

Report on the 2008 Japan Foundation Training Programme in Urawa
(4-week Course for Non-Native Speaking Teachers
from the USA, Canada and UK)

For more information about this training programme, please see http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/teaching_grant.php.

Report by Helen Turner, Teacher of Japanese at Hertford Regional College, Hertfordshire.

I attended the Urawa summer course for a month this June. This was the second time I had the opportunity to go to Urawa. The group attending this particular course was small: five people from the USA and just two of us from the UK. This enabled us to have more individual attention from the tutors and meant that we were able to have more chance to express ourselves in the classroom. In the institute at the same time were a group of teachers from all over South East Asia so we were able to mix with other people whose common language was Japanese, and therefore had a lot of practice outside of lessons.



Helen Turner (back row, furthest right) with other course participants and lecturers

The course consisted of two main components: Japanese Language and Culture, and Pedagogy. The purpose of the Japanese Language and Culture element was to develop communicative competency in Japanese whilst exploring themes on modern and traditional Japanese culture. We covered topics such as school life, modern Japanese society and kabuki. These topics were also enhanced by visits to a high school and an elementary school, to a kabuki theatre in Tokyo and a class trip to Aizuwakamatsu in Fukushima Prefecture.

The Pedagogy element introduced various new resources and how to use them. For example we had an afternoon looking at the new DVD resources 'Erin ga chōsen! Nihongo dekimasu' (Erin's Challenge) and were then given a copy of all three books and DVDs. We also had a session on 'idea sharing' where all teachers gave a short presentation on resources they had created or games they find useful in the classroom.

As part of the course we had to plan and create our own resources. High school students helped us make videos and take pictures of everyday situations that would be of interest to our British and American students. At the end of the course we had to give a 15-minute presentation of the resources and lessons we had created and show session plans on how to use them. This meant we not only came back with our own new materials, but also with materials created by our classmates. This was a wonderful way to start the new academic year with quite a few lessons already planned.

In addition to classroom lessons there were several cultural trips including the trip to Fukushima, a great chance to visit another area of Japan. We stayed in a ryokan (Japanese inn), ate traditional food and bathed in the local onsen (hot spring).

The course was extremely well organised and well thought out, and the teachers were dedicated and willing to help with anything including finding a shop that sold

‘akachōchin’ (red lanterns)! The entire course was in Japanese and therefore we were fully immersed in the language for four weeks, which was a great opportunity to brush up and learn more up-to-date Japanese.

For those people teaching Japanese who never get a chance to visit Japan regularly, this is a great course, with no expenses apart from the airfare. I would recommend it to anyone teaching Japanese.



Course participants painting Akabeko (red cows), a traditional toy and lucky charm from the Aizu region