

Kerstin Meinecke

Kerstin Meinecke lives in New Zealand now, but until last year, she was one of the most popular English teachers in Hokkaido, Japan.

Kerstin already had a strong passion for Asia but became aware of the attraction of the Japanese Language for first time in 1989 in Paraparaumu. She began studying Japanese at a night class, and became more and more single minded in her commitment to it. During local library visits she would become a bookworm for any book containing mention of Japan. When she went to an Asian food shop, she would check her Japanese against the wording on the back of Japanese food packets.



On her first visit to Japan in 1990 she spent six weeks traveling around the main island of Honshu. Then a year later she went back to Japan with two big goals: the first, to find a permanent job in Japan and the second to improve her Japanese language skills. Having achieved the second but not the first goal, she decided to return to New Zealand.

In 1995, Kerstin began her more serious study of Japanese at Massey University in Palmerston North. After graduating from Massey, she flew back to Japan to work as an English language teacher in Hokkaido.

She taught at 14 different schools. With her friendly, easygoing personality, Kerstin was able to build up a good relationship with her students and other workmates in a very short time.

Looking back on her life in Japan, Kerstin comments: “One thing I still remember is that as I always wanted to improve my Japanese so I went out of my way to meet with Japanese people as often as I could. For example, I attended the Japanese traditional Matsuri (festival). I wore Yukata (traditional Japanese clothes) and danced with the local people!”

Of her teaching, she observed: “Teaching English to teenagers was not an easy job but it was a fruitful. One day, one of my students told me that he liked studying English because he understood my lessons. His comment actually made my teaching life meaningful”.

Kerstin returned to New Zealand in 2004. She is now studying at Massey University College of Education in Palmerston North and will soon qualify as a

New Zealand registered teacher.

Her advice to New Zealanders learning Japanese? “Don’t focus on the language to begin with, focus more on culture, custom and such like. Your language comprehension will follow. Read as many books on culture, history, literature etc or translated novels as possible.”

Profile by Megumi Chiba, 2005