

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

MARCH
2016

MUST-KNOWS ON THE VISUAL KEI MUSIC PHENOMENON

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH MASKS IN JAPAN?

GOING BEYOND JET

A FESTIVAL DEALING WITH THE ECHOS OF DEVASTATION

NEW-FASHION WAYS TO HAVE OLD-FASHION CONNECTIONS



The Japanese Lifestyle & Culture
Magazine Written by the International
Community in Japan



the art issue

● is a special art issue of Connect that will act as a public portfolio for the expat community in Japan.

Go to **this site** for more information and to send us your work! Submissions are open until March 31st.

CREDITS & CONTENTS

HEAD EDITOR

Rajeev Rahela

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Timothy Saar

SECTION EDITORS

Alexandra Brueckner

Hiroshi Fukushima

Elena Galindo

Erica Grainger

Leah Gray

Rayna Healy

Cameron Joe

Pia Peterson

Margaret Pickard

Mira Richard-Fioramore

Timothy Saar

Jennifer Sanchez

Becca Simas

Joyce Wan

Sabrina Zirakzadeh

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

Patrick Finn

ASSISTANT DESIGNERS

Mathew Cartwright

Hannah Killoh

Amy Koller

COVER PHOTO

Illaura Rossiter

TABLE OF CONTENTS PHOTO

Orrin Heath

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS

Yagnya Ananthanarayanan

Amy Bowinski

Alexandra Brueckner

Cassie Conrad

Lauren Debussy

Sterling Diesel

Patrick Finn

Hiroshi Fukushima

Erica Grainger

Tony Grant

Lilly Gray

Orrin Heath

Anisa Kazemi

Ganda Kenyeh

Emily Lee

David Male

Madisen Nguyen

Pia Peterson

Chris Porter

Illaura Rossiter

Becca Simas

Textures.com

Victoria Vlisides

Ali Watson

Wikicommons

Lisa Wynne

ZOZOTOWN

CORPORATE ADVERTISING

Jared Oliva

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Jasmin Lau

SOCIAL MEDIA

Keith Lawton

COPYEDITING

Thea Felmore

Liam Nolan

CONTRIBUTORS

Amy Bowinski

K Dunaway

Tony Grant

Lilly Gray

Anisa Kazemi

Micah Mizukami

Madisen Nguyen

Victoria Vlisides

C - The Art Issue	2
Letter from the Editor	6
NEWS & EVENTS	
Event Calendar	10
In the News	15
ARTS & CULTURE	
Lessons on Music and Living	18
Music, Video Games, and Magic Forests	22
The Way of Visual Kei	26
Go Go Mighty Music Picks	30
Hina Dolls	31
Unmasking Japan	32
Faces in Fashion	36
LIFESTYLE	
Ramen 'Round Japan	40
Roasted Sunchoke Chips	44
Gochujang Butter-Garlic Noodles	46
Ethics at the Oyster Festival	48
Beyond JET	52
COMMUNITY	
Yuki-Yama	56
Don't 'Get Involved'	60
The Athletic Amami Islands	64
Contributing to Connect	66

This magazine contains original photos used with permission, as well as free-use images. All included photos are property of the author unless otherwise specified. If you are the owner of an image featured in this publication believed to be used without permission, please contact the Head of Graphic Design and Layout, Patrick Finn, at patrick.finn@ajet.net.

This edition, and all past editions of AJET Connect, can be found online at AJET.net [here](#). Read Connect online and follow us on [ISSUU](#).

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello! Welcome to the March 2016 edition of Connect magazine.

Winter has been a milder one this year. Be that as it may, the winds of change are upon us: Spring is on the way. Keep an eye out for the various sakura predictions in your areas; we'd love to see your photos when the blossoms start to bloom.

Did you set yourself any goals for the new year? If so, how are they going? I hope well. I'm yet to meet my own set criteria, but it's all a work in progress. So if you haven't achieved the things you wanted yet, take your time.

Sitting in the demographic that doesn't enjoy the snow, it's not always the fun when you live in one of the snowier parts of Japan; however, there is some beauty in the madness. Like all of our experiences in Japan, there will be times we don't enjoy.

