

ALTIA CENTRAL RECRUITING

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We're Getting Closer A general update for April

By Graham Van Zwoll, ALT Recruitment Manager

Wow! February! Already!? Hard to believe that we're this far into the year already!

We've been busy for some 3 months straight now, but the really, really busy season is happening right now. The proverbial light at the end of the tunnel is visible and by mid March most all of the interviews and placements should be done. I say "should" because as I will explain below, it's not quite that simple.

In December we asked all of our current ALTs what their plans were for the next school year. Were they planning to stay another year? Had they decided that it was time to move back home? Leaning in one direction or the other? They let us know during the month of January and thus we can start to put together a fairly complete list of positions that would need to be filled. But as I mentioned above, it's never quite that easy.

Things can change and plans go astray, so we are often told in February and March that family health issues, grad school applications or sudden job openings (or promises that fell through) have suddenly made them alter their plans for the upcoming school year. And, as we are really only able to accept a full school year commitment from ALTs, some people need to pull out due to plans that

have solidified for them months in the future!

So, we take our initial target number, and add or subtract from it with regards to expected contracts for the new school year, and then that of course gets altered a number of times throughout February and into March with people changing their minds. So we have a new number. But, then that gets changed when a BOE has a budget cut, another BOE gets approval to increase the number of ALTs, or a certain contract is unexpectedly lost or, more likely, won. The number of ALTs we need to hire might change from about 35 or 40, then up to 50, lowered to about 45, then suddenly jumps to 55 and ends up around 45 again. All the while of course, it's not just numbers but areas, levels and specific locations which are constantly changing as well. It's that mysterious final number that we need to get to, and we will, but it just takes time - and patience.

Getting closer now, we can see the end of this recruiting season, but we're not quite there. By the end of February, we should be in a much better position to tell you about a guaranteed position we have for you, how close we are to a guaranteed position, or at least what your chances are looking like with us.

Hang in there, and let's keep in touch.



Contributing to your school

Being active, proactive, and interactive

By Matthew COTHRAN, Lead Teacher

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As ALTs, we are in our schools for at least 8 hours a day. Our lessons are between 40-50 min long. Some days we have 5 lessons, other days we might only have 1. If you do the math, you'll realize we can have a lot of time at school when we are not actually teaching lessons. Obviously we all eat lunch with our students and help during cleaning time. Many ALTs also join in *bukatsu*, or club activities, after school. However, we can do even more than that. The question is not what we 'should' be doing with any abundance of time, but what we 'CAN' do!

After you get your lessons planned and ready to go, and if you find yourself still with plenty of work time, try to increase your presence in your school. In Elementary schools that might include interacting with students more during recess periods, such as playing and sweating as you run all over the grounds, discussing books in the library, or helping take care of the school animals (commonly rabbits or chickens). In Junior High school, although there may not be recess periods or students playing on the grounds, you can find plenty of students standing in the halls and chatting with friends between lessons. Often if you walk around during these breaks, some groups will call you over and include you in a conversation or badger you with questions! Many of these students may be quiet in class, but in a group of friends they may feel more comfortable and courageous enough to speak to the foreigner!

In both school levels it is also nice to chat with teachers. You will quickly recognize the times of day when the teachers chat over some coffee or green tea in the teachers room. Make it a point to have a little refreshment at that same time. Many teachers will be happy to have the chance to get to know you more, and you can learn all kinds of things about your school, your students, and your communities from taking the time to

drink a cup of tea. Some schools even share *omiyage* or small snacks at this time, too!

Occasionally you'll have some free periods with no lessons. The other teachers are busy, and the students are all in class, so what can you do? A great option is offering to help your fellow English teachers.

In JHS, we can offer assistance for checking students' workbooks and writing positive and supportive comments to them. Another idea would be doing an English related project for your school. Examples might be livening up your English room (if you have one), starting an English newsletter or newspaper (at a proactive JHS), or simply making an English Board (a universal possibility)! All 3 of these do require asking permission from the proper teachers, but if the right enthusiasm and careful presentation of what you want to do is fully realized, then you'll be encouraged to go ahead more often than not.

