for special occasions, so don’t hesitate to ask!
Make sure your co-workers know that although you may not be able to share a full meal with them, that you still enjoy their company and want to be invited to social gatherings. Sometimes Japanese people are unsure of your eating habits and are afraid that you might be hungry at dinners, etc. Be honest and let them know you are fine eating rice and other small vegetarian dishes that may be available.

Food Shopping • 買い物
Cooking for yourself is easier than going out, but navigating your way through the local grocery store might pose some difficulties. For example, in order to scan an ingredient label, it helps to be familiar with the handful of kanji characters for meat 肉, bird 鳥 and fish 魚. It may be helpful to find a fluent JET or Japanese friend to shop with you for the first few weeks and using the google translate live camera translation can be a huge help. Again, the VegJET group on Facebook is an incredible resource for ingredient guides and translations. You can even snap a photo of an ingredient label, and community members will rush to provide you with a translation.

While it is not recommended to use up valuable packing space for food, if you enjoy cooking at home, bringing a couple of packets of stock might be useful as even vegetable stock in Japan contains meat. If you regularly take a nutritional supplement, such as Vitamin B12, you should bring enough for at least several months. While supplements are available in Japan, it may be difficult to determine whether the nutrient is from a plant or animal source.

There are also many online stores where you can find vegetarian or vegan foods. iHerb offers bulk and organic foods, as well as nutritional supplements and cosmetics. Indojin sells bulk Indian ingredients such as dried lentils and chickpeas. Amazon Japan also has a grocery section. This link provides good info about vegetarian combini food.

Visiting Someone’s Home • 訪問
Japanese people are very accommodating and will always try hard to cater for you if you visit their home. However, this will likely be the first time they have hosted a vegetarian or vegan and it usually causes a bit of anxiety about what to cook for you. Suggesting Japanese dishes such as udon or soba (noodles), okonomiyaki (fried noodle pancake), temakizushi (a hand-rolled sushi roll that allows each person to choose their own ingredients) or tempura (fried vegetables) or simple foreign dishes like pasta greatly help to put their minds at ease.

Lifestyle • 生活
If you choose to avoid products made with or tested on animals, it can add another layer of difficulty to life in Japan. However, as with eating a plant-based diet, it’s entirely possible. Be aware that there is no cruelty-free certification for cosmetics or other products in Japan, and you will likely have to buy Western imports. While these may be more expensive or harder to find in Shimane, a day trip to Lush or Costco in Hiroshima can cover you for several months, or you can order online through a website like iHerb.

You may also be invited to visit one of Japan’s many zoos, aquariums, or even a cat or owl café. However, be warned that Japan has significantly more relaxed animal cruelty standards than you may be used to in your home country, and these places may regularly mistreat or exploit their animals. It is your choice whether to visit these places, but if you’ve been invited by a Japanese friend or as part of a school trip, be sure to thank them profusely for wanting to include you.

Finally, there are many friendly vegetarian and vegan JETs living all over the country. If you find you are struggling or have questions, don’t be afraid to ask—the Facebook Groups have a wealth of information!
Medical Matters

Shimane may be a rural prefecture, but it has no shortage of medical facilities. Differences between the Japanese medical system and that of your home country’s may make you anxious, but remember that Japan has one of the longest life expectancies in the world. Most doctors tend to work in hospitals or private clinics rather than in their own practices and aside from dentists, appointments are generally unnecessary.

We have provided a brief summary on the most frequent concerns that JETs have before arriving. If you have questions about medical service once you arrive, don’t hesitate to ask fellow JETs, Japanese friends, or one of the PAs for support.

Communication・コミュニケーション
Language, of course, may be a barrier for you, but so may different assumptions about the doctor/patient relationship. Giving patients information on which to base decisions is not common in Japan; neither is asking about the medication that you have been prescribed, nor asking for a second opinion. It is important to keep in mind these linguistic and cultural differences when visiting a doctor. Although many doctors at hospitals speak at least some English, if you feel you need it, there are also Volunteer Community Interpreters from the Shimane International Center that are available to go with you to ease the communication process.