This month: we have an interesting look at the world of Visual Kei and its impact on Japanese Rock music; Face masks in Japan, what does it actually signify?; What sounds like my new favourite, quick meal for the next few months: Gochujang Butter-Garlic Noodles (salivating as I type this); an interesting take on submersing yourself into the Japanese community in a non-traditional sense; as well as our regular features and great new content to help you pass the days till the warmer breeze becomes that little bit more bearable!

Don't be afraid to be in touch with anyone working for Connect! If you have ideas on content, images to share, opinions, or just want to say 'hi', please feel free to do so! This is your magazine as well as it is ours, and we can only make the changes you want to see, together. I look forward to hearing from you!

I hope March turns out to be the best month of 2016 yet!

Rajeev Rahela
Head Editor
2nd-year Gifu ALT



PHOTO SUBMISSIONS

INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING A COVER PHOTO FOR THE NEXT ISSUE? CLICK [HERE](#) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SUBMIT YOUR PHOTOS!



NEWS & EVENTS

NEWS EDITOR

connect.news@ajet.net

Margaret Pickard

Rejoice, for Pokemon RBYG has been released on Virtual Console!

EVENTS EDITOR

connect.events@ajet.net

Jennifer Sanchez

 *Illaura Rossiter*

NEWS & EVENTS

Event Calendar

In the News

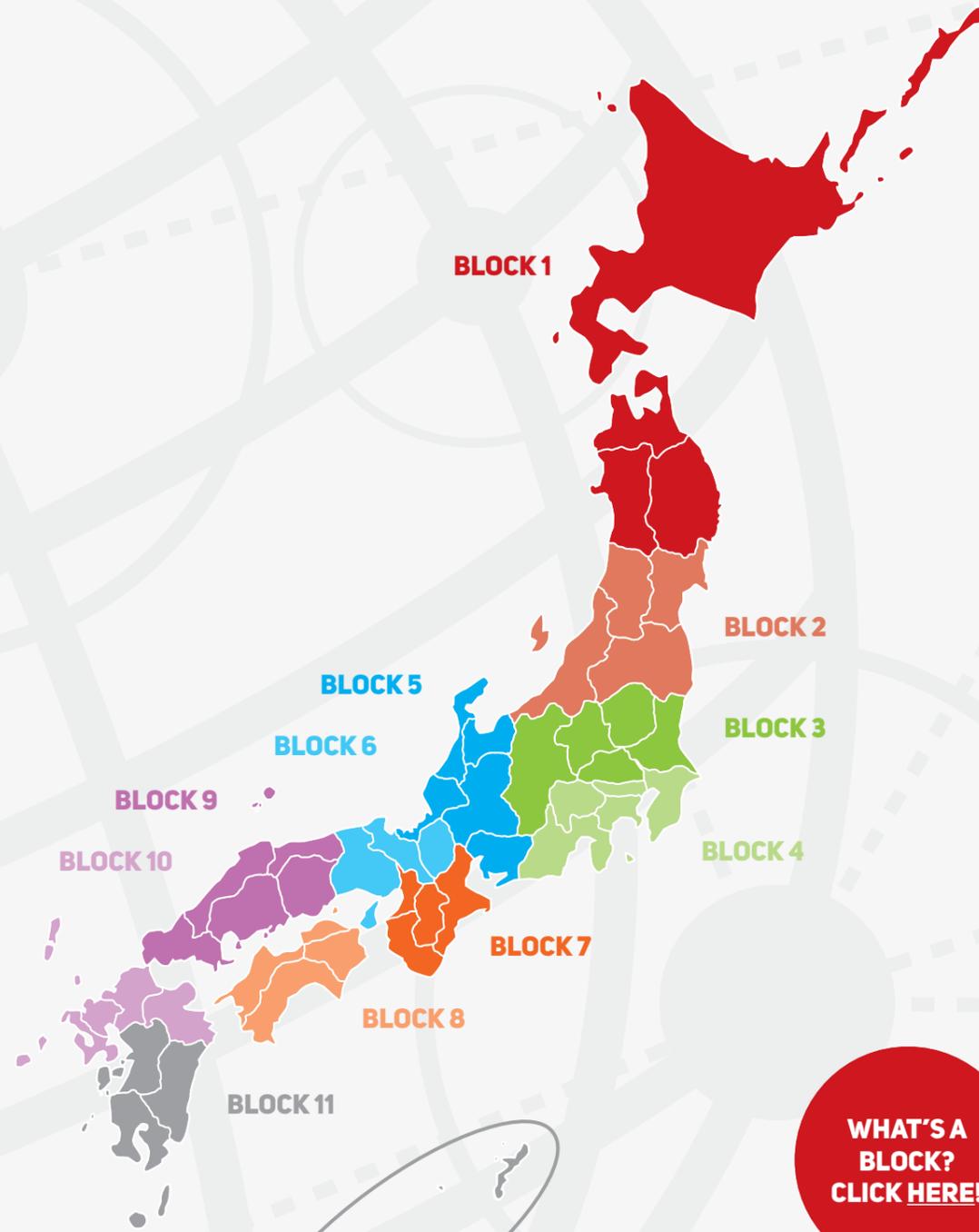
10

15



EVENTS CALENDAR

March



SHIRETOKO FANTASIA

Until 12 March
Utoro, Hokkaido
[Website](#)

ARDITO STRING ORCHESTRA

11 March
Hirosaki Community Hall,
Hirosaki City, Aomori
[Website](#)

FIREWORKS MATSURI

19 March
