

For ALTs in the JET Program in Japan, there are two big periods of change each year. Of course the end of March/beginning of April is a big change, because our coworkers, students and work schedules shift. But the other period of change that you might not know about is right now: the end of July and the beginning of August. Many veteran ALTs leave, after a year or two or three, and in August, new ALTs, who often don't speak Japanese and don't know anything about Japan, arrive.

This is my third year in the JET Program, saying goodbye to many good friends I've made this year. In my first year, most of my friends stayed in Japan. It wasn't a difficult time and I was excited about starting a second year together with most of my friends. But the my second year in Japan, last year, was difficult. As many of my friends were preparing to return home, I started doubting my own decision to stay. It felt like all of my good friends were leaving, and watching them prepare to return to their home countries, get new jobs and start their new lives was really difficult. I was sure that my third year couldn't be as meaningful as the first two, but it was too late to change my mind.

Surprisingly enough, the new ALTs came to Japan last August and I made some really great friends. Suddenly, I found myself with a social life even busier than the year before, and with a lot of meaningful friendships. But almost all of those people decided to stay just for one year and are getting ready to head back to their home countries now.

Each year that my friends leave me, I feel some pangs of sadness. Not only is it sad to say goodbye to them as they go back to their different countries around the globe, but it always makes me think of how I will say goodbye to the co-workers, students and friends I have made in Japan in the last three years. Each time I go to the closing ceremony, I think of the speech I will someday have to make, and how hard it will be. With each year that passes, I feel more and more nervous about those days when it will be time for me to say goodbye, not only to my friends, but to Japan.

The next few weeks are filled with goodbye parties, taking friends to the airport ferry and saying many goodbyes. While I know I will see many of them again, there are many that I'm sure I will never see. I like to think that it's a small world, but the reality is that all the Mie JETs that I know now will probably never be in the same place again. Even though this is my third year to see my friends leave, I don't know how to say goodbye.