

Speech by H.E. SUZUKI Kazuhiro
Ambassador of Japan to Australia
On the occasion of the 2023 JET Programme Farewell Reception
Wednesday 5 July 2023

Good evening everyone, and welcome to my residence.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging Senator for Tasmania, Catryna Bilyk, and former Sasebo JET and President of the JET Alumni Association of Canberra, Rafael Villadiego.

I'd also like to welcome former Ishinomaki JET and former Australian Ambassador to Germany, Lynette Wood who is working currently for the Prime Minister's office.

For the first time since 2019, we gather to bid farewell to the new participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme from Canberra.

The JET Programme is one of the world's most successful international exchange programs.

Beginning in 1987, more than 75,000 people from 77 countries have participated on the Programme, around 5,000 of which have been from Australia.

Some of those former participants are here tonight, including four of our colleagues from the Embassy: Simon, Caitlin, Jessica, and Nicole. And four others from our Embassy alumni as well.

The immense JET alumni network expands across a variety of fields, not just here in Australia but also overseas.

I thought Japanese anime was more popular among boys, but maybe I'm wrong.

Our JET alumni are friends of Japan; maintaining their connections with Japan in more ways than one.

With Japan and Australia's relationship being better than ever, more and more local governments in Japan are requesting more Aussie JETs.

From the unspoiled rural landscapes of the Tohoku region to the subtropical islands off Kyushu's south, our seven JETs from Canberra will be right across Japan.

To our new JETs, you may be feeling a little anxious about what awaits you in Japan.

But let me assure you, your soon-to-be students and colleagues are looking forward to your arrival.

Outside of school, it is my hope that you fully immerse yourself into the local community to get to know the real Japan.

My advice is to say yes to the many invitations you'll get to do things together with your school and community.

If you are invited to plant seeds together with students in a rice field in the early morning of spring, say yes!

You will enjoy delicious curry rice come autumn.

If you are asked to dance together with locals at a summer festival on a balmy night, say yes!

You will learn local tradition in the most authentic way.

And if you are invited to drink green tea and chat to the local elderly, say yes!

You will be invited to enjoy local delicacies and sake with them in winter.

These experiences will enrich this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity you are about to embark on.

I am confident your JET sempai here this evening will gladly share their experiences with you because as we know, JETs love to talk about their time in Japan.

And if I may, I'd also like to share with you a small anecdote of my own.

When I was 14 years old, I had my first English conversation with a foreigner.

He was James from Tasmania, home staying at my uncle's house at the time.

For me, he looked like Harry Potter.

He was such a nice boy, though I couldn't understand a word of his English.

You know kids can communicate with each other without speaking much.

My excuse at the time was that he had such a strong accent that I couldn't understand his English.

But I must confess I had no idea if he was speaking standard English or with a strong Tasmanian accent.

Anyway, James fascinated my uncle's family and gave much incentive for my cousin to go to Tasmania for high school exchange.

She lived in a small town called Smithton for a year.

For my uncle's family and myself at the time, James definitely represented Tasmania and perhaps Australia in general.

So to our new JETs, I'd like to say when you go to Japan you'll meet many Japanese people like my uncle's family or me at 14 years of age who will have no experience with foreigners.

For them, you represent Australia.

Just like Ambassador Wood did in Germany or myself now for Japan in Canberra.

Although we are a little bit older than you are now.

But don't be nervous and you don't have to be too formal.

Be natural. Be yourself.

Somehow, you'll understand what I am telling you now when you actually start living in Japan and that I'm sure will help you grow.

Congratulations on being selected for the JET Programme, and I wish you all the best in Japan.

Thank you.