

March
20th - Vernal Equinox

April
29th - Showa Day

The Shiga Situation



Spring, already?

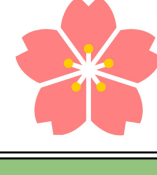
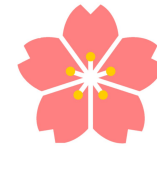
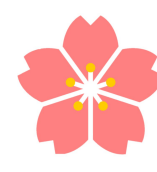
Winter has reached its end. The cold, crisp days have become cool and fresh. The birds are back and the cherry blossoms will be making their annual appearance soon enough. As Japan prepares for the new starts associated with spring, it can feel as though this past year never truly began. Since we still have to remain vigilant against COVID-19, we have to find new ways to make the most of our time in Japan. More time away from others doesn't have to equate to wasted time though. Study something new, pick up a new hobby or get out and enjoy Japan's nature at its finest... just maybe avoid the most popular cherry blossom spots.

Arriving JETS?

The spread of new virulent strains of the coronavirus have led to a tightening of immigration restrictions. Unfortunately, those who had previously been accepted into the JET Program are stuck in limbo as their wait times lengthen. Participants who were previously asked to come to Japan had the option to withdraw from the program or to either have their start dates pushed back to coincide with early-arrival-schedule departures (which have also been pushed back), or the fall departures.

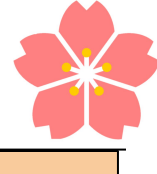
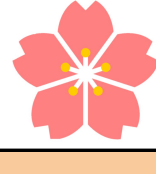
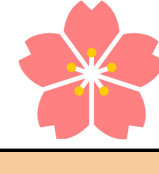
JLPT

The next chance to sit the [JLPT](#) will be in July and registrations will open in April. As the go-to means of proving your Japanese chops (besides, you know, actually talking to somebody), having passed the JLPT is a nice bump to any resume and might be used as a minimum requirement for certain work opportunities. Even if you don't intend to use Japanese in your future endeavors, it shows a commitment to personal/professional development and studying Japanese can only improve your time in Japan. If you're on the fence why not give it a shot? Successful candidates of the N3, N2 or N1 can apply for the [JLPT grant from CLAIR](#) the following fall which covers the cost of the test.



New PA!

The PA interview process has concluded and next year's PA has been selected. The strengths of each candidate made it no easy decision. I'm pleased to announce that Joseph Kosciusko Tritzschler will be succeeding me as the ALT PA for Shiga this summer. The position involves a lot of new challenges, but I'm confident that Joseph will be able to face them head on. We'll meet over the coming months to ensure he is able to hit the ground running with all of the ideas he has for the JET Program in Shiga. Joseph has some great plans and I hope you welcome him with (metaphorically, *covid*) open arms.



6th year JETs, Say What?!

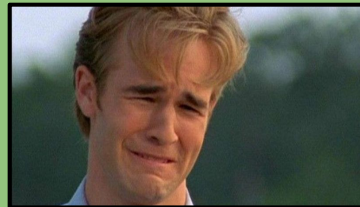
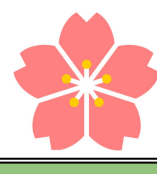
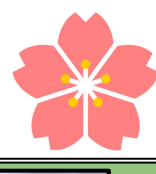
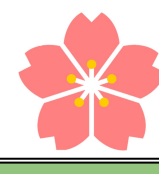
If 5th year JETs are called unicorns because of their rarity, what's a 6th year JET? CLAIR has given Contracting Organizations the go ahead to offer current 5th year JETs a special 1-year recontracting option due to the uncertainty surrounding new arrivals. Some CO's might be able to take advantage of this while, for various reasons, others might not. Prefectural JETs were fortunate enough to be offered this option. Given the state of things, I've opted to extend my stay in Japan. Having already appointed my successor, who is preparing for the transition, I will still be stepping down as PA and moving into a high school teaching position for the 2021-2022 JET year.

Shiga AJET Wants You!

While there isn't anything currently planned, the Shiga AJET team is working on ideas for events in the coming months, taking into account the continued threat of COVID-19. There will be a turnover in May, and Shiga AJET will be looking for new members. AJET plays a key role in strengthening the JET community in the prefecture. As a former member of the AJET team myself, I highly recommend getting involved!

National AJET Wants You, Too!