Lastly, after you have been at your school for a while and have built up a good work-relationship, one option is even joining other lessons. Talking to the appropriate teacher has seen me joining anything from cooking in Home Economics lessons, to swimming in the PE lessons two periods in a row (the best trick to staying cool during Japanese summer!).

At the end of the day, the more you put into being a great ALT and an active member of your schools, the more you will get out of your time here!

“...if the right enthusiasm and careful presentation of what you want to do is fully realized, then you'll be encouraged to go ahead more often than not.”

ALTIA CENTRAL Company Cars Getting Around in Style (?)

By Michael Sullivan, ALT Supervisor

Even in Japan where using the train is “convenient” we know that having your own wheels offers freedoms not otherwise available. One of the many things that makes life a little easier for our ALTs is the fact that we provide cars for **both personal and work use** in most positions which require driving. Buying, maintaining and using a car in Japan can be very expensive. However, ALTIA CENTRAL owns many a “Mira” (THE standard compact car in Japan made by Daihatsu) and through routine maintenance and thoughtful stewardship by our ALTs we will continue to do so for years to come!

Why do we do this? For starters, you may be traveling some distance to your school(s) where public transportation would take much time or simply not be available; we want you at your schools on time and relaxed! Also, the BOE’s are most often keen on having you drive because you work for us, not them, thus we take responsibility in the case of an accident. JETs and the vast majority of non-AC ALTs therefore, are not allowed to drive to school. If you do plan to use your own car you may do so and we will even provide a monthly stipend (currently ¥16,500/month). You will, of course, need to provide proof of eligibility to drive in Japan and adequate insurance coverage, but if you want to own your own car, it’s a small price to pay. No car of your own? No need to buy one! We offer two plans to get you rolling depending on your preferences.

First, Plan ‘W’ allows the use of the vehicle for strictly Work Only purposes. Work purposes are defined as “operation of the vehicle, along the company approved commuting routes between the Driver’s residence and host institution(s).” Under

Plan W, ALTIA CENTRAL accepts the responsibility to pay for all the comprehensive auto insurance, monthly parking fees and all gasoline expenses associated with the vehicle, the monthly lease expense, inspection and registrations fees, yearly vehicle taxes, scheduled maintenance check ups and repairs due to normal wear and tear. What do you pay? Not much! Can you stop at the grocery store on the way home from work? No. Never. Seriously! This is a WORK ONLY plan, and thus are strictly limited to driving a set route each day.

The other option is Plan ‘W+’. Under the Work Plus plan, we share the costs of the vehicle. The DRIVER accepts the responsibility to pay for all the comprehensive insurance and all the gasoline associated with operating the vehicle for both work and private purposes, but only within a 100 km radius of home. ALTIA CENTRAL agrees to pay all other expenses including parking. What do you actually pay? ¥8000 per month plus fuel. We think that for ALTs, it’s a pretty sweet deal and we hope you think so too! Indeed, having a car means that as soon as you move in, there will be a mode of transportation immediately available to you!

“ALTIA Central owns many a ‘Mira’ and through routine maintenance and thoughtful stewardship by our ALTs we will continue to do so for years to come!”

SPOTLIGHT

Karen FUKUYAMA &
Eriko TAKEUCHI

Our Supervisors will be your first point of contact with the company. They have been exceptional ALTs over many years prior to stepping up to this level. They are experienced and knowledgeable and understand both your needs and those of our client.

You will first meet the Supervisors at Orientation/Training and get to know them fairly well over the week. Later,

they will visit you at school to both observe lessons as well as get feedback from your schools and teachers. Sometimes they will visit you at school with their teammate, one of our IUP Coordinators who work with the Supervisor in your geographic area.