All around Daisen City,
Akita
[Website](#)

ART FESTA IWATE

Until 27 March
Matsuhaba-12-3 Motomiya,
Morioka, Iwate
[Website](#)

MANPUKU SOBA FESTA

05-06 March
Iwate Town and Hachmantai
City, Iwate
[Website](#)



ISHI MIKOTO FIRE FESTIVAL

13 March
Sekison Shrine, Kurihara
City, Miyagi
[Website](#)

OKURA YUKI MONOGATARI

19 March
451-2 Oazaminamiyama,
Okuramura, Mogamigun,
Yamagata
[Website](#)

SNOW AND FIREWORKS FESTIVAL

05 March
490 Yuzawa Town, Niigata
[Website](#)

SAKE NO JIN

12-13 March
6-1 Bandajima, Chuo-ku,
Niigata City, Niigata
[Website](#)



SAITO FESTIVAL

09 March
Kashima Shrine, Kashima
City, Ibaraki
[Website](#)

HINA DOLL FESTIVAL TOUR

Until 06 March
80 locations in Mashiko
Town, Tochigi (check
website)
[Website](#)

STONE STEPS HINA FESTIVAL (LIVE CHILDREN DRESSED AS HINA DOLLS)

07-08 March
Ikaho, Ikaho-machi,
Shibukawa-shi, Gunma
[Website](#)

HARUNA UME FESTIVAL

20 March
1072-1 Kamisatomi-machi,
Takasaki-shi, Gunma
[Website](#)

WHAT'S A
BLOCK?
CLICK [HERE!](#)





**SEKAI NO OWARI
NATIONWIDE TOUR**

25-26 March
2-1 Nakase, Mihama-ku,
Chiba City, Chiba
[Website](#)

**FERMENTATION HAKKO
AMBASSADOR COURSE &
CERTIFICATION**

27 March
NOCO Building 2F 5-6-5
Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo
[Website](#)

RAMEN GIRLS FESTIVAL

17-21 March
1-1 Shinko, Naka-ku,
Yokohama, Kanagawa
[Website](#)

**PURE SPRING WATER
FESTIVAL**

06 March
Doshimura, Yamanashi
[Website](#)

MINAMI SAKURA MATSURI

Until 10 March
Minami Izucho, Shimogamo,
Shizuoka
[Website](#)

CAMELLIA FESTIVAL

19-20 March
Tsubaki no Mori Park, Nanto
City, Toyama
[Website](#)

OIDE MATSURI

18-23 March
Keta Shrine, Hakuishi,
Jikecho, Ishikawa
[Website](#)