NAJET election planning is underway. While the timeline hasn't yet been announced, expect things to get rolling in the next month or so. Recontracting ALTs will be welcome to submit a platform for any of the [elected positions](#), or can apply for one of the many [appointed positions](#). For years now, Shiga JETs have held several of the NAJET positions. These volunteer positions are a great way to gain some invaluable experience while working to improve the JET experience.



Departing JETs

You probably have a lot of stuff. If you're leaving, you've got to deal with it. For those of you among us leaving this year, it's time to start thinking about what that involves and getting yourself organized. Ask your BoE, sooner than later, which items belong to them (if any) and whether or not you have to clear your apartment out when you leave. Here's what to do next:

Ship It

Start researching what shipping options are available to your return destination and comparing costs - a good place to start is [Japan Post](#). Often JETs will ship winter clothing by boat as it's the cheapest option but it takes the longest (not a problem while you're still on JET). Before sending everything home, seriously consider what you really need to bring with you. It might be better to sell/donate/throw away some items. Also, with the ongoing pandemic, shipping options/restrictions are subject to change suddenly, with air mail often unavailable - if you're going to ship things home, it's something to keep an eye on.

Sell It

In years past, many people have given/sold things to their successor. If this is your plan, consider that there is a possibility that new JETs won't be able to come depending on the coronavirus situation. You should have a plan for what to do with your stuff in that case. If you decide to sell things, the [Mottainai Shiga](#) Facebook group is a good place to start; it serves as a marketplace for Shiga JETs and others in the area. Just bear in mind, the later you wait the more you will be competing with others looking to sell their things too. There are other apps and sites where you can sell things as well. Some JETs with a decent grasp of Japanese have had success selling things using through [Mercari](#). You can sell your gently used belongings to recycle stores or second-hand stores as a last resort though generally you will be paid very little, if at all.

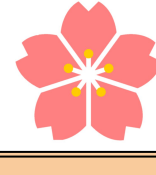
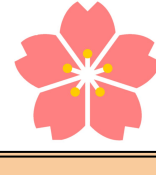
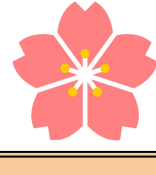
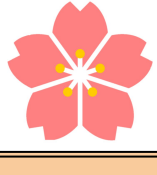
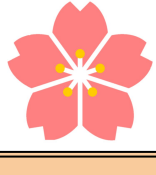
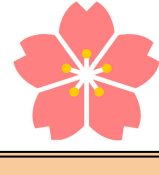
Toss It

If you have a lot of things to throw away, make sure you're aware of what the garbage rules are in your area. You can usually get a garbage guide at city hall and some cities even have garbage apps. Generally speaking, large garbage items, like furniture, that don't fit in a trash bag are the trickiest to deal with and an extra fee is often required (unless you can break them down and fit them into bags). By looking into this early you can avoid being caught off guard later.



Finances: Pension Refunds and Getting Organized

It's important before you leave to make sure you have your finances in order. Know when your last payday will be and whether it will be a full or partial paycheck. Plan to leave enough money in your bank account to cover any bills you will have the month after you leave (water, gas, electricity, rent, etc.). Make a list of any services you are registered for (phone, internet, gym, etc.) and ensure you know how and when you need to cancel them, as well as if you will incur any fees for doing so. If you want to claim your pension refund upon leaving Japan (you definitely should want to) there are some things you need to do before you leave. Officially designate a tax representative who can handle your finances in Japan once you've left and ensure you understand [the process to claim your lump sum withdrawal and the associated tax refund](#). Luckily for those of you in 4th or 5th year, the 3-year cap on pension refunds is going to be increased to 5 years as of April.



Taxes (Disclaimer: I'm not an expert)

Another big thing to be aware of is how much resident tax you will owe at the time you leave - it's often much more than people expect. JETs often have 10 months of tax to pay at the time they leave, so if you calculate your monthly resident tax payments and multiply by 10, you'll have a rough idea of the kind of balance you'll have outstanding - **please budget for this!** The reason for this is that we pay taxes from June - May on our salary from the previous calendar year.

So, we are responsible for paying resident tax on our Jan-Dec 2020 income to our city of residence as of Jan. 1 2021, during the tax year June 2021-May 2022. Often, the yearly tax owing is divided by 12 and removed directly from our paychecks on a monthly basis (unless you pay it in quarterly installments) but if you'll leave at the end of July or September, you may have only paid 2 to 4 months out of 12 months you owe. You're responsible for paying your remaining taxes in full. Also, since the amount you owe is based on your yearly income from the previous calendar year, and JET salary increases yearly, expect your taxes to be higher come spring.