Privacy・プライバシー
You may be examined in an open plan type setting, especially in a public hospital. You are definitely entitled to ask for a reasonable amount of privacy, so don’t hesitate to ask.

Insurance・保険
Please see the 2018 JET General Information Handbook (GIH) for further information.

Prescription Medications・処方薬
Please bring what you think you are going to need with you. Refer to JET GIH (above) for the maximum allowances for prescription medication. It is helpful to bring a letter from your doctor saying what the prescription is for and a copy of the prescription.

Pharmacies・薬局
Hospitals have their own pharmacies and every municipality has at least one drug store/chemist. All medicine labels are written in Japanese, so it might be difficult for you to understand their purpose or dosage at first. Also, the brands will likely be different to the ones in your home country. So, make sure you confirm any medicine’s usage with your doctor or pharmacist.

Dentists・歯医者
Dental treatment is covered by your insurance. Dentistry in Shimane may not be as advanced as in your home country, so we recommend getting a final check-up before arrival.

Pregnancy・妊娠
Home pregnancy tests are cheap and readily available in Shimane. The ‘Clear Blue’ brand includes directions in English. If you are uncomfortable with store-bought tests, you can also visit a doctor.
**Contraception • 避妊**
Condoms can be found in most convenience stores and chemists. If you have a preferred brand/size, you can bring a supply with you. Other contraceptives are available from doctors. The pill and low-dose pills are legal in Japan, although getting them may require a doctor’s visit and more effort than in many of your home countries. Therefore, we recommend that you bring a supply with you.

**STDs • 性感染症**
Take the same precautions you would in Japan as you would back at home, or in any country. STDs do exist here, and care needs to be taken to protect yourself.

**Abortion • 墮胎**
Abortion is legal in Japan. Technically, terminations are not covered by insurance but your doctor may assist you in making a discrete claim.

**PAP Smears / Gynaecologists • パップスメア**
PAP smears are not routine here for unmarried women under 30. However, they are available in Shimane, and we have had several JETs visit gynecologists and they have had good experiences with their doctors.

**Natural Therapies • 自然療法**
Natural therapies are not widely available in Shimane. Massage is available and onsens (hot spring) may offer massage chairs and herbal pools. Aromatherapy oils are available in the larger towns. You can find vitamins in drug stores and supermarkets, but, as with prescription medication, the brands may differ to those of your home country.

**Workplace Health Checks • 検診**
Your insurance requires you to have a health check at your workplace every year. These are conducted by a travelling team of health professionals. The checks are usually not very private and include urine, blood, eye/hearing tests, and a chest X-ray to detect tuberculosis.

**Vaccinations and Inoculations • 予防接種**
If you plan to stay in Japan, and not travel to any foreign countries, you will be fine with basic vaccinations. However, if you plan to travel to any third world countries, you should find out what vaccinations or inoculations you need, if any. Availability at hospitals can vary, as can price.

Please consult the JET General Information Handbook for more details on medical matters and the limits on prescription medication that you are allowed to bring with you. For more specific information relating to Shimane the PAs can provide assistance(confidentially).
You can contact us through e-mail:
Oliver Marshall: shimane@cirpa@gmail.com
Alexander Hart-Smith: shimane-altpa-advisor@shimanet.onmicrosoft.com

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The Shimane International Center (SIC) coordinates a Volunteer Interpreter Group. The SIC can dispatch a volunteer interpreter to assist a JET participant at the hospital. Also, JET supervisors or English teachers may offer to assist their JET too.
Financial Advice

How much money should I bring to Japan?
After arrival, most JETs will not get paid until the middle of August and sometimes even later so, you will need to bring enough money to live on until then. For the average person, a safe amount is ¥180,000-¥220,000.
This figure assumes you do not intend to go on a shopping spree in the first few weeks. If, however, you intend to buy a car, phone line, or large furniture early on, you will need to bring more money. Traveler's Cheques can be difficult to process at banks here, so bring cash and a credit card (if you have one). You may also be expected to pay up to ¥160,000 as a start-up price for your apartment (ask your predecessor for specific start up costs).
Japan is still very much a cash-based society and many people carry large sums of money on them. It is generally safe to bring cash with you, but please remain as vigilant as you would at home as robberies still do occur. After arrival, try to budget carefully so you avoid running out of money before your first payday.

