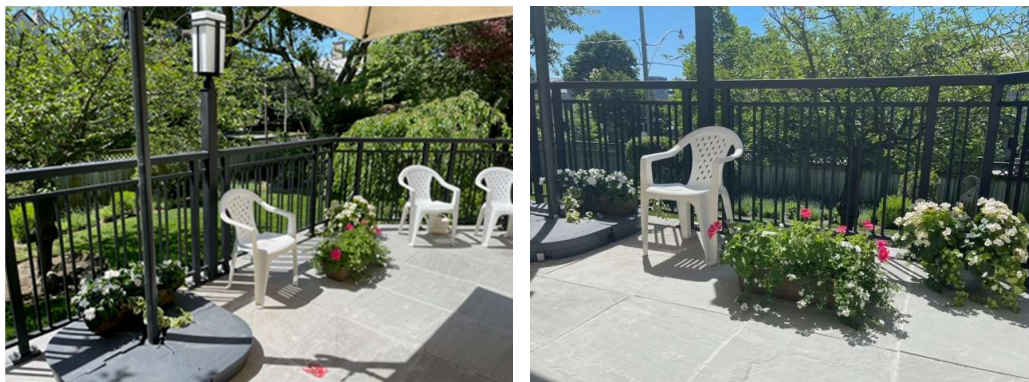


MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

June 2021

I hope visitors to our website are all keeping well.

Toronto is enjoying its first taste of summer, and there are days when the daytime temperature exceeds 30 degrees. However, there is no rainy season here like there is in Japan, and when the day is clear, it is also cool and comfortable. On the other hand, there are also days characterized by unstable weather. The high-rise building which houses the Consulate-General of Japan is sometimes hidden among low lying clouds and more than half of the iconic CN Tower can also be covered in haze. These are days when one can enjoy the abundance of nature in Ontario even living in a large metropolis.



With respect to the pandemic, the Government of Ontario's longstanding stay-at-home order came to an end on June 2. On June 11, the province entered the eagerly awaited Step 1 of its Roadmap to Reopen. Furthermore, it was announced that Step 2 will commence earlier than planned on June 30. Vaccines are also being dispensed widely, and Canada is now the world leader in having at least the first dose of the inoculation administered. The light is clearly at the end of the tunnel. Health measures, however, remain in place. I would like to ask everyone to continue checking the announcements from the Government of Ontario, as well as the websites run by your local authorities. Please comply with the prescribed measures and continue to prevent the spread of infection.

This month, I would like to tell you about the exchange programs run by the Government of Japan and its agencies – in particular, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme which invites foreign youth to Japan to assist in language education and internationalization.

There are various exchange programs run by the Government of Japan, including JET, the Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarships, and the Kakehashi Project. The JET Programme in particular has a long history, which saw youths invited to Japan from the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand in 1986. Canada joined the program in 1988, and Japan continues to welcome JET participants today.

The participants are assigned to various regional authorities across Japan and become active as Assistant Language Teacher(ALT) and Coordinators of International Relations (CIR). Their usual work contract is for one year, but this can be extended upon request. As long as there are requests for JET participants from local governments and schools, assigned locations can be from anywhere across Japan. I myself have seen countless JETs off from Canada, many of them assigned to communities in Japan I have never visited.

There have been easily over 3000 JET participants who went to Japan from Ontario, excluding Ottawa. Surely there is no other exchange program which recruits so many participants each year from North America. Many of the JET participants hold some interest in Japan before joining the program. They not only use their experiences in Japan to support international exchange, but also return to Canada with a profound appreciation and relationship with Japan – a strong bond, or *kizuna* in Japanese.

Our work relating to the JET Programme includes supporting the activities of alumni associations in order to maintain ties with participants who have left Japan after completing their tenure. The JETAA (JET Alumni Association) has a Toronto chapter, which has over 1100 members taking part in its various programs.

Two Co-Chairs oversee JETAA Toronto, and I was able to interview Mr. Andrew Massey and Mr. Geoffrey Greig over e-mail and ask them about their ties with Japan, as well as their organization's activities. (Note: what follows are edited portions of the interview)



JETAA Toronto Co-chair, Mr. Andrew Massey
who worked at high schools in Nagasaki Prefecture from 2013 to 2015



JETAA Toronto Co-chair, Mr. Geoffrey Greig
who worked in Kagoshima Prefecture from 2013 to 2014

SASAYAMA: Could you tell us what first got you interested in Japan?

MR. MASSEY: My interest in Japan began at a young age and developed from an interest in Japanese video games. As a teenager, I joined a student exchange program and moved to Japan for one year mainly so that I could play Street Fighter in Japanese arcades.

MR. GRIEG: When I was in middle school the English version of Shonen Jump was released. Included in this were series such as *Shaman King* which introduced me to Japanese mythology and fascinated me throughout high school and university while I studied Visual Art.

SASAYAMA: Inserting 100 and 50 yen coins into Space Invader consoles in arcades was typical for my generation (*laughs*). I also would read manga magazines while waiting for a haircut at the stylist. I recall diligently trying to get my hair cut at least once a month (*laughs awkwardly*).

Could you describe some of your memories from Japan?

MR. GRIEG: The memories I have of being welcomed by teachers, students, families, coworkers, and even retail workers will live fondly within me forever. I also was able to immerse myself in school cultures and festivals ranging from a samurai march to a spider fighting competition (note: a traditional event in which two spiders compete to remain on a horizontal stick).

MR. MASSEY: I fondly remember taking weekend trips and exploring different areas that I had never been to before. While travelling, I loved visiting local restaurants and trying region-specific specialty dishes. I think Japan is a top-tier food destination and has some of the best food culture of anywhere in the world.

SASAYAMA: My father was from Kochi so I recall playing with spiders and crabs whenever I went to my grandparents' house during summer holidays. I also have

fond memories of my relatives in Okayama and being surprised by the delicious tastes of sake and ayu that came from the clear running waters of the local stream. JETs know more about every corner of Japan than most Japanese!



Photo of his first attendance of a professional baseball game in Japan with a group of JET program participants during a trip to Fukuoka. (MR. MASSEY)



Photo of the Horse Dancing festival in Kirishima City, Kagoshima (MR. GRIEG)

SASAYAMA: Please tell us about JETAA Toronto's future activities.

BOTH: As former JETs who know Japan and Japanese culture, we would like to strengthen ties between Japan and the local community. To be specific, we will continue to deepen exchange both online and in person. We would like to resume tours of Toronto's downtown ramen shops. We would like to increase exchange with representatives of local Japanese businesses and community organizations. We also would like to provide more networking and career support for our alumni.



Group photo at the JET pre-departure orientation
Copyright: JETAA Toronto

SASAYAMA: Whether online or in person, the activities of JETAA Toronto are certain to make significant contributions toward deepening Japan-Canada relations. The Consulate-General of Japan will continue to put our efforts into such aspects of the program as the pre-departure orientations, including Japanese language classes, for new JET participants, as well as support for JET alumni in their study of Japanese.

As of June 14, over 100 new JET participants are unfortunately unable to leave for Japan due to COVID-19. I sincerely hope that the situation surrounding this pandemic will ease soon, and that their departure date will arrive as soon as possible.

SASAYAMA Takuya
Consul-General of Japan