

ALTIA CENTRAL RECRUITING

Recruit Newsletter No. 4 January, 2018

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The Placement Puzzle Where to from here?

By Graham Van Zwoll, ALT Recruitment Manager

OK, so we're getting close, but what happens from here? Well, at present we are waiting to hear from our current ALTs and the various Boards of Education that we deal with, both current and new, regarding their intentions for next year's contracts. Most ALTs will stay of course, and we will likewise keep most contracts we have now, but it's still too early to know how everything will end up just yet. One way or another, the coming weeks will be very exciting and very busy!

January onward is our peak in-country recruiting season. We are busy interviewing applicants who are already here living and working in Japan. Our first concern is trying to take care of our current ALTs who wish to transfer to other areas, and especially those who work in areas where we may have lost a contract. From there, we try to fill the bulk of our open positions with in-country applicants and then try to find suitable places for the small number of overseas people that we have been able to guarantee jobs to. We may also have a handful of overseas applicants whom we have

not been able to guarantee specific positions to just yet and thus must ask for a bit more patience from them as we try to put this giant, ever-changing puzzle together. We hope to have as many great new ALTs working with us from April, but this whole process will take us right into March before it all comes together.

There are always many more applicants than open positions, but obviously the preferences of applicants aren't evenly spread out. This means that while certain areas might have 5 possible people to fill each opening, another area might have only 1 suitable applicant for 2 openings, and thus presents a unique challenge to fill. Each position is unique in location, level, number of schools, driving/non-driving and other factors, not to mention the specific needs and requests from the BOE. Some openings are inevitably harder to fill than others and some will be much more popular. Thus while we have to keep your preferences in mind to ensure that you are placed somewhere where you can be happy and successful, we must be particularly careful about matching an applicant's experience and abilities to our customer's needs.

Some areas are more open to limited or no teaching experience than others. Some areas absolutely require strong conversational Japanese. While other BOEs may need someone who has lived in Japan for several years. It really is like a giant puzzle (and always changing and evolving too) and we have to make all the various pieces fit together well! We think long and hard about this and most certainly do not just throw people into any old position. The wrong person in the wrong contract can cause a lot of damage to our reputation and business, not to mention negatively affect your experience here. Rest assured, we try our best to think carefully about everything.

Our biggest challenge is placing those who have little teaching experience, little or no Japanese or who have never been to Japan. Our general promise that we promote to the BOEs is an experienced, educated in a related field, Japanese speaking, comfortable in Japan ALT with a wonderful, flexible personality. So you can imagine there might be some resistance when we can only offer the last points and can't supply everything else we promise to that BOE. Our clients are becoming more demanding, but generally, if we have a strong relationship with a BOE, they will trust our judgement to offer the extra support required.

We're getting closer, so hang in there and let's keep in touch as best we can in the coming weeks.

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Teaching All Over Japan

An Observation from a Unique Opportunity

By Patrick DALY, ALT Supervisor

Hello, my name is Patrick Daly. I am one of the supervisors with ALTIA CENTRAL and one of my biggest job responsibilities as a new supervisor is cover teaching. Basically, that is a fancy term for substitute teaching. Since April of this year, I have already worked in about thirty different schools all across Japan. I have taught kindergarten through junior high school, in large schools with over a thousand students and schools with less than twenty students. I have worked in the inner city, up in the mountains and even on an island. Imagine taking a ferry every day to work!

Despite teaching in all of these radically different environments I have found something to be universally true: schools are eagerly looking forward to the ALT's visit. The students cannot wait for your lesson. When you come to class they will be so eager to sing and play games with you they can barely contain themselves. In the hallway and between classes they will all be asking you questions and wanting to play "rock, scissors, paper." Recess will come and you will be invited by numerous classes to join them in tag, soccer, dodgeball or even to just a swing around on the monkey bars. When you eat with students at lunchtime, where you will sit is always a hotly debated topic because all the students want to sit close to you and talk! After school there are club activities and everyone wants you to visit their group or team. It can be quite a challenge to visit every club on any given day, but there is a lot of fun to be had in trying!

It is not just the students that want to see you, but the teachers, principals and the school as a whole as well. I am often impressed by how eager many of the staff are to communicate with the new ALT. I have sat in principal's offices and talked about "serious" topics from *kyuushoku* (school lunch) to local professional baseball teams. I have also been at my desk preparing lessons while a procession of staff members come to visit me to talk about my home country and my impressions of Japan.

"When you eat with students at lunchtime, where you will sit is always a hotly debated topic because all the students want to sit close to you and talk!"

Overall they are all doing their best to welcome me to their school, and often you are made to feel like not only like a valued member of the staff, but also as an eagerly anticipated guest.

Unfortunately, any cover teaching assignment must come to an end sometime, and even if I have just spent one day at the school, it is always difficult to say goodbye. It is not uncommon to walk out of the school with "thank you" letters from the students and best wishes from the staff.