Banking in Shimane ・島根の銀行
Your supervisor will probably help you open a bank account after your arrival. You may have the choice to open a bank account or a post office account, or one of both. The largest bank in Shimane is the ‘Sanin Gōdō Ginkō’, with the largest amount of ATMs and branches. Other banks, such as Shimane Bank or JA, may have a strong presence only in a specific region of Shimane. You can ask your supervisor for assistance arranging automatic bill payments and salary deposits.
Outside of the Sanin Region, your accounts can be accessed via a convenience store or post office ATM, but not all banks are serviced by all ATMs. Usually, there is a fee of a few hundred yen for using a 3rd party ATM. Consider, signing up for a second bank account either with Japan Net Bank or Shinsei, should you need Visa Debit or English support. Detailed info on the PA resources website here.

Credit Cards ・クレジットカード
Japan is still largely a cash-based society. It is common for people to carry large sums of money with them. Credit card payment is becoming more popular, especially at department stores, but it is still uncommon. If you have a credit card or can secure one in your home country, bring it with you. As a foreigner, obtaining a credit card from a Japanese bank can be difficult, and often needs your supervisor to act as guarantor, which they may be unwilling to do.

Banking Back Home ・母国で銀行
While you are in Japan, it is a good idea to have someone trustworthy monitoring your accounts at home. Adding a relative as a co-signer to your account can give them access to make transactions on your behalf. Alternatively, you can give them a general power of attorney, and they will be able to attend to all of your affairs, as if they were you. Also, don’t forget you can still use online banking from Japan – just remember to bring a copy of your log in details!

Taxes ・税金
The 2018 General Information Handbook provides a reasonably detailed account of the tax situation for each country. For specific questions or concerns before you leave, you can speak with your JET Program Coordinator or contact your local tax authorities. Once you are in Japan, your fellow JETs can be a valuable source of information, since they have had to file taxes from Japan.
Married Life as a JET

Michelle Zimmermann is a former ALT, who lived with her non-JET husband, Khoa, on the tiny island village of Chibu.

It’s been two years since Khoa and I packed up our bags and moved half-way across the world, and what an adventure it has been. We were best friends in high school, college sweethearts, and then became husband and wife in June 2010, two months before I was to leave for Japan. Getting married and then moving to another country within two months was quite the life change, but spending our first year as a married couple in a foreign country has made us stronger.

I have a fairly good command of the Japanese language (studied for 4 years in college), but my husband at first couldn’t extend a conversation past “Konnichiwa.” I had studied abroad for around 6 months while I was in college, so I thought I was fairly aware of what it would be like to live in Japan. Leading up to our big move, I was constantly worried about Khoa, if he would like it in Japan, if he would get used to it quickly, and so on. I wasn’t even worried about myself. To my surprise, it was me who had the harder time adjusting. In retrospect, it might have even been a bad thing that I studied abroad in college because I was filled with so many preconceived notions and expectations. As a result, I was overly disappointed when the good things I thought I would be doing didn’t happen. Khoa, on the other hand, took everything like a champ and welcomed all of the unexpected things that came his way. You never know who will adjust to life in Japan better...

