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Feature: Hokkaido Television Broadcasting Tour
JET Spotlight: Michael Crisostomo

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Into the World of HTB

On June 19th, I and the two other Coordinators for International Relations working for the Hokkaido government had the chance to visit the studios of HTB, or the Hokkaido Television Broadcasting Company. This was my first time to visit a studio of any kind, and I was impressed by the hard work of all the people both in front of and behind the cameras.

Before we began our official tour of the studios, however, I had a mission to fulfill. HTB is the home of one of my favorite Japanese television shows, “How do you like Wednesday?” In every episode of the show, they film an opening and closing sequence in the park outside of the HTB studios. I brought the other girls to the park and we acted out some famous poses from the show. Dream come true!

The HTB officials appreciated my love of the show, but they were also interested to hear that I learned about the show from Netflix. It’s curious to see the relationship between live broadcast television and online streaming services like Netflix. I think Netflix is a great way to preserve past seasons of the show – the DVDs are hard to come by

and can’t be found at normal video rental stores. And, although I learned about “How do you like Wednesday?” through Netflix, I am excited to watch the new up and coming reboot as it airs on HTB!

Okay, fangirling aside, the actual tour of the HTB studios was quite an adventure. The HTB officials led us through what seemed at times to be a labyrinth of halls and rooms. As HTB grew, they added on more and more space to the main building, the end result being a mish-mash of styles and endless narrow hallways. Apparently, soon they will outgrow even that space and move to a new location.

Our first stop on the tour was a practice studio where they film close up shots of anchors. There was a group of anchors-in-training hard at work, getting advice from their mentors and practicing reading out the news in front of the camera. In Japan, an announcer’s first appearance in front of the camera is called *hatsu naki*, or first song, which usually refers to the first song of cicadas or birds that mark a change in the seasons.

We got to stand in front of the cameras in the announcer's seat, the real announcers exchanging smiles as we took photos and pretended to read the news. On the desk, I noticed a dictionary I had never seen before. It turns out, most anchors have a copy of a Japanese pronunciation dictionary, which they use to study the finer notes of pronunciation and to practice enunciating properly. With my Japanese pronunciation level mediocre at best, perhaps I should start using one!

Our tour guide then brought us into what seemed to be the hub of content production. A large open room was filled with desks and people – from writers and editors to newscasters and cameramen, everyone works together to build the final product. I was impressed by all the hands that touch the story before it actually airs. Writers go out to find the story, editors work it into a script, anchormen bring the script to life, people in charge of the over 24 stationary cameras find relevant footage, more editors splice the footage together, and then there is even a whole team that works to create the text and images that appear on the screen.

The cherry on the top of our tour was a chance to sit in the stage audience during a live broadcast of Ichiyoshi, a weekday evening show that covers news, events, and interviews with artists, and features live games with actual

Hokkaido residents. We first headed to a dark room just like in the movies, with a wall of screens, people wearing headsets, and a giant clock counting the seconds. There was even a girl whose only job was to keep time!

I was impressed by how relaxed everyone was – I guess if you deal with time crunches and live broadcasts every day, you get used to it! The anchors were joking and laughing with everyone up until the final few seconds before the cameras were rolling, and as soon as the shot was done, they went right back into normal conversation.

Our final stop on the journey was the actual studio where Ichiyoshi is filmed. We were extremely lucky in that the special guest was Ai Carina Uemura, a Japanese-American singer and songwriter, there to promote her latest album "Wa To Yo." Clearly a professional, she joined the anchors in tasting an American Johnsonville sausage, cheering on a woman competing to win a grocery store shopping race, and even singing live!

All in all, it was a truly fun experience, and I got to experience a little of everything. I've found a new love and loyalty for Hokkaido's local broadcasting company, and I look forward to continuing to tune in for the rest of my time in Hokkaido. Thank you HTB!



Posing in the park with the other CIRs.



Holding hands with on-chan!



The neighborhood is proud of their on-chan statue.



Our 15 seconds of fame!



All the channels on TV can be monitored here.



Behind the scenes sneak peek.



Announcers in training,
practicing for their *hatsu naki*.



An aerial view of the
Hokkaido Government building.



Material for commercials and other broadcast
material.



Posing in front of the How do you like
Wednesday? corner.



HOKKAIDO JET SPOTLIGHT



There are over 200 participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme who call Hokkaido home. We come from all over the world and we all have a very unique experience with the island. In each edition of the Red Brick Bulletin, I will introduce a current JET living in Hokkaido. Each has their own story to tell – let’s get to know them!



MEET MICHAEL CRISOSTOMO



What brought you to Hokkaido?

A It’s the JET Programme that basically brought me to Hokkaido, and to be honest, Hokkaido was not on my list when I applied for the program. I am from a tropical country and yes I was excited to see snow and experience winter then, but the thought of long cold months and less sunshine made me scared. However, the beautiful scenery, amazing landscapes, and delicious food turned that fear into love and so far I have been enjoying my stay.

How has your experience been so far?

A I would say it has been a pleasurable and a learning experience. Pleasurable because of; (1) driving around Hokkaido and watch every beautiful scenery unfolds before your eyes already warm the heart – more so meeting some wildlife along the way; (2) soup curry is a genius invention! And (3) the locals – joining the Matsuri however small or big it is, volunteering, or simply having a small chat with the neighbor. There is nothing more authentic experience than being with

the locals. Learning experience because of a lot of “first time”. First time to shovel snow, first time to drive on the opposite side of the road, first time to drive on winter roads and the list goes on. These experiences made me knowledgeable if not wiser for the next seasons to come.

This is a very difficult question, but what has been your most memorable moment in Hokkaido?

A Being with children. I volunteer at the Furano City Library’s English Reading Club and it makes me happy every time children come and enjoy singing songs, reading books and playing games. It is such a joy not just to see an interest in English develop in them but also the bond you create with them and their parents.

What’s your favorite thing about your region?

A Furano is situated in a perfect location making the major cities like Sapporo, Asahikawa, and Obihiro very accessible. It has also great landscapes both in summer and in winter. In summer, colorful flowers and greens carpet the valleys and hills – a sight paragliders and flower lovers wouldn’t want to miss. In winter, the mountains are covered with powder snow turning the landscape into a beautiful white field popular among movie makers and photography clubs and making Furano one of the best place to ski, snowboard, and other winter sports. Furano also has a variety of great restaurants for food lovers. With this combination, who wouldn’t love Furano?

Anything else you’d like to share?

A Hokkaido may lack the traditional Japanese atmosphere one can find in Kyoto or the bustling sights of Tokyo but the island has many gems waiting to be discovered. So don’t just sit there, grab those travel shoes and start exploring. Go with friends or with a local.

Remember, the best way to enjoy living in Japan is to understand the culture and live by it!

Michael Crisostomo is a 1st year JET from the Philippines and works as the Elementary Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Furano. Michael loves being close to nature, going to shrines, driving around Hokkaido, and collecting country signs at Michi no Eki.

All issues of The Red Brick Bulletin can be accessed at http://pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/ss/tsk/akarenga_eng.htm

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