The work supervisors do in the office behind the scenes is interesting, challenging and very important, but it is great to have an opportunity to get back into a school, even for a short time. After spending a day at a school playing games, singing songs and talking with nearly everybody in the building it is easy to remember why I became an ALT in the first place and why I will always remember it as the best job I ever had!

"After covering in some 30 different schools all over Japan ... it is easy to remember why I became an ALT in the first place and why I will always remember it as the best job I ever had!"

-Patrick DALY
ALTIA CENTRAL Supervisor



Money Matters

A general idea of how much it all costs

By Charlene Yasuda, former ALT Administrator, Head Office

When changing jobs or moving house, money matters tend to be at the forefront of many people's minds, especially when it involves going overseas. Working as an ALT will not make you rich, but it is a stable and liveable income in Japan, and Japan these days is not nearly expensive as you might think. As the yen strengthens or weakens against foreign currency, our salaries when converted to our home country obviously go up or down but here is just a basic picture of what the cost of living in Japan will be like to guide you.

SALARY As you may know, the monthly base pay for most contracts is between 240,000 and 255,000 JPY per month depending on qualifications and experience, and occasionally a bit on your location which may have a lower base due to fewer working days per year. Salary is paid on the 20th of the following month (i.e. April's salary is paid on May 20th) meaning that your 1st paycheck might be some 7 weeks away after you start. You will be asked to pay the 1st month's rent up front at O/T and then deductions for the 2nd month's rent and the first 2 months of health insurance are taken off your 1st pay. Unfortunately, this may take up the bulk of that 1st salary and it will take another month and another payday to really get on your feet again. To start off then, it's imperative you bring about ¥200,000 or ¥300,000 to Japan to survive comfortably for the 1st few months. It depends on how you budget, how you eat, how you want to set up your apartment, and how often you go out on the town of course, but the 1st few months may be a bit monetarily challenging. It does get better though, and it does balance out in the end.

TAXES Income tax is only about 3-4% of your monthly earnings and will be deducted by the company and paid on your behalf. Resident's/City Tax is a bit more but it is calculated after the 1st year of earnings. The exact amounts vary from place to place, depending on where you live, number of dependents, your earnings for the previous year, etc. Taxes in your home country may also need to be filed, though generally the exemption amount is more than your yearly salary here, you will likely not need to pay taxes on your Japanese income. Home country taxation rules and requirements are, obviously, the sole responsibility of the Employee.

BANK ACCOUNT ALTIA CENTRAL generally utilizes the Post Office Savings Account system to pay our employees. After you have your Residence Card, you can quickly and easily set up a Japan Post account. ATMs are located at most every post office and offer great access to your money, especially in rural areas where there is a limited number of banks. The fees associated with depositing and withdrawing money from a Post Office ATM are generally much less than that of the regular banks, the ATM cards can be used at most bank and convenience store ATMs nationwide and ATM access in Japan is now better than ever and getting to your money should not be a problem.

HEALTH INSURANCE Since you will be working in the Public School system, all of our ALTs must be on either the National Health Insurance (*Kokumin Hoken*) or Employee's Health Insurance (*Shakai Hoken*) plans, depending on your particular contract. Each plan includes both health insurance and a pension plan, which is not optional (but mostly refundable), especially for *Shakai Hoken*. *Shakai Hoken* is a bit more expensive, about ¥35,000 per month but is considered by some to be a more desirable plan and includes your whole family, if you have one. *Kokumin* is a bit cheaper overall, especially in your 1st year in Japan as it's based on your previous year's income, but as not all contracts are eligible for one or the other plan, yours will likely be chosen based on the contract type in your position and we will take your preferences into consideration when we place you. You can find more information on this subject at <http://www.sia.go.jp/e/ss.html>.

RENT & UTILITIES Rent and utilities are overall quite reasonable, with most utility bills being easily paid at local convenience stores. Mobile phones are easily available with a multitude of plans and of course will vary in cost depending on the plan and your usage. Internet and cable TV fees can sometimes be combined for a better deal, depending on your area. If you need an apartment, we do offer an ALTIA CENTRAL sponsored apartment like LeoPalace. These are furnished with appliances and come with an internet provider already connected and easily activated for a small fee of about ¥1,600/month. Though small, they are very convenient and are super easy to move into.

GROCERIES Grocery shopping can be quite expensive compared to some countries, with fresh fruit, vegetables and beef being a bit on the expensive side. Pork and chicken are quite cheap and there are many other foods which offer a great value, especially local vegetables in season. Depending on what you eat, sometimes eating out can work out cheaper! Avoid convenience stores, shop around for cheaper supermarkets, look for the 100 yen food shops which are quite popular, and try the evening specials at most supermarkets as well. Most ALTs eat *kyushoku* (school lunch) in their schools and the cost is particularly cheap at ¥300 or less per day. It provides you with a sizable, nutritious, hot meal each day at school.