As for my husband finding a job, the short answer is: he hasn’t...at least not in the conventional sense. We live on an island where if you don’t work for the school, the town hall, the bank, or the post office, you are a fisherman with a free, flexible schedule. As a result, most of the odd jobs that Khoa could do are picked up by the fishermen. We’ve made friends here who have hired Khoa from time to time (bailing hay, planting rice...a pretty cool experience), but no actual part-time jobs. Khoa has also taken up photography since coming to Japan, so he enjoys taking walks around the island and taking pictures. He is taking classes online, so that occupies some of his time while I’m at work, but he also does a lot of volunteering around the island. He comes to the kindergarten with me every week (the kids LOOOOVE him...but I have to admit that I get a little sad when his name is always the one that’s screamed first). He also joins my eikaiwa class at night (a great way to meet other English speakers) and joins the elementary school classes once in a while. The elementary school staff adores Khoa and invites him to events (with or without me) and asks him to photograph ceremonies or other events. We also play tennis once a week with some of the parents who live on the island and have established pretty close friendships with the local residents. All of this has been achieved even though Khoa doesn’t speak too much Japanese; it’s really amazing how far a smile and generous nature will get you. Even though paid jobs are few and far between, Khoa has been able to fill his time with lots of volunteer work. If you’re okay with not getting paid, there are plenty of things a non-working significant other can do to occupy and enjoy their time during the day.

We’ve been really enjoying our time together living in Japan; we’re even thinking about continuing into a fourth or even fifth year. Don’t get me wrong, it’s been hard at times, but I feel like this experience has allowed us to grow closer and understand each other on a whole
other level. Living on an island and being so isolated from other foreigners gave us a chance to appreciate and better enjoy each other’s company and has allowed us to focus on each other, without many distractions. Having my best friend to help me through the tough times, the culture shock, not being able to work my own washing machine, and all the other trials that come with living in a foreign country, is the greatest thing I could have asked for. It might sound silly, but the thing that Khoa and I fought about the most was when I would worry about him too much. I would constantly ask him, “Are you sure you’re okay at home? Are you sure you’re happy here? Are you really sure?” I felt like it was my duty to make sure he was happy because I got us into this situation. I landed my dream job, but I didn’t want him to be miserable while I was having a blast. I admit, there are worse fights a couple could have, but me worrying about him too much really did put a strain on our relationship. For those JETs with an unemployed spouse, relax, your significant other came to Japan because they love you/want to live in Japan, don’t worry about them so much!

Being able to share the JET Programme experience with my husband has been the highlight of my life so far. Congrats to the both of you!

**JET With Your Partner**

*By former Yasugi City ALT Greg Stevens*

I initially applied to JET together with my wife. We decided that if one of us didn't make it, we wouldn't go. Only I got in. We went anyway. And so we began our post-college lives together living in a foreign country. Upon arrival, our BOE was more than willing to accommodate both her and I. The hardest thing to find for her was work. Before arriving in Japan, we were told to keep an eye out for English conversation schools, ALT positions, private firms, cram schools, and pre-schools. She eventually settled with a weekly eikaiwa less than an hour a way, to work for a mere hour a week. The pay and time isn't great, but it gives her something to do and she loves working with her students. Eventually she also started doing private lessons here and there and it's now up to four sessions a week. I keep monthly budgets for five categories (gas, groceries, eating out, fun, and other living expenditures), and input purchases into an excel file weekly. I never imagined I would go that far, but after setting it up it only takes me 10-15 minutes a week to maintain. Thanks to this budgeting, we're able to pay the bills, have fun, and go on (sometimes bordering excessive) trips, in addition to saving quite a bit of money. It's doable, you just have to stay on top of it. Alas, having tons of free time and very little knowledge of the local language can be a bad combination. This doubles when the other person in the relationship can speak the language, leading your partner to rely on you for almost everything. One thing I've learned in hindsight is that it's important to encourage your partner's independence. The more your partner can interact with his or her environment, the quicker and smoother the adjustment will go. Luckily, my wife did make some really good friends during her stay. Some are JETs in the area with a daily work schedule similar to mine, but others are Japanese that she met in the community. Your best bet is to make friends with people in your town and find out who speaks English. One of my wife's best friends turned out to be the local English juku teacher. Negative experiences are bound to happen, but try to keep an open mind about whether that's a feature of living in Japan or just normal marriage life. We also had some of the most amazing experiences of our lives, and despite the struggles my wife expressed interest in staying even longer.
Unmarried Life with A Partner

