

**Speech for the 2018 お帰りなさい会 JET Reception**  
**By Ambassador Kobayashi**  
**Tuesday 19 February 2019**

Kia Ora, good evening ladies and gentlemen, and to our JET Programme returnees, お帰りなさい — welcome home.

Thank you all very much for coming this evening.

Tonight, I am very pleased to welcome back to my residence the JET participants who have returned to New Zealand after completing their contracts in August last year.

The JET Programme is one of the most important cultural exchange programmes between Japan and New Zealand, with 3,287 New Zealanders having participated in the Programme over its 32 year history. Of course, I hardly need to explain to all of you here the JET Programme's main goal: to encourage cultural exchange and mutual understanding at a grassroots level. Depending on each participant's position, this may take many forms: teaching through language or sports, coordination with local Japanese communities and government organisations, or even translation and interpretation for Japanese officials and residents, as well as foreign nationals living in Japan.

During your time in Japan, JET participants were often called “Cultural Ambassadors”, constructively acting as bridges between Japan and New Zealand to promote mutual cooperation and communication. I wish to express, on behalf of the Government and the people of Japan, our sincere gratitude to the latest JET returnees for their valuable dedication and contribution to the Programme. 皆様、有り難うございました。

Now that you have returned to New Zealand, we hope that you will play an active role in your local JET Alumni Association and its activities, which I think JETAA

President Mark Dittmer will be speaking about later. The Wellington chapter of the JET Alumni Association is involved in many local Japan-related community events throughout the year, such as spring Hanami picnics, the annual Japan photo competition, and weekly Japanese classes. A number of their members are here tonight, so I hope you will take this opportunity to chat with them about their upcoming events, and their own experiences of returning home.

The Embassy of Japan also organises a number of our own projects to promote Japanese cultural awareness throughout New Zealand. As you know, there are some very exciting events taking place in Japan in the upcoming years: this year's Rugby World Cup, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, the Kansai World Masters Games in 2021, and the 2025 World Expo in Osaka. Whether your interests lie in sport, education, culture, or beyond, there will be no better time to be actively connected to Japan.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our JET Programme participants, both past and present, and everyone contributing to strengthening ties between Japan and New Zealand. Interviews for the 2019 JET Programme just concluded in late January, and we are looking forward to the results for New Zealand's next batch of JET participants.

In closing, welcome home to Wellington, and thank you again for all of your heartfelt efforts and participation in the JET Programme in Japan.