

Andrea Humm (profiled by Adele Montgomery)



Andrea first became interested in Japanese when her older brother started taking Japanese at High School. Her family also had a lot of home-stay students over the years, which further fuelled her interest in Japanese culture. Andrea couldn't wait to study Japanese once she got to High School. She even asked her brother to teach her hiragana and katakana when she was at Intermediate so she had a head

start when she finally hit 3rd form/year 9!

Andrea studied hard all throughout High School, getting the 6th Form Award for first in Japanese and then in 7th form (Year 13) she won a scholarship from Tokyo Dome to study at their Foreign Language Institute for 10 months in Tokyo. Part of the scholarship was to work part-time in Tokyo Dome Korakuen Amusement Park. However, the company didn't organise the working visas in time, so the scholarship students couldn't work until the last two months they were there, making it quite uncomfortable to live in Tokyo, one of the most expensive cities in the world. Because of this, and a few other reasons, Andrea didn't feel very positive about her time in Tokyo. Andrea returned to New Zealand and began studying Physical Education at Otago University, taking a break from Japanese. However, in her 3rd year at Otago, she picked up some Japanese language and cultural papers and found that she really enjoyed them.

In the summer holidays after her 3rd year at Otago, Andrea got a job as a Japanese-speaking guide on the Routeburn Track based in Queenstown. Andrea loves tramping, so for her, it was an absolute dream job that she couldn't believe she was getting paid for! By dealing with Japanese clients every day, Andrea's Japanese, particularly her speaking and listening, improved immensely.

After graduating from Otago University, Andrea returned to the Routeburn Track for two more seasons. When she finished her 3rd season on the Routeburn Track, she realised she really needed to get back to Japan, as she knew that there had to be more to it than the mediocre experience she had had in Tokyo.

Andrea applied for the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme and was placed in two Junior High Schools in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka prefecture. Andrea wasn't a typical ALT (Assistant Language Teacher), because she taught her own English conversation lessons. Andrea found it challenging at first as she had no textbook or curriculum to work from. However she soon started to enjoy it and found it to be a very satisfying and rewarding job.

While in Hamamatsu, Andrea took up karate and also joined a women's soccer team. Being the only foreigner on the soccer team was at times very challenging and frustrating, but again, her

Japanese improved significantly during that time and she also learnt a lot more about Japanese culture.

After two years on the JET Programme, Andrea applied to become a volunteer English teacher on board the Peace Boat. This non-profit 'group' - in the form of a ship – sails predominantly Japanese passengers around the world teaching them about the perils of nuclear proliferation and global warming and exposing them to other cultures and ways of living. Speaking Japanese really helped Andrea to get the position, as she was teaching lower level older students who didn't understand any English. On board the Peace Boat, Andrea met her Japanese partner and since then they have travelled to many other countries together.

Following her time on Peace Boat, Andrea returned to Japan to train for six months to prepare for her karate black belt grading. Andrea found this to be an amazing experience, one of her best in Japan, as she really had an excellent time training hard with the other club members. She also got her black belt!

From April 2008, Andrea has been working at Nagoya International Junior and Senior High School, a school with a strong focus on English. She is not an ALT - more like a 'real' teacher. For example, Andrea shares a home-room with a Japanese teacher, writes reports and participates in parent interviews. Many Japanese teachers at the school do not speak English so it is very important that Andrea can communicate with the other teachers. If Andrea could not communicate effectively in Japanese, she would not have been able to get this job.

Andrea thinks it is amazing where Japanese has led her in life. She would not have had any of these incredible experiences or opportunities had she not chosen to study Japanese.