Did you know? The Hokkaido Government Building has two other CIRs besides me!

This month, we all went on a trip to Okhotsk. We all write our own Red Brick Bulletins in Japanese and, respectively, Chinese, English, and Korean, and this month’s issues are all about the Okhotsk. So if you find this one interesting and want to know more, if you just want to keep practicing your Japanese, or if you’re learning Chinese or Korean and want to practice, make sure to check out the other Red Brick Bulletins!

This month’s Red Brick Bulletin will take a brief look at a small area in this region, and introduce some of the things that I was lucky enough to see on my trip there!

Drift Ice: This is the time of year for Drift Ice that flows from further north and gets caught against the Shiretoko Peninsula, creating a yearly tourist attraction. There is an ice-breaker boat made specifically for the purpose of tourism, called the Aurora that we were able to catch a ride on. We powered through a field of ice, the ship cracking and rising and breaking the sheets that covered the water before us. A Steller’s sea eagle was visible off to one side, but it took off as we drew closer.
Abashiri Prison: As a part of the settling of Hokkaido, convicts were sent north, to Abashiri, where a prison was established and hard labor was carried out. The prison is no longer, but many of the buildings were moved or rebuilt on the grounds of the Abashiri Prison Museum. This multilingual museum has lots of information about and buildings pertaining to the original prison. I do have to say though, that this place was a bit creepy with its plethora of mannequins to represent the guards and prisoners who once roamed the halls.

If you’ve ever watched or read the series “Golden Kamuy,” you might be familiar with this prison, as it is a large element in the series. Within the museum, visitors are treated to various pictures and drawings related to the anime and manga.

Shiretoko

The Shiretoko Peninsula is a natural paradise where you can partake in numerous activities such as kayaking in the summer and drift ice walking and diving in the winter. However, in the winter many of the roads are closed off for safety reasons.

On the way up to the Shiretoko area, we passed a waterfall, called Oshin-Koshin Falls. It was a short, but slightly treacherous climb due to the amount of ice on the path, but the waterfall was prettily gushing water down to meet the sea below. The descent for us onlookers was also a slide over rocks and stairs. Luckily we all made it safely down.

In the town itself, right by the Michi no Eki, is the Shiretoko World Heritage Conservation Center. This small, but well-presented center details the natural aspects of the Shiretoko area. It has interactive aspects that let you play and learn, as well as beautiful, multilingual displays.

Honestly, this region has much more than the brief introductions that I presented here. The drift ice creates a special environment which makes the seafood delicious—crab is especially famous—so you should definitely eat some. Even this early in the season, cyclists are already pitting themselves against the roads littered with the remnants of snow, and eagles and hawks reign the skies. The different seasons bring different natural wonders, so get out there and explore!
There are about 300 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. Read on to learn more!

Meet Josh Taylor!

Brief Biography

My name is Josh Taylor, I’m a 3rd year JET from New Zealand. I live in a town called Bihoro in the Okhotsk region of Hokkaido. I love it out here, with our wide open farm scenery and roads that smell like onions. This might sound sarcastic but I can tell you truthfully from now until forever, onions will smell like home. Which is actually an upgrade considering my town in New Zealand consistently smells like sheep poo. Other than onions and sheep poo, I love sports and the outdoors especially camping, snowboarding and any beach related activity. When I’m at home you can find me talking to myself, laughing at my own jokes and probably eating pizza while watching rugby.

What brought you to Hokkaido (or Japan)?

Bit of a different reason to most, but I was actually born in Ibaraki prefecture while my parents were on the JET Programme. We moved back to NZ as a family while I was still a wee ankle biter. After 12 years in NZ we decided to revisit Japan via the JET Programme again and lived in Yamaguchi Prefecture for 2 years where my 2 sisters and I attended Japanese school. It was an incredibly tough experience at first with no Japanese ability, but by the end of our 2 years I had truly found a new home in Japan and vowed to come back as soon as I could. So here we are. Despite requesting placement down south nearer where I used to live, CLAIR sent me up here to Hokkaido (to start my love affair with onions) and I couldn’t be happier.

How has your experience been so far?

It’s been magical. Coming straight out of university with some seriously incredible experiences and memories in the bag, I was sure I had peaked, and that it couldn’t get any better. How wrong I was. What an amazing time it has been living in Hokkaido so far, trying plenty of new things and making dear mates over cheap beers. Hokkaido is like one big playground for me with its beautiful mountains, lakes and people. I don’t think I could love it more than I do.
What has been your most memorable moment?

This is a hard one to choose as there's been so many. The first one that springs to mind would be landing my first ever proper jump while snowboarding because it was a real moment where I realised that I had actually been improving my skills over my time here.

One that is probably a more accurate representation of my time in Hokkaido would be the time that I split my pants during lunchtime at school while doing some particularly aggressive cartwheels with the students. While some students (and myself) were left rolling around laughing on the gym floor, a group of them ran off to get their sewing kits and came back loudly proclaiming they could fix my pants! I'll never forget their little faces, what absolute heroes.

What is your favorite thing about your region?

Onions.

Oh...and the amazing wild scenery and great local people around the whole region.

But mainly onions.