

Paul Walsh

Communicating the Allure of Hiroshima to the World

Paul Walsh from the United Kingdom works to communicate the allure of Hiroshima abroad and currently runs an inbound tourism consulting company for all of Japan from Hiroshima.

SATO KUMIKO

PAUL Walsh from the United Kingdom runs an inbound tourism consulting company for all of Japan from his base in Hiroshima. The company is called Jizo Hat. “When traveling to the countryside of

Japan, there are small stone Ojizo-san statues along the road, and they are quite adorable, often wearing little handmade hats made by locals. These statues are said to help people in trouble. I want my company to be that kind of a presence,”

says Paul.

While in university, Paul entered and won an award through an essay contest sponsored by a Japanese securities company, and as an extra prize, he was given the opportunity to study in Japan for three weeks. It was during this time that he learned of the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme, an initiative of the Japanese government that invites young people from abroad to offer language guidance in Japan. In 1991 after graduating from university, he joined the JET Programme, and spent three enriching years as an assistant language teacher at junior high and high schools in Oita Prefecture.

After that, he traveled around Asia with an American woman he met in Oita and who he would later marry. He then returned to Japan, and began working as an English conversation teacher in Hiroshima in 1996. At first, life in Hiroshima was not fun for the two of them.

“When I think of it now, we didn’t have enough information,” says Paul.

At the time, English information was limited to tourist spots, and there was little English information of benefit for enhancing and stabilizing everyday life.



Copies of *GetHiroshima*, a free English-language magazine formerly published by Paul and the GetHiroshima team

They thought of leaving Hiroshima, but before leaving, they decided to seek out the allure of Hiroshima on their own, walking around the city and visiting a variety of communities. This was in 1999.

“Right around that time, there was a movement among young people to try and communicate information about new shops and music in Hiroshima, and we started making connections with these people one by one.”

After making connections with others and finding a place to settle down, they took action. From 2000, they began distributing information they gathered themselves and had thought interesting under the name GetHiroshima.com. The information gathered through these



Paul riding his bicycle along the river in Hiroshima City



A map filled with information on Hiroshima created by Paul and the GetHiroshima team

actions led to the 2014 start of *GetHiroshima*, a free English-language magazine.

The concept for *GetHiroshima* is, “Be more than a tourist, become a virtual insider.” Paul wanted tourists, many of whom left Hiroshima after seeing Miyajima, Peace Memorial Park, and other major tourist spots, to know more about the lively everyday life in Hiroshima. *GetHiroshima*, filled with information about the city that Paul and his wife had selected, was met with a favorable reception among both tourists and foreign residents of Hiroshima.

Paul then poured his passion into inbound tourism, founding Jizo Hat in

2018. *GetHiroshima*, which had been published continuously for five years, ceased publication the following year.

Having originally come for a short stay, Paul has continued to seek out the charms of Hiroshima, and to him, it is a beloved city. He hopes to restart *GetHiroshima* someday and introduce restaurants such as those selling *okonomiyaki*, a Hiroshima specialty.

“Hiroshima had miserable wartime experiences in the past, but today, it is a city proclaiming world peace. Try speaking with someone from Hiroshima. It’s even better to eat and drink something delicious together with them. Just start by raising a toast with the person sitting next to you!” says Paul. 🍷



Paul at Jizo Hat headquarters