



# JETAA SA Newsletter

July 2009

hey fellow SA Jet Alum, and I hope this finds you all happy and well, and keeping warm if you happen to be caught in the icy grip of a South African winter.

I can't believe just how quickly the year has flown – it seems like just the other day that I was sending out the first newsletter of the year (over 4 months ago!). We have been busy in the meantime though, mainly with trying to update the JETAASA alumni database, and making sure that we have the correct contact details for all of you.

As many of you would have noticed, JETAASA now has a new email address ([jetaasa@yahoo.com](mailto:jetaasa@yahoo.com)) and I am afraid that you will have to put up with several more emails from me asking for contact details for those Jets that we still haven't heard from. We have such a small Chapter – roughly 300 Jets, of which a third is still in Japan, and a large proportion of the remainder are living overseas in foreign countries – so it makes sense to make contact with as many of you as possible, so that we can eventually start setting up events in your respective areas. This is my ultimate goal, and hopefully it shouldn't take too long before we can get that going.

In the meantime though, I hope you enjoy the latest newsletter. Thanks to Michelle and Georgina for contributing and if you want to share your own thoughts with the group I would love you to drop me a mail about it.

I look forward to hearing from all of you, and until then have a great week!

Ja Ne

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## How Creative Are You?

2010 marks the 100 year anniversary of an official Japanese presence in South Africa. Understandably, this is a huge occasion for the Japanese Embassy and many exciting events are already being planning to mark the occasion. As part of the celebrations the embassy plan to make posters and pamphlets outlining the 100 years of Japan-South Africa relations; and would like these posters to contain a specially designed logo to represent the relationship – much like our own JETAASA logo of a baobab tree sprouting sakura.

The embassy is currently brainstorming possible logos and would like the JET Alumni to contribute to the creative process. So, if you have an idea of a symbol or image that may work well, or are artistically-inclined and can design something yourself, please send through your ideas and designs to [jetaasa@yahoo.com](mailto:jetaasa@yahoo.com) by 17<sup>th</sup> July. We look forward to seeing your ideas.



# bridging the Gap

By Georgina Hooper-Box



It was while standing on a traffic bridge in Kojima on the Inland Sea that my thoughts turned to, well, bridges. What do they connect? Land to land, country to country. Standing in the middle of one you look over sea, air, cars moving underneath you. Is it better to be standing in the middle, or feet firmly planted on one side? Perhaps the pleasure lies in crossing over and it doesn't really matter which side you end up on. With this in mind the next time I browsed through my heavy photo albums of Japan, I was quite astonished to see how many of my photos capture bridges.

Here I am, standing on one outside the restaurant where I received my first raucous welcome party, hosted by the teachers of my senior high school. It's a hot August evening and my smiling face is shining in the humidity. I remember spending most of that night turning to a teacher beside me, pointing at my plates and asking, "What's this?" and "Can I eat that?"

Now here I am standing on a curved, wooden bridge in Korakuen, the most prized landscape garden in Okayama. The green bushes in the background are perfectly round, and every tree looks to be planted with precision. The still water reflects the clouds in the white sky. That was the day I participated in my first tea ceremony; this one was special because all those serving us were men in navy blue and grey kimono. I remember looking around the room to get clues as to how I should do this – I had heard about pausing to admire the cup and knew about taking large sips to down the tea. The second part proved to be difficult as I forced down this broth of warm fish – as it tasted to me. No visible grimace, I hope.

Here is one of my favourite places in Japan, and it happens to be in my little town of Kurashiki. A gorgeous area of old stone warehouses that have been converted into classy restaurants, trinket shops and jazz bars. There is the Ohara Art Gallery which houses original works by some of the best European painters – Gauguin, Modigliani, Monet. A river runs through it all, and here I am standing on a stone bridge engraved with dragons. I would come back to that bridge on my very last weekend in Japan, some three years later, to take commemorative photos with the colleagues I had formed a particularly strong friendship with.

Next come a series of photos of an impossibly curved bridge at Miyajima, home of the famous torii in the sea. It has been painted red on top and its wooden stilts sink down through mud which reflects traces

of orange. The tide was out that day, as it happens, and so any romantic ideas I had had of pictures of the majestic torii standing in the water were replaced with shots of deer wandering nearby, huge vats of sake piled up at the temple, and a long row of unlit lanterns waiting for the dark.