By: Kristin Prostinak – USA, Hamada City ALT; Stacey Wallace – CANADA, former Masuda City ALT; Katy Zaksek – USA, former Kawamoto Town ALT

Katy Zaksek – Unfortunately, CLAIR does not offer much on living with your significant other in Japan. We hope this article helps answer some of your questions. Before we begin, a brief synopsis of our situations:
KP – My boyfriend Kevin and I both applied for JET, I was accepted and he was not. Our plan was for him to find a job hopefully near Hamada. He flew to Japan a few days after I arrived in Shimane on a 90 day US Tourist VISA.
SW – I came to Shimane in 2001, and my boyfriend, Brad, and I had been a couple for 10 months before I left. Once in Shimane, I found Brad a job teaching English at a cram school in my town and he came in the spring of 2002. He taught during the evenings, and applied for JET while he was living here (he had to fly back to Canada to interview). He was accepted in the summer of 2003 and fortunately he was placed in the same town we were living in.
KZ – Craig and I both applied to JET, I was accepted and he wasn’t, but we couldn’t pass up the opportunity...we knew we could make it work. Craig came about one month after me and by that time there was a job!

1. Visas (did you go out of the country every 3 months, etc.)
KP – Kevin immediately started the search for a job and there was nothing available in Hamada. So he tried his luck in Hiroshima Prefecture. He found a cram school company, Nova, which has the reputation of giving out visas like candy, and applied. He was accepted and promptly given a visa. However, the cram school never contacted him, so he basically just got a free visa.
SW – Brad came over on a Canadian working holiday visa that’s valid for one year, but it’s legal only if you are traveling and working various jobs. Brad came to Japan with the job offer from the cram school, but they only sponsored his visa after he had been working for three months. We spent summer vacation in Seoul, South Korea getting the proper documentation. Make sure to double check before you leave that you have all the paperwork. The process for applying/receiving the visa is very easy; it’s just a nuisance to have to go to another country to do so.
KZ – On my first day in Shimane, I met someone who needed to fill his position at a cram school. I took him up on the offer and Craig had a job! He came in August, started working in late September and we went to the US in November to change his visa status. Some people at my work were a bit upset that he had started working before his visa papers were completely approved. I wouldn’t recommend working without a visa but the cram school wanted him to start. He has also picked up small jobs day jobs in the area and these places pay/contract him through the school so things are legal (and easier on the taxes).

2. Work (what kind of work did they secure?)
KP – We later learned that two of our friends (Eric and Michelle) who were Interac ALTs were leaving Hamada in March. They put in a good word for Kevin and he applied with Interac. He nailed his interview and the company told him he came “highly recommended!” They even let him choose which schools he wanted to work at in Hamada. So once again we got lucky!
KZ – Craig works for a cram school. He also teaches classes at three local schools (elementary, high school and college), and two English conversation classes.
3. Difficulties
KP – I was originally told that Kevin would have to find his own place to live. After consulting with Prefectural Advisors, the BOE decided to let Kevin live in my apartment and my rent was raised 15,000 yen a month. One of the difficulties was living off of one income for the eight months it took Kevin to get a job. Other than that it was getting stressful towards the end trying to figure out how he was going to stay in the country, and he had to switch from a specialist in humanities visa to an instructor’s visa which required a couple of trips to the immigration office.

SW – We didn’t speak Japanese when we came which was hard (we learned quickly through a local volunteer). We made studying something the two of us would do together during our busy week. When one partner is a JET and one isn’t, there can be heated discussions about who has the "easy job."

KZ – Craig’s cram school is about an hour and a half drive away so the commute is tiring. Since he teaches at a cram school our schedules are completely opposite and a week can go by before we have time to talk. We also have heated discussions on who has the worse situation. Finally, we had a very small space for two people, but my school has moved us to a ‘family’ apartment, we just had to ask!

