

JET Programme CIR Report

August 2024 – January 2025

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, or good night to anyone who reads this report. My name is Anna Baré, and I am currently a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Niseko, Hokkaido.

I arrived here in August 2024, not knowing what to expect. Like many of you, I had never heard of Niseko before. When I looked it up, all I could find was that it was famous for ski resorts and that many foreigners, especially Australians, like to spend their winter vacation there. However, since then, I have learned much more about the region, and there is still much left to discover.



I would like to use this report to review the past six months I have spent here, kind of like a diary. However, since I have an audience (at least I hope so), I will also expand on my job experience and future CIR endeavours.

Let us start with the question I get the most: "Why Niseko?". Until now, the only option for Belgians in the JET programme has been Kanazawa, thanks to the long-lasting sister city agreement between Kanazawa and our lovely Belgian city, Gent. This should also have been the case for this year if not for the lack of English-speaking CIRs. Understandably, since English is the international language of our current society (that is also the reason why I am writing this report in English), the JET programme hires significantly more CIRs from English-speaking countries. Still, sometimes, the demand does not align with the offer, and applicants from other (English-passing) countries get an extra chance. That is why, this year, we have not only one but five Belgian CIRs active in different parts of Japan. Now that this question has been answered, let me briefly introduce Niseko Town and my job as a CIR.

As mentioned, Niseko is located in Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four big islands. It takes around one and a half hours by car and three hours by train to get here from Sapporo, the prefecture's capital. It is important to note the difference between Niseko Town and the Niseko Area. The



Niseko Area refers to the tourist and resort area and encompasses the neighbouring towns of Kutchan and Rankoshi. Niseko Town is much smaller and only has about 5000 inhabitants, of which roughly 10 per cent are foreign residents, a very high number for Japan, which goes even higher during the winter as many foreigners come to work here for the ski season. This is probably one of the reasons why such a small town employs five CIRs.

Yes, you read it right. I work here at Niseko Town Hall with four other CIRs from different countries. Currently, we have a Canadian, Chinese, German, Indonesian, and, of course, Belgian CIR. As well as two ALTs. Let me use this moment to promote our social media page, Niseko FRIENDS, and if you are curious to know more about what we are doing in Niseko, I strongly encourage you to follow us 😊



When you look up the definition of a CIR on the JET programme website, you get a very vague and broad explanation. This is because, depending on where you are assigned and the needs of your contracting organisation, you can get various tasks. I will focus on the contents of my job here in Niseko. Our desks are in the town hall and are part of the Commerce, Industry and Tourism division. We are mainly in charge of interpretation and translation at the town hall. We do interpretation for foreign residents who come to the town hall, health check-ups, and other official instances where English (or any other language we speak) interpretation is needed. Translation of official documents and information from the town hall also falls under our daily work tasks.

We also organise events to foster cultural exchange among the residents of Niseko. We are free to choose what kind of events we want to plan. They can be themed around food, traditions such as Halloween, Christmas, the Chinese New Year, or even language classes. For example, I have organised a Speculoos-baking event to introduce the tradition of Saint Nicolas (Sinterklaas). In the future, I am also thinking of organising a French language class focussing on the whole French-speaking area to show that it is not limited to France.



In addition, we are also involved with schools; we give presentations about our countries to the students of the local Niseko Schools, and students from schools around Hokkaido come to Niseko to experience an "English Programme."

Unique to Niseko is also the International Reading Project (IRP) and the yearly "Picture Book World" event, during which we read picture books in different languages aloud. Lastly, we are also in charge of our radio programme, which is broadcast once a week in English and Japanese.

What I like about Niseko Town is its endeavour to engage in cultural exchange in both ways. With that, I mean that it is not only us, CIRs, that share our culture with the Japanese residents. We are also encouraged to participate in town events and learn more about Japanese culture.

As I write these lines, the snow has already piled up to more than one meter high, but let me rewind to the heat of the August summer days. When I arrived, my first job was participating in the O-bon festivities around town. We dressed up in yukatas and learned the different dances while meeting with the Niseko locals. This was a lovely experience and a perfect way to start my term.

In September, we had another chance to dance for the annual Odori-yama from the Kaributo Shrine festival, a Shinto shrine in Niseko. We practised for three days and performed in front of various businesses to wish them prosperity. My Chinese colleague and I got really hooked up with traditional Japanese dance, and we were allowed to take classes throughout the year as part of our work duties.



Outside of work, I love hiking in my free time, and Niseko is a perfect spot for this. Although best known for ski slopes, the mountains around Niseko can also be enjoyed during the green season and offer astonishing views. The picture on the right shows the view from the top of Mt. Annupuri. You can see the majestic Mt.



Yotei in the back (also known as Ezo Fuji). I also like visiting art exhibitions, but I was afraid there would be no around Niseko. Still, thanks to the Arishima Memorial Museum, I can get my fair share of art, which makes me happy.

Overall, I learned a lot during these first six months, whether at work (since this is my first job) or in my personal life (I feel like I have become more adult). I would like to discover more of Hokkaido during the coming year and get to know more people to broaden my vision of life.

Let us meet again in the next report. Until then, bye-bye!

