

# Great Things Come in Small Packages

The JET Programme, without a doubt, presents its fair share of challenges. Agreeing to work in a foreign country for at least one year requires an enormous commitment. In addition, when living in a culture that radically differs from your own, feelings of isolation and loneliness are to be expected. Perhaps most importantly, you are being placed in a working environment where the interaction with your colleagues will either make or break your experience. However, for me, it is where I work that provides one of the greatest and most worthwhile aspects I have experienced while on the JET Programme.

After being dazzled by the lights and surreal visuals of Tokyo for 3 days during the JET orientation, reality once again set in as I arrived in Akitsu, a small port town located along the Seto Inland Sea in Hiroshima Prefecture. With Akitsu's population being a little over 12,000 people, I immediately began longing for the familiar comforts of urban life: skyscrapers, department stores, streetlights, and people of my own age. Coming from a fairly large city in Canada, and having just been tempted by the metropolitan giant that is Tokyo, it was difficult not to be disappointed with where I would be living for the next 12 months. However, "*inaka*" aside, this is what I agreed to do. Challenges like this were long expected and the show must go on. Luckily, it was when I was introduced to my base school, Toyota High School, that I realized how fortunate I was to be living in Akitsu.

I first got a sense of how small the school was when the students lined up in the gymnasium to have their uniforms inspected before the start of the fall semester. As the teachers made sure that no neck tie was left undone, no skirt were left too short, or no strand of hair on the students' heads was any color other than black, I asked one of my two English teachers if the one hundred or so students in the gym at that moment were the first year students. He laughed at my naivety and responded, "Actually, these are all of the students".

Of course, to compliment this small number of students is an equally small number of teachers, all of whom do their part to keep the school running. My greatest observation of this was when I first arrived in town and needed help with settling in. Although I do have a very helpful supervisor, registering for things such as a foreigner's card or a bank account take a considerable amount of time and paperwork (especially in Japan), and it was not always possible for him to be around to help me. Fortunately, whether it was the vice-principal, the Japanese teacher or an office worker, someone always offered to give me a hand even when they had no obligation to do so. I will never forget the day they helped me move furniture into my house. It was on one of those particularly hot August days; the kind that leaves you drenched in sweat for merely breathing. Six of my teachers, including the principal and vice-principal, riding in a convoy of compact cars and mini-cabs packed with furniture, battled the uncomfortably narrow roads leading up to

# ¡Qué bueno que haya venido a Okinawa!

Esta es la cuarta vez que vengo a Japón, pero la primera a Okinawa. Llegué a Okinawa en abril del 2005 y al poco tiempo empezaba la época de lluvias a cántaros. Me sentía deprimida porque a diferencia del clima seco en Perú, no estaba acostumbrada a este clima húmedo y me mantenía encerrada en mi departamento. Sin embargo, luego continúan los días de fuertísimos calor entre julio y octubre y hay que protegerse de los rayos solares. También es época de tifones y no es raro que se cancelen las fiestas de playa previamente programadas. Yo ya estoy acostumbrada a este clima pero siempre hay que tener a la mano un paraguas, una sombrilla, bloqueador, etc.

La traducción-interpretación, visitas a escuelas, programa de Tour para jóvenes, etc. son algunas de mis actividades laborales. Estoy muy contenta porque puedo poner en práctica la traducción e interpretación aprendido en la universidad. A pesar de ser mi cuarto año aún siento nervios cuando interpreto o hablo en público. Anualmente visito unas 20 escuelas y siempre actualizo material. Por más que esté cansada, una vez que empiezo mi presentación me convierto en otra persona llena de energías. El Tour para jóvenes es un programa anual en donde la prefectura de Okinawa invita a unos 12 estudiantes de secundaria, descendientes okinawenses a

que vengan a Okinawa y se integren con estudiantes locales. Ellos aprenden de la cultura e historia de Okinawa con el fin de fortalecer la red *uchinanchu* en el mundo. Este es un programa único de Okinawa, como prefectura con mayor número de emigrantes, de tal manera que los jóvenes conozcan sus raíces y sirvan de puente de unión en un futuro. Me sorprendió saber que hay más de 360 mil descendientes en el extranjero de los cuales más de 60 mil de ellos viven en Perú. Yo como descendiente japonesa estoy contenta de ser parte de este programa.

Gracias a este tour he podido recorrer muchos lugares de Okinawa incluyendo sus pequeñas islas. Es una isla muy diminuta en el mapa y uno no se daría cuenta de la cantidad de recursos que hay en esta isla si no se la visita. A mí me gusta el mar transparente, el cielo azul y la línea nítida que separa las nubes del cielo azul. Les recomiendo el mar de Okinawa a aquellas personas que les gusta el *esnórquel* o los baños de mar. Sin embargo, es muy raro ver gente okinawense en las playas ya que se cuidan mucho de los rayos solares.

