

May  
2020

No. 54

# The Red Brick Bulletin

Feature: International Relations IN a COVID-19 World  
JET Spotlight: Jacob Iglesias (Wakkanai City)



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## International Relations IN a COVID-19 World



Washington, DC ↑  
←Flowering Dogwoods

In 1912, the Mayor of Tokyo gifted 3000 cherry blossom trees to the city of Washington, DC in a show of friendship and international cooperation. Washington DC reciprocated by sending thousands of the flowering dogwood tree. Year after year, those trees still bloom connecting the two countries, and in Washington, DC, in a normal year, people flock to the city to get a taste of hanami, and attend the annual festival held there. However, due to COVID-19, the festival was canceled this year. Take a look at their website [here](#) to see people's favorite parts of festivals past.

Exchange is a big part of international relations. One program in Japan that works to promote cultural exchange is the JET Programme, short for the "Japanese Exchange and Teaching Programme," and as the name suggests, most of the participants are assistant language teachers who help teach English to students. There are about 300 people in Hokkaido who are here on the JET Programme.

However, a large part of the program is actually "exchange." And this month's Red Brick Bulletin will take a peek at how some JETs are keeping that exchange alive while maintaining social distancing and preventative measures against COVID-19.

## YouTube Channels

There are quite a few work places and schools that have moved many of their operations online, so why not international exchange? In an effort to continue cultural exchange, as well as offer things that you might not be able to learn in a classroom alone, many JETs have taken to posting to YouTube, including the JET Programme Coordinators of International Relations (CIRs) in Higashikawa Town in Hokkaido. Here are a few words from the organizer about the channel:

### International Kitchen: Higashikawa CIRs

In the town of Higashikawa there are 11 CIRs from 10 different countries. Twice a year, we hold an event called the “International Kitchen” where people are able to taste and learn how to cook food from different countries. This year, we had planned to hold the event in May or June, but we decided not to because of the current state of affairs. However, with the long hours indoors, people have been more and more worried about what they’re eating and what they should cook. Hearing this, we wondered if there was something that we could do, and so decided to hold our “International Kitchen”... on YouTube.

The channel itself consists of the “International Kitchen” part which has introductions to dishes from the various countries of our CIRs, as well as “Kim-sensei’s Home Cooking” part. Kim-sensei’s videos are part of the ongoing Korean language learning class, and every week a video is posted that accompanies a Korean text pamphlet that is sent to those in the class. Currently, we have been asking the people of the town what food they would like to make from our home countries, and then, based on their responses, we shoot, edit, and record what we need to produce and upload the video of the food or recipe that was requested.

While there are already numerous cooking channels on YouTube, we wanted our channel to be for the people of Higashikawa, and to ensure that we do that we follow two basic guidelines: 1. We only introduce food that has ingredients that can be found in Higashikawa, and 2. We add Japanese subtitles to our videos, something cooking videos from other countries don’t do. We always make our videos keeping these two points in mind.

There have been numerous people who have watched our videos and then sent us pictures of the finished product along with their thoughts on it. We’ve received comments that express how viewers are enjoying this way to connect with each other in these times when we can’t meet, and how it also gives people a way to continue their studies; through this cultural exchange, we feel we’re able to make a connection. We wanted to make something that was useful to people and that would be utilized by them, and it motivates us when we hear such things. Regardless of how many views we get or how many people subscribe, we’d like to keep the channel going until at least the end of June.

Check out their YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqgsKSym8LJQW69jCoWHuEA>



# Mask Sew-a-thon

The National AJET Association has organized a countrywide Mask Sew-a-Thon in order to help with the shortage of masks. The local Hokkaido branch, known as HAJET, decided to participate. Here are a few words from the HAJET President about the Sew-a-Thon:

“As many of you all know, due to the pandemic, everywhere is sold out of disposable masks. It is important that we keep ourselves safe with some sort of covering on our faces while we’re outside our homes, but there are many people who do not have the resources to make these coverings. This is why AJET organized the Mask Sew-a-Thon! AJET collected the best information for what the masks should be made with and the easiest way to make them and made it easily accessible on a Facebook group. For example, they found that making masks with 100% cotton is the most effective since it can help soak up any extra moisture that a virus would need to live. Also, they made it mandatory that all masks should be made with two different colors, that way when you take off the mask you know which side you had already had touching your face and can put it back on correctly.

We as an AJET chapter are contributing to make the project a success. We reached out to the Hokkaido Foreign Resident Support Center asking if they knew of an organization that we could donate the handmade masks to and suggested that it be somewhere that teachers and students could receive them. Emily, our past Prefectural Advisor in 2016-18, who now works for that center, messaged back that they would be happy to reach out to the Hokkaido Board of Education (HBOE) and within a couple of days, the HBOE responded and are very appreciative that HAJET can help their staff and students. Our goal is to send the HBOE 100 masks! I think our big island can definitely reach this goal.”

The Sew-a-thon is going on until JUNE 26th. If you would like to get involved, please contact the HAJET president at [president@hajet.org](mailto:president@hajet.org)



Even though social distancing and other preventative measures have caused difficulties in face-to-face international relationship building, people are adapting. Famous museums and places are offering virtual tours on their websites, and people whose jobs revolve around international exchange are coming up with new and innovative ways to reach out and still have that exchange, even at a distance. Even while you’re at home, you can still get out there and explore!



# HOKKAIDO JET SPOTLIGHT



**T**here 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 Jacob!



My name is Jacob Iglesias, I'm 23 years old, and I was born and raised in the city of San Antonio, Texas. I attended Texas A&M University, where I majored in International Commerce and minored in Japanese. During my time in college, I was also a member of the university band, which is the largest military marching band in the world. Since coming to Japan, I've found myself teaching Elementary and Junior high school in Wakkanai, Hokkaido. My hobbies at the moment include skate boarding, playing the guitar, and studying Japanese.

### What brought you to Japan ?

From a very young age, I naturally had an interest in most things Japanese, such as anime and video games. The Final Fantasy series in particular was very influential during my childhood. Overtime, I completely forgot about my aspirations to learn Japanese until I discovered that the class was offered at my University. After taking that class, I changed my major from Biology to International studies, and participated in a ten-week study abroad to Tokyo during my sophomore year. When I finally returned to the states, I realized that I wanted to spend more time here and sought to apply for the JET program when I finally graduated!

## How has your experience been so far?

I would say that I've had a great time since I've come to Japan! All of my co workers are extremely nice, and I am able to experience lots of new things, which is one of the biggest reasons I wanted to come to Japan. I also genuinely enjoy teaching and interacting with the kids. Of course, not everything is all rainbows and butterflies. As someone that is heavily extroverted, I enjoy meeting/spending time with people and tend to struggle to entertain myself. This was especially difficult during the winter, as I also do not have a driving license and I found myself stuck at home during my free time. To counter that, I've recently started learning guitar and immersing myself in improving upon my current skillsets!

## What has been your most memorable moment?

My most memorable moment would have to be the festival I participated in soon after I first arrived in Wakkanai. I danced as part of the Wakkanai board of education, and I kept being handed mini beers in between songs. Once that finished, we all retreated to the back of the city hall and had a Genghis Kahn Nomikai!

## What is your favorite thing about your region?

My favorite thing about my region would have to be all the beautiful scenery that I get to experience. In particular, the sunsets off the western coast of Wakkanai are very beautiful and I occasionally ride my bike there in the afternoon to take pictures. I also appreciate the summer weather, as it never gets too hot and every day is a perfect day! Also Wakkanai is a big port town, and I find myself often walking along the docks and breathing in the sea air.