One late summer weekend I took a trip up to Kamakura, near Tokyo, to see the Great Buddha who resides there. A friend had arranged for her acquaintance to meet me and show me the town, and here is a photo he took of me in front of a bridge near the temple, with enormous Japanese pine trees and a bamboo lattice fence in the background. The Buddha himself sits serenely with palms joined in his lap, eyes closed to the flock of people mulling around his base.

I'm looking at a slanted close-up of my best friend and I atop a walkway over a busy road in central Tokyo. She had come over to visit Japan for the first time and we made sure we did what any foreigner must – walk the streets interviewing strangers with her video camera; get lost; stop to take photos of unusual vending machines; wander around Tsukiji fish market sampling unknown entities; have madly expensive drinks at the Park Hyatt; sing karaoke until dawn; eat breakfast in a Shibuya diner alongside men in crisp black suits; and finally make loop after loop around the city on the subway because we were too sleep-deprived to stand up when our station came by. Here we are again, this time on a bridge in Takamatsu before we climbed up Kompira Mountain in the misty drizzle.

One last bridge: overlooking central Kobe at Sannomiya station. This was taken during my final summer in Japan on one of many trips with a close friend from Birmingham. It was a bitter-sweet time because we knew we'd be saying goodbye soon; we would have to move on.

Looking back on the journey I took, the journey that we all take when deciding to pack up and leave behind everything that is familiar, I realise that even now it hasn't really ended. As JETs we have all crossed over into a wonderfully strange new world, and we have provided a bridge for the people we met in Japan to get to know about us and our country. It is an easy metaphor for what the Jet Programme is all about – bridging the gap between two cultures and allowing one another to step across into new worlds, as it were. And with exciting events like the 2010 World Cup one year away, we have a fantastic opportunity to once again reach out to people in Japan and welcome them over to our side.



## A South African Japanese database

We are still in the process of creating a database of Japanese 'stuff' in South Africa – restaurants, dojos, clubs etc – that may help all of us maintain our connection with Japan. If you know of anything like this in your area, please drop me a mail at [jetaasa@yahoo.com](mailto:jetaasa@yahoo.com) with a little info on the place/restaurant as well as its contact details. As soon as we have the makings of a decent sized database I will email it on to all of you.



# Jet Grows from **Strength** to Strength in SA

By Michelle Smith

It must have been a very nervous group that boarded the plane to Hong Kong en route to Japan in 1997. Not only were they the first group to represent South Africa on the JET Programme, but there were only five participants in total that year.

Numbers grew steadily, however, and ten years later in 2007, 47 JETs departed from O.R. Tambo International.

Since 1997, a total of 302 South Africans (130 men and 172 women) have participated in the JET Programme. At present there are 99 South African JETs in Japan, four of them in their fifth year on the Programme.

It is impossible to know the exact extent of the impact that these 302 individuals have had on the Japanese schools and communities in which they were placed, and the impact that they continue to have in promoting Japan to South Africans upon their return.

The Programme has influenced participants in numerous and life-changing ways – some have married fellow JETs, other now have Japanese spouses, some have remained in Japan with their spouses and children, others have pursued studies and careers overseas and some have returned home to work in vocations that invariably have some Japanese connection.

Ex-JETs that I have encountered include journalists, employees of Toyota, teachers and lecturers, trainees at the Department of Foreign Affairs, travel agents and researchers.



## South African Jet Participants

Year	Total	Male	Female
1997	5	2	3
1998	8	2	6
1999	11	0	11
2000	15	8	7
2001	20	8	12
2002	22	6	16
2003	26	12	14

Year	Total	Male	Female
2004	31	16	15
2005	32	19	13
2006	37	18	19
2007	47	16	31
2008	47	23	24
2009	40	20	20

# Be a Part of the **Next** Newsletter

If you feel like reminiscing about your time in Japan, have something to share with the other Jet Alumni or just want to let us know just what you have been up to since leaving Japan, PLEASE feel free to send it through to me to include in the next newsletter. Ideally I would like the newsletter to contain as much, if not more, entries from all of you, as from me. As always, you can send through any contributions to [jetaasa@yahoo.com](mailto:jetaasa@yahoo.com).