Karen FUKUYAMA has been with ALTIA CENTRAL as an ALT and a Supervisor for more years than she’ll let me write. She spends plenty of evenings having supportive chats with her ALTs over coffee, and is always extremely happy to share both advice and her time.

One of her IUP Coordinator partners is Eriko TAKEUCHI and together they

deal with many of our important contracts in southern Aichi Prefecture, an ALTIA CENTRAL stronghold. Eriko spent time in Scotland before becoming a Senior High school English teacher, and subsequently joining ALTIA CENTRAL several years ago.



Being a Senior High School ALT

Unique Challenges, Unique Opportunities

by Jason WALTERS, Special Recruiting Assistant

Over the past decade, and especially since the Ministry of Education's declaration that "in principle, high school classes should be taught entirely in English," demand for native speakers in secondary education has continued to grow. While a majority of ALTIA CENTRAL ALTs work in junior high and elementary schools, some of you may have the unique experience of teaching high school. I've worked for five years at various high schools in Japan, and have found the experience to be challenging, fun, and immensely rewarding. Whether you're a brand new ALT or are making the transition from JHS or elementary, you're in for an exciting experience.

While the high school ALT's day has a similar structure to that of a junior high ALT, your role will likely be very different. While no two positions are entirely alike, most high school ALTs will act as "lead" teacher during their lessons. While you will certainly have a curriculum designed by your Japanese coworkers, the work of preparing lessons and managing the flow of your classes may fall largely on you. You might even be asked to grade assignments, keep track of student performance, and create test materials. However, don't let this apparent level of autonomy fool you due to the nature of your responsibilities, active, timely communication with your JTEs is all the more essential. Because your coworkers are busy outside of class, they will appreciate your patience and flexibility in making yourself available at the times most convenient for them.

High school ALTs are often assigned to teach classes with names like "Oral Communication," "English Expression," or "Language Lab." What most of these courses have in common is that they rarely introduce new vocabulary or grammar points. A variety of high school textbooks exist, and for the most part, they contain material the students have already learned "on paper" during junior high school. Your students may continue to learn new grammar in their other English lessons, but your ultimate goal as a high school ALT is to create a classroom environment in which your students can work on overcoming shyness, building confidence, and begin verbalizing the English they've spent the last five or six years learning. You may be surprised at

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what seems to be a huge difference in skill levels among students in the same class, but in time you're likely to discover that these are more often issues of confidence than English ability.

Just as in elementary and junior high, high energy in class is important, but high school students won't



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always let you get away with "hamming it up" in lieu of real confidence, so it's important to exude genuine warmth, give heartfelt praise, and to be a cheerful, good-humored ally rather than a comedian. Make verbal communication relevant to their lives, give them opportunities to try some self-directed learning and experimentation, and encourage them to feel safe making lots of mistakes.

Unlike working at a junior high or elementary, you won't be eating school lunch with your students, so it's even more important to seek out opportunities to connect with them elsewhere. English clubs and debate teams may demand some extra time, but afford you great chances to get to know your most enthusiastic students on a one-to-one basis. Don't be afraid to try practicing some difficult Japanese with your less confident students (outside class, of course). This gives them the valuable chance to interact with a foreigner while learning firsthand that it's possible to communicate without being fluent or perfect.

High school is a critical decision-making period. If you work hard to earn your students' trust and respect, you may find yourself in the unique position to be able to write recommendation letters to foreign universities' study abroad programs for your students' benefit. You can discuss their career goals together, helping them to recognize options they may not have known they had. You may even be asked to help write a letter to Ke\$ha that results in your student being invited backstage for a post-concert meet-and-greet (yes, this happened!). If you stay in Japan for a few years, you will see your students graduate, go on to universities, get jobs, or have children of their own. Being asked to attend a former student's wedding is one of the great honors I've had in my life.

Working as a high school ALT comes with a number of unique challenges, but with some effort and flexibility on your part, it can be hugely rewarding. If you're willing to truly serve your students to the best of your ability, you can quite literally change lives. Good luck out there, give of yourself, and stay genki!