

JET Programme CIR Report

January 2025 – July 2025

It has been more than a year since I wrote my first CIR report. I finished my last report in the middle of the winter of 2025, and we are already at the end of my second winter here in Niseko. I think it is time for an update.

Let us rewind to the start of 2025. In the continuity of winter, I got to enjoy the snowy mountains of Niseko, tried skiing, and did several snowshoe hikes. For work, I made a presentation introducing Belgium to elementary school kids, taught them how to make crepes, and, more importantly, how to flip them in a pan. During our seasonal World Café event, I got to introduce the Epiphany Fest and the “Galette des Rois”, an almond pie that we eat on the occasion. To celebrate Valentine’s Day, I baked a chocolate fondant with, of course, Belgian chocolate. February is also the month of our biggest event, “Picture Book World”, where we introduce children from Niseko to picture books from around the world. We use these books as a medium to trigger their interest and deepen comprehension of the world around them. I got to read the book “Barbapapa” in French, and we also did a 5-language picture book reading. I try to even out the Belgian languages, so as I read Barbapapa in French, I read the second book in Dutch (my German colleague took care of the German part).

In March, I reconnected with my alma mater, KU Leuven, as one of my Japanese language teachers asked me to do a presentation to the students about the JET programme and my experience as a CIR.



As I endeavour to make Belgium known in Niseko, I do not forget to also deepen my knowledge and understanding of Japan. I think interacting with the local community is also an important part to achieve that, so as I mentioned in my previous report, I started learning Japanese dance at the community centre. Together with my Japanese dance class, we organised a “kimono-wearing” workshop for middle school students in Niseko. It was unsettling to be a

foreigner teaching Japanese middle school kids how to wear a kimono, but I was honoured that they would ask us to help. In March, I also got to make miso together with locals. It was very interesting to learn the technique behind this staple Japanese food. Sadly, my storage method was quite poor, and it did not turn out edible, so I will have to continue using store-bought miso for now. I am also interested in agriculture. Thanks to a connection from my university exchange in Kyoto, I visited an apple orchard holder and cider maker in Yoichi. I would love to get to know more about the agriculture in Japan.



During March, I went on a trip to Hiroshima and Itsukushima. A local guide in Hiroshima gave us a tour of the memorial park, explaining about the atomic bomb incident. I also tried Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki for the first time.

In April, as the snow melted, I bought my first-ever car, a sky-blue Daihatsu Tanto. With that done, I was finally able to start exploring more of Hokkaido. Although cherry blossoms only appear around Golden Week in Hokkaido, April is still the beginning of spring, and with that also comes the desire to try out new things, so I decided to challenge myself. I joined several local clubs in Niseko. First, as I love taking a stroll in nature, I joined the Niseko Footpath club, a walking club. With them, I got to explore and learn more about Niseko's natural environment. Many of the club members are nature guides and know a lot about the fauna and flora. Every time we go on a walk, they always tell me about plant names, ways to differentiate trees, how to find bamboo shoots in the woods, and whether plants are edible or poisonous. Since everything is in Japanese, there are a lot of terms that I do not understand, but I try to remember as many as I can. For now, I can recognise a plant called snakeberry (舞鶴草 maidzuruso), or know that I need to absolutely avoid touching urushi (Chinese lacquer tree), a very toxic plant.

Next, I also joined a Japanese drum club. I have always loved music, and I wanted to try out new instruments while in Niseko. What better than Taiko drums, the beat of Japan? I started training once a week in April, and as of now, I have already participated in several performances around town.

I also joined the amateur orchestra of Niseko, OK-Niseko, and played a bit of banjo together with them.

In May, Niseko Town Hall sent us to the International Japanese-English Translation and Interpretation Conference in Fukuoka to learn more about translation and interpretation, as it is a big part of our job. It was just after Golden Week, so together with some of my colleagues, we took the opportunity to visit Busan in South Korea. From Fukuoka, you can easily access Busan by boat. It was interesting to experience the different atmosphere between Japan and South Korea. I have also studied Korean at university, so I was happy to use it in a real situation.

During April, May, and June, I taught a French beginner class for Niseko residents. It was my first time teaching, so I was a bit nervous at the start, but the students were very motivated and encouraging. I tried to keep the class interesting by using interactive methods such as games, music and movies.

And just like that, the first half of the year had already gone. In July, I went back to Belgium to visit my family for a little while. It was a weird feeling leaving my home in Niseko to go back to my home in Belgium. Still, I was happy to see my family again and to catch up with my friends I had not seen in one year. This report is getting quite long. I will continue my story in the next one.