4. Any problems with Japanese people not accepting the relationship because you are living together but not married?
KP – I knew that it looks really bad to be living with your partner in Japan when you are not married. So I told everyone that Kevin and I were engaged. We have been dating for eight years now and have never broken up. It sounds a lot better when you say you are living with your “fiancé” instead of your “boyfriend.”

KZ – We have had NO problems and it makes us MORE interesting to our students. They love talking with both of us about the other half of the couple. But I often am not asked to come to after school/evening things because people assume that I have to get home to take care of ‘my darling’! This has been a great opportunity to break stereotypes and to show our friends that men can cook and wash dishes! We are also getting married soon so I think that helps.

5. What were the positive aspects?
KP - One positive aspect was he wasn’t working. So whenever I got substitute holiday, we turned my 3-day weekends into 5-day weekends and went on vacation. We also took advantage of this time by taking every volunteer opportunity that came up. He volunteered for English camps, an English speaking circle at the University, and Halloween and Christmas parties.

SW - The most positive aspect of our experience in Japan has been the opportunity to take part in our community. We have made many friends, both Japanese and foreign. We really enjoy the Japanese language, culture, spirit and traditions. We would not trade this experience for anything! Also, living apart for a year brought out qualities in ourselves that helped us become a stronger couple and being able to share the Japan experience is an unbreakable bond that we’ve forged.

KZ – We couldn’t imagine not having this experience together, the good and bad. We are learning and experiencing things that just can’t be described over the phone/email. Although it was definitely stressful in times of uncertainty about his visa/work, it was worth it. We are very happy being together.
Coming On JET Without Your Partner

Some advice:

• Before coming to Japan my partner and I talked very little about what it would be like to be apart because we were both afraid of how difficult it might be. By not preparing beforehand, we made the first few weeks apart much more difficult on our relationship.
• I recommend any parted couple take the time to write a letter or two every week. Receiving a letter in the mail was so much more meaningful for me than getting a quick email every morning. You can go to sleep with a letter in your hands, but I think we can all agree that sleeping with your Mac is a bit odd...
• Make lots of plans for visits. Always have the prospect of seeing your partner somewhere on the horizon. It doesn't have to be often but not knowing when you are going to see your partner again can be really difficult.
• Regular Skype dates or calls. Sometimes it is difficult to find a time or day of the week that is good for both of you. But it is important to have regular communication. One thing that was particularly hard for me was talking about all the things happening in Japan. I felt really guilty about how much fun I was having, knowing that my partner wanted to be in Japan too. If one of you is having the time of your life and the other is working 60 hours a week at a fast food restaurant, you'll have a difficult time connecting without feeling negative sentiments towards the others' experience. Award yourselves enough time to struggle, and recover, and reflect before immediately Skyping or chatting with your partner.
• It's important to grow independently and share your own discoveries after they've happened.
• In this simple way we challenge ourselves to always look positively at our own experience and to find positive ways to connect what we are learning and doing with our partner's situation.
• I flew home over winter holiday for three weeks to visit my partner. It was magical. In my situation, I am very glad I did it. It allowed my partner and I to re-connect and re-evaluate ourselves and our relationship after living apart for six months. They will come to visit me in Japan this coming summer - which will complete the experience of connecting ourselves to each other's independent experiences.
• I found it very comforting to talk about and make plans for the future. We booked a holiday for September so we get some quality time together when I return to the UK.
• Before I left for Japan I made a little box of goodies for my partner including letters, sweets, photos etc. I didn't tell him until I'd been in Japan a few weeks. He was free to look at it whenever he was feeling down or lonely. He really appreciated it and it lifted his spirits at a time when we were not able to Skype much. He made me a beautiful photo album for me to take with me too.
• If you have shared interests try to keep them going whilst you are away. For example, once a month we had a movie night. We both watched the movie and Skyped at the same time. It was nice to share it with him even though we couldn't be in the same room together. Another option may be reading the same books, watching the same TV series, listening to the same music etc.
• It is definitely possible to make a long distance relationship work if you are both realistic. I was expecting to feel very distant from my partner but with Skype and messenger services I can send him pictures and messages any time I want. This helps keep a close bond and I feel he can share my experiences to some extent. By staying in close communication we have made our relationship even stronger than before I left for JET. I look forward to building on that when I get home.
The JETs in Shimane have compiled this useful reading/website list to help you brush up on your knowledge of Japan and Shimane, its society, etiquettes, and values.

