

Good evening, こんばんは。

Thank you for coming. It is my great pleasure to welcome everybody here to honour the five JET Programme participants who have recently returned to Melbourne after working for a few years in Japan. Tonight, we also have two new JET participants who are going to Japan in mid-January next year. Welcome to the reception!

I arrived in Melbourne from Tokyo at the end of January and this is my first time hosting a reception for JET returnees at my residence. In fact, this is my first-ever reception in person at the residence so it is a very special occasion for me and for my chef, who has been eager to show off his Japanese cooking skills!

First and foremost, to all the returned JETs, welcome back home. お疲れ様でした。 I believe that all of you had many unique experiences over the last few years in Japan. Spending time overseas during a pandemic must have been stressful and challenging at times, but I hope that your time in Japan was fruitful. I'm sure that it has become an invaluable asset not only for you and the community you lived in, but also for the Japan-Australia relationship. And to the new JETs, I hope you have a wonderful time in Japan and make long-lasting friendships and connections with Japanese people and culture. Please get as much advice as possible from the returned JETs tonight as well as from other guests, including the JET Alumni and the members of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Melbourne who all have connections in various locations in Japan. As for myself and my wife Kaoru, we are originally from Osaka, which many of you here would know as the sister city of Melbourne for over 40 years.

On the topic of Melbourne, the annual Japanese Film Festival is currently taking place at the cinemas. The festival was held online last year, so we were very fortunate that the cinemas were allowed to fully reopen just a week before the opening film, HOKUSAI. Nothing is better than watching films on a big wide screen at the cinemas!

I spent many hours connecting with people online since I arrived in Melbourne. While virtual communications are convenient and easy to use, nothing can beat real human interactions. In Melbourne, many Japan-related events were postponed or were held online in the last two years. I hope that many Japan-related events including the Melbourne Japanese Summer Festival and the Japan Festival in Box Hill will come back in-person in 2023, if not in 2022.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone here for your continued assistance to the JET Programme and your support towards strengthening the Japan-Australia relationship. Particularly, I would like to thank Mr Bruce Atkinson for his attendance tonight and his continued warm support towards strengthening the Japan-Victoria relationship. Thank you, Bruce-san.

Tonight is an opportunity for the JET returnees to share their memories and experiences in Japan with us. I hope you will all enjoy tonight's gathering!

Thank you.