

Interview with a former JET participant

Every year, the Consular Office helps hire Alaskan residents to go work abroad in Japan as teachers, translators, or even sports coaches. This job opportunity, known as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program is highly competitive but life-changing for those who are selected! We had an opportunity to catch up with one of our former Alaskan JET participants, Maria Labatos, on how the program went.

Q: Hello! Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed! I understand you were on the JET Program for the maximum 5 years; is it safe to say you enjoyed living in Japan?

A: Yes, I LOVED my time in the JET Program. I was placed in a port town that was famous for its Aquarium, Acerola fruit, & Soba noodles! Motobu, Okinawa! It was a tourist destination and had it's busy days, but it was quaint, and I loved going around and about getting to know the townsfolk!



Q: What was your job like? Did you have any opportunities to teach your students about Alaska?

A: Yes! I was given many opportunities to teach my schools and students about life in Alaska! My Homeroom teachers at the Junior High Schools & Elementary Schools would let me create and run lesson plans, PowerPoints, worksheets, and even games that related to the current chapter of the textbooks. In my experience, my job was very steady. I assisted with grading tests, reading and writing practices, listening recordings and quizzes, speaking activities – those are just some of the things I did regularly with my schools.

Q: What have you been doing since you came back to the US? Is JET still a part of your life here?

A: I took a few months off to recoup to life here in the States, but then I was given the opportunity to get a job with the Department of Education and Early Development! Yes, I have joined AKJETAA as their Secretary~!

AKJETAA (The Alaska Chapter of the JET program Alumni Association) is a volunteer run group of former JETs that support past and current Alaskan JETs, spread Japanese culture with events and workshops, and promotes the JET program to anyone who might be interested in applying! You can learn about upcoming events from their Facebook group!

Q: Next month, this year's batch of JETs will make their way to Japan! Do you have any words of wisdom for them?

A: It's said entirely way too much, but **Every Situation is Different~!** Really! So, just try to enjoy what you have, and make memories. It won't start to feel like 'home' till after a year at least~



Q: Thank you for all your wonderful answers! I saved the hardest question for last. What's the one thing you took for granted the most living in Japan? Something you can't get easily here, but was a staple of your life in Okinawa?

A: The sea , the color – Okinawa blue really is a special color. I miss it. -- Not that I really took anything for granted. I do feel like I lived the most in my lifetime in Okinawa. Living there taught me to slow down and appreciate life and to finally take time for myself. Before I moved to Okinawa, most of my twenties was spent working seven days a week, thirteen-hour workdays, for seven years. I can honestly say that I don't remember much, nor was there anything really in that time that made me feel like I was 'living.' I miss the people – The café family that took me in when I first got there - treated me like one of their own. My schools – the students~ the teachers, and my friends. I built a life there and I miss it. But I will definitely go back there. It might not be that exact same, but it will always be home.