• Shimane PA Resources Website: http://shimaneparesources.wordpress.com/
• Shimane’s Official English Site: http://www.pref.shimane.lg.jp/English.html
• Shimane International Center: http://www.sic-info.org/en/

Websites About Shimane
These are official English websites about Shimane, with plenty of pictures to view:
• Visit Shimane: http://visitshimane.com/
• The Iwami Travel Guide: http://www.iwami-travelguide.com
• All Iwami: http://www.all-iwami.com/en/

Tourist Attractions
• Adachi Museum of Art: https://www.adachi-museum.or.jp/en/
• Hamada Children’s Museum of Art: http://eng.hamada-kodomo-art.com/
• Matsue Castle: http://www.kankou-shimane.com/en/?p=649
• Matsue Vogel Park: http://www.vogel.jp/English/index2.html
• Aquas Aquarium: https://aquas.or.jp/english/
• Izumo Taisha: http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e5804.html
• Oki Islands Geopark: http://www.oki-geopark.jp/en/
• Iwami Kagura: http://iwami-kagura.com/

Books
It’s useful to bring a guide book with you such as the Rough Guide or Lonely Planet - they are helpful during your stay and travel through Japan.
Here are some additional readings:
The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture by Roger J. Davies - a guide to understanding concepts such as silence, ambiguity, and obligation in modern Japanese culture.
Learning to Bow by Bruce Feiler - A former JET’s view of his time in Japan.
Glimpses of an Unfamiliar Japan by Lafcadio Hearn, one of the authors credited for first popularizing Japan in the West, he lived in Shimane, travelled extensively and is still extolled in Shimane to this day.
JET Life in Shimane Prefecture ranges from the crazy, to the calm. Each person’s time as an ALT or CIR is dictated by so many different factors. It’s up to you to come prepared for the time of your life in a part of Japan few foreigners get the chance to live in. There are so many opportunities – friends, places, events - waiting here for you.

We hope this guidebook has provided you with a glimpse into where you’re coming and what to expect. We now defer to our fellow Shimane JETs to share some of their experiences, opinions and general tips of life ‘down the rabbit hole’.

My favorite Japanese blunder is kurage (jellyfish) vs. karaage (fried chicken). You will get strange looks followed by a grin if you say that you were stung by fried chicken.

I had grass and concrete on the playgrounds and clearly defined parking spaces at the schools I went to growing up. This is something to consider when you park at your schools. You don’t want to make the mistake I made by parking in the middle of the dirt baseball field thinking that it’s for cars. Ask your supervisor where you should park.

"Ryoya" is the name of a boy. "Rooya" is prison/jail. Ryoya will not forgive you if you call him Rooya for a year and half. The kids still make fun of him and I still can't seem to get it right.

Greet everyone. Even if it’s been a bad day, and especially when people are staring at you. Greetings are ingrained in Japanese society and if you say “konnichiwa” when someone is looking at you they’re basically obligated to say it back. Everyone knows everyone in the country and if you’re friendly and greet people when you see them on the street it will connect you more with the community and when you need help in the future people will be there for you!

Saying "Suwate kudasai." (Sit down, please.) is OK, but don’t say "Sawate kudasai." (Touch me, please.) At least not during class...

After the 6 week summer break I came back to school feeling refreshed. I had been on a vacation that included beaches and 4-cheese everything for every meal. I hadn’t been so happy in a long time. When I walked into school for the first time, one of my students reacted in surprise, saying something to me in rapid Japanese. I turned to my JTE for a translation.

