

Matthew Birch



Matt's journey began about twenty years ago at New Plymouth Boys High School where he chose to study Japanese as an elective subject. This language he thought would help him get a job, but overtime it also became his passion. After 4 years of Japanese language study, Matt's growing enthusiasm for Japanese led him to Tochigi on an international exchange programme. On this programme he attended Tochigi Minami High School, lived with a Japanese home stay family and took up Japanese archery or *kyuudo*. This complete immersion in Japanese society and culture enabled Matt to hone his language skills and not

surprisingly, he became fluent in just 6 months!

In 1994, Matt returned to New Zealand and completed his 7th form high school year. After completing this work, he applied for and was awarded the *Monbusho Japanese Education Scholarship*. This award enabled Matt to return to Japan to study at a language school in Tokyo, for one year. Of course, one year wasn't long enough for Matt, so after his scholarship ended he fearlessly enrolled at Kyushu University to study psychology. While studying, Matt joined a Japanese heavy metal band and became the Business English Tutor for university staff.

In 1997 Matt returned to NZ and enrolled at International Pacific College (IPC). He graduated in 1999 with a Bachelor of International Studies. At IPC, Matt continued to embrace Japanese culture – he managed the Japanese drum team, played alongside Japanese students in the IPC rugby team, participated in English language tutoring and studied Japanese to an advanced level. He also played in a rock band with a Japanese drummer and fellow Japanese language graduate, Michael Mackay.

As expected, Matt soon returned to Japan, this time to teach English at the NOVA institute. He stayed with NOVA for five years, starting work there as an English instructor and advancing to an assistant trainer. During his time at NOVA, Matt met his current fiancé. In 2006, Matt returned to New Zealand and started working at Massey University as the International Student Support Officer. In this role Matt provided educational support services to both Japanese and international students. He also helped these students engage with the New Zealand way-of-life.



In 2008, Matt moved to England to join his London-based fiancé. Now in England, Matt works for a company which arranges cultural home stays in Europe. Matt is currently the operations manager and in this role helps place Japanese students in home stays.

Since learning his first Japanese words – some 20 years ago – Matt has advanced his Japanese language (reading and writing) competency to an advanced level. Matt remains extremely fond of Japan – the culture, music, food,

landscape and people – and aspires to return there soon.

*Profiled by Lindi Newth June 2009*