Okinawa es una isla con su propia cultura que la diferencia de la isla mayor de Japón, por tal motivo siempre pregunto a la

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my house on the base of a mountain. After the furniture was placed inside, sweaty foreheads were wiped with trusty handkerchiefs, and "otsukaresamadeshita" were exchanged, they promptly piled back into the vehicles and returned to the school below to continue their workday. It was an incredible display of prowess and efficiency, which left me pondering this unfamiliar concept. In my experience of high school, teachers were merely responsible for instructing the students. Maintaining the school was an entirely separate task that was something they were not expected to do. However, at Toyota High School, it is the teachers' collective efforts alone which keeps the school going; from planting flowers in the school garden to driving students to sports tournaments. I soon began to realize just how strong the sense of community was in the school.

As the weeks went on, everyone at work strived to make my stay more comfortable and I quickly got to know my colleagues. Teachers would stop at my desk so frequently to ask if I needed anything that a portion of the staff room white board entitled "Things Mike needs..." was created. To officially welcome me to the school, my principal invited the entire school's staff to stay at his house on an island off the coast of Akitsu. I eventually joined the school's badminton team as a way to stay fit. With the club consisting of only 3 students, it was really easy to develop a close relationship with them and I quickly fell in love with the sport. Now, playing badminton is something that I truly look forward to doing everyday,

and because of it, I have been able to meet so many amazing and friendly people in and around Akitsu who share the same passion for the sport as I do. It was, in fact, through badminton, that I developed a strong relationship with one of my colleagues and his family. Being the coach of the badminton club, he taught me everything about the game and I eventually became a coach as well to assist him. Every week, I go over to his house for dinner where his wife patiently teaches me Japanese. In return, I help his son, who is planning to study abroad, improve his English skills. The time I spend with them means so much to me because they are all such wonderful people, and had I not met them, Akitsu would be a much colder and less meaningful place to live.

Looking back, I do not think I ever expected to appreciate living such a quiet and simple life in this small town. However, it is something that has truly taught me the importance of community and to pursue a healthy and active lifestyle. I believe I owe this to the people around me. Their kindness and energy has made living in Akitsu one of the best experiences I could have asked for. I certainly hope my time here has impacted their lives in the same way that they have impacted mine.

英語

## Gloria Uchida

gente local sobre las diferencias que hay en cada evento o ritual como bailes tradicionales, sanshin, bodas, velatorios, etc. El arte culinario también es diferente; tienen el mayor porcentaje de consumo de carne de cerdo de todo Japón. Uno de los platos típicos es el "chämpuru", un saltado de verduras, queso de soya y carne de cerdo. En los alrededores de la avenida turística muy cerca a donde vivo "kokusai dori" hay restaurantes típicos con shows de bailes okinawenses y en el período de festividades de culto a los muertos se puede apreciar a los jóvenes danzando el tradicional "eisa" en diversas partes.

Aprendí mucho sobre la guerra ya que en Okinawa existen bases americanas y muchos ciudadanos americanos. Okinawa fue el único lugar de batalla en la segunda guerra mundial y sólo lo podemos ver a través de fotos o imágenes.

He vivido en Tokyo y Hiroshima pero la gente okinawense parece ser más sociable, sencilla y muy tratable. Muy similar a la sociedad peruana, una vez cuando estaba sentada en el bus y media agripada, estornudé unas 3 veces y una anciana sentada en el asiento trasero me entregó unas vitaminas para la gripe diciéndome "toma esto que es bueno para la gripe". Reconocí que eran unas de los

comerciales de televisión así es que se los acepté.

En Okinawa no hay trenes y hace medio año atrás me compré una bicicleta, lo cual me facilita el transporte para ir al trabajo, a visitar amistades de más de una hora de distancia, para hacer compras, etc. Hay poca gente que monta bicicleta por lo que hay muchas cuestras. Cuesta tiempo y energía, pero la alegría y frescura que se siente al descender la cuesta es el doble.

He podido aprender mucho sobre Okinawa y hacer amistades asistiendo a sus festividades (hari, tsunahikimatsuri), sus círculos sociales (yoga, oratoria) etc. Así mismo ahora me interesa el badminton, karaoke, la cocina, los tragos japoneses, etc.

En mi oficina también aprendo de la cultura de otros países como EE.UU. Canadá, China y Korea, ya que también hay un coordinador de estos países.

Estoy muy agradecida a Okinawa por esta valiosa experiencia que me ofrece. ¡Qué tal si ustedes también nos visitan y conocen de este ambiente y el trato de su gente!

スペイン語