“He says you look slim.” A soft smile crept over my face. This was big. This was the same class that often pointed to pictures of sumo wrestlers in the textbook and declared that we shared a striking similarity. But before I could really bask in the compliment, my JTE corrected himself, “No, stiff…” Um. That was a new one. “No! Sunburnt. He thinks you look sunburnt!” My JTE finally landed on. Ah. Well, alas, when he’s right, he’s right. Seeing as it was the closest to ‘slim’ that I’ve ever been in the eyes of a student, I still took it as compliment.

Despite what they tell you, no one actually expects you to catch all the mukade you find in your house with long chopsticks and boil them alive in hot oil to make a mukade venom antidote.
It was that time of year: just after New Years when a combination of resolutions and a desperate need to remember what it’s like to feel warm had managed to propel me to the gym. By nature I am a lethargic, slow moving specimen. It takes a carefully planned ritual to amply hype myself up for that desirable sweaty affect I was after in the dead of winter. Part of this hype up was a profane hip hop playlist. As I prepared mentally/spiritually/physically to do my next reps, some head banging Kanye came on. It was only polite to head bang along. And then I got a little carried away and head banged longer than I should have because head banging is easier on my back than lifting weights. But when I came out of my trance, I looked up and saw that a wide-eyed, elderly man was maintaining bewildered eye contact, matching me bob for bob. It was a sudden realization: he had mistaken my head bobbing for vigorous, excited, and dare I say, respectful, bowing. By some twist of fate, he had entered the gym at the same time that I had started head bobbing. And, trapped in a bow off of pure politeness, he could not be the first to break away from the enthusiastic greeting of an odd foreigner that he had never met before. From that day forward, I did not listen to Kanye while facing the door to the gym ever again.

Often in Japan, you work in close quarters and if you are sick, it is courteous to wear a face mask, similar to a doctor’s mask. I had come down with the flu and returned to work, mask-less, forgetting mine at home. A week later, everyone around me was coughing, sneezing and blowing their noses. I felt guilty for not wearing the mask and I told my Japanese tutor how bad I felt for giving everyone my cold. In a Confucius-like manner, she told me: “Do not feel bad. One year you give a cold, the next year you receive a cold.”

I teach at a mountain school that is small, no even smaller than what you’re thinking. It had 15 kids in the entire Junior High School. I only saw them once a week and they were painfully shy. Which made me subconsciously painfully awkward around them. It was a brutal cycle. At this school, the kids all eat lunch in a cafeteria together. And since it’s a national pasttime in Japan to watch foreigners eat and then comment on it, this was a particularly rough time for all of us. They didn’t want to look at me but couldn’t look away. It was always so silent that you could hear a pin drop. One unfortunate lunch, 7 months into the year, we were all just as uncomfortable around each other as ever—dodging eye contact, staring hard into endless bowls of rice. I had brought some apples to lunch that day and due to some unfortunate physics combined with my powerful jaw movements, when I bit into the apple slice, more juice than I originally thought was possible to be contained in a whole apple, flew out of the side of my mouth and spilled all over the student to my right’s back. My stomach turned in shock. How could I make an already incredibly uncomfortable situation more uncomfortable? My eyes were wide in disbelief as I looked around to make sure no one else had seen. But my eyes locked with a first year (7th grade) boy. He was as shocked as I was by the recent transgression. In disbelief we both started cracking up, as silently as possible, trying not to draw attention to ourselves. But attention was drawn. People waited in awkward anticipation for an explanation. But I didn’t know how to/didn’t want to admit that I had spit chewed food, accidentally of course, all over a student’s back. By the next week, the story had gotten around and everything changed. The apple juice incident catapulted me to instant fame. Suddenly everyone was interested in joking around with me, usually beginning all conversations with “apple juice.” It quickly became my favorite school. If I had known seven months earlier that spitting food at a child would be the ticket to popularity in the halls of a Junior High School, I would have done it way sooner and much more often.
Welcome to the Adventure!