An APPROXIMATE monthly expense breakdown

Rent.....	¥55,000
Apt. Mgmt. Fee.....	¥3,500
Utilities.....	¥10,000
School lunch.....	¥5,000
Groceries.....	¥30,000
Health Ins. (if <i>shakai hoken</i>).....	¥35,000
(optional) Internet.....	¥1,600
(optional) Mobile phone.....	¥8,000

Working with Special Needs Students A Surprise and a Delight!

By Meron MESFIN, Recruiting Assistant

With all the challenges that take place in the special needs classroom the rewards can often be that much greater. The reason I would suggest that rewards can indeed be “greater” is because the effect you potentially have on special needs students can be life changing. Positive experiences that are emotionally charged seem to engrave themselves deeply into memory. I am by no means an expert in this field however I do believe that this tends to happen a lot more with special needs students. As a wise ALTIA CENTRAL staff member once told me when welcoming me into head office: “With great power... comes great responsibility” (this pearl also seems to be used a lot by Uncle Ben to inspire superheroes). All joking aside, I believe that teaching these students is a great opportunity given to us which we can not overlook.

Please allow me to introduce myself and elaborate on my experiences. My name is Meron Mesfin and I have worked as an ALT for 5 years, in special needs classrooms or with special needs students every year both in rural and urban Japan. I have gone from being surprised and nervous but with a feeling of “Wow, this is really nice” after each lesson, to requesting even more lessons and opportunities to work with special needs students. I currently work in an actual special needs school with heavily disabled students who are physically, mentally and visually impaired. This will be different to most ALTs' experiences with special-needs classrooms, but the commonality that lies in all the classrooms and lessons is the requirement for stacks, mounds and even mountains of patience and creativity.

Special needs students are very similar to kindergardeners and younger learners and are often highly dependent on their teachers. Interacting with their teachers before, during and after class is vital, and is one of the first thing we have to do. It's also something we have to do right, especially in the beginning, in order to get a proper profile of the students, and any particular areas of sensitivity they have.

Some of the most engraved memories that I have are from seeing the faces of my special needs students light up with excitement every time we meet each other, cheering me up with their smiles and constantly forcing me to play with them even if I was on my way to class with materials in hand. Of course I would make it up to them during break time, but a lesson packed with songs, stories, role-plays and simple activities is really what they kept begging me for. Needless to say, I always felt loved and appreciated and the smiles on their faces, and their teachers' faces, could not be described as anything less than magic.

English might have seemed completely secondary at times but by earning trust and building their exposure to English I helped to extend their comfort zones with people. Be sure to start with TRUST and continue the journey from there. Coming back to the “aim” of the special-need classroom, allowing them to trust and be more independent helps them realise themselves as being an active part of the society they live in, no matter how big or small.

I hope this sounds very familiar to your experiences with your regular ES or even JHS classroom, because that is how we should feel whenever asked to teach special needs.

5 KEY POINTS FOR THE SPECIAL NEEDS CLASS

1. Speak with HRT/JTE consistently on how students are responding to the lessons
2. Do not be afraid to slow the lesson right down to give the students extra time
3. Repeat material often and build up gradually
4. Be aware of what format the students remember information best - i.e. physically, visually, audio etc
5. Be cheerful, positive and let them know that you are happy to be there

SPOTLIGHT

Atsuko ARAKAWA &
Patrick DALY

Teamwork is important in almost any field, company or organization and ALTIA CENTRAL is no different. In our company however, we have the added complexity of having a Japanese owned company with Japanese clients, half the head office staff from Japan and half from other countries, and all of our ALTs from abroad as well. It is a unique environment and thus teamwork is vital for us to survive, and thrive, as a company in the ALT industry.

Our ALT supervisors are all native English speakers, have years of time

spent living and working in Japan, and they all have been exceptional ALTs with ALTIA CENTRAL before being promoted. And our Japanese IUP Coordinators have all lived abroad and thus understand the importance of 2nd languages and communication. Our supervisors are the first point of contact with the ALTs, and our IUP Coordinators liaise with our client BOEs and schools, and together they form a very important and capable team and an integral part of our company.

Patrick DALY was born in an area of Michigan that was mainly populated by Japanese people who worked in the local automotive industry. He grew up eating sushi, udon and *anpan* and eventually came here to study Japanese. He spent 3 years with us teaching in elementary

school while earning a Masters in TESOL by night, and joined our head office as a supervisor in 2011.

Atsuko ARAKAWA is from Nagoya but has spent some time living in the US as well as traveling and backpacking all over the world. Her latest trips were to Peru and Indonesia. She has been with ALTIA CENTRAL for almost 10 years now.