OMIZU OKURI

02 March
Jinguji Temple, Obama,
Fukui
[Website](#)

**NAGOYA CITY & NAGOYA
WOMEN'S MARATHON**

12-13 March
Nagoya Dome, Nagoya City,
Aichi
[Website](#)

HONENSAI FESTIVAL

15 March
Tagata Jinja, Inuyama, Aichi

SAGICHO MATSURI

Weekend in mid-March
Himure Hachimangu Shrine,
Omihachiman City, Shiga
[Website](#)

HIGASHIYAMA HANATORO

12 & 21 March
See website for multiple
locations in Kyoto
[Website](#)

KYO NAGASHI BINA FESTIVAL

03 March
Shimogamo Shrine, 59
Izumigawa-cho, Sakyo-ku,
Kyoto City, Kyoto
[Website](#)

**AWAJISHIMA SAKURA
FESTIVAL**

05-18 March
8-10 Yume Butai, Awajishi,
Hyogo
[Website](#)

**THE FOURTH SENGOKU
DARUMA MATSURI**

20 March
1201-1 Mizuno, Futami, Mie
[Website](#)

SPRING HIGANE FESTIVAL

17-23 March
1-11-18 Shitennoji, Tennoji-
ku, Osaka City, Osaka
[Website](#)

OMIZU TORI

01-14 March
Todaiji Temple, Zoshicho,
Nara City, Nara
[Website](#)

HINA NAGASHI

03 March
118 Kada, Wakayama,
Wakayama Prefecture
[Website](#)

**TOKUSHIMA TSUBAKI
FESTIVAL**

01-31 March
45 Sei Tsubakimachi, Anan
City, Tokushima
[Website](#)

**THE FULL BLOOM SPRING
FESTA**

19 March - 08 May
42432-12 Yoshino,
Mannoucho, Kagawa
[Website](#)

**NOFUKUTOUGE SAKURA
MATSURI**

27 March
Nofuku Pass, Matsuo Park,
Seiyo City, Ehime
[Website](#)

KASHIMA SHRINE FESTIVAL

06 March
Kashima Shrine, Saga,
Kuroshiocho, Kochi
[Website](#)

**TOTTORI FULL BLOOM
FLORAL FESTIVAL**

19-27 March
110 Tsuruta,
Nanbucho, Tottori
[Website](#)

**MOMOTEMATOSHINJI
EXORCISM RITUAL**

28 March
Tsudo, Okinoshimacho,
Okigun, Shimane

**KORAKUEN INAUGURATION
ANNIVERSARY**

02 March
1-5 Korakuen, Kitaku,
Okayamashi, Okayama
[Website](#)

ONIMICHI HAIKU FESTIVAL

19 March to 17 April
Senkoji Park, Onomichi,
Hiroshima
[Website](#)

1,000 CHERRY TREE FESTIVAL

27 March
2047-1 Senzaki, Nagatoshi,
Yamaguchi
[Website](#)





KYOKUSUI NO EN FESTIVAL

06 March
Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine,
4-7-1 Saifu, Dazaifu-shi,
Fukuoka
[Website](#)

SAIKAI BRIDGE SPRING FESTIVAL

19 March - 10 April
Saikai Bridge, Sasebo City,
Nagasaki
[Website](#)

SEKI MACKEREL FESTIVAL

12 March
Saganoseki special event hall
in Saganosekimachi, Oita
City, Oita
[Website](#)

DAIHIMONJIYAKI AT MT. ASO

Weekend in mid-March
(TBA, please check website)
Ojo-dake and Aso Shrine in
several villages in Aso City,
Kumamoto
[Website](#)

TAMAYURA SHINTO MUSIC AND DANCE FESTIVAL

04-19 March
7272-1 Tamayura Onsen,
Miyazaki City, Miyazaki
[Website](#)

KAGOSHIMA MARATHON

06 March
Chuo Community Center,
Kagoshima City, Kagoshima
[Website](#)

OKINAWA CRAFT FAIR (FREE)

10-13 March
Plaza House Shopping
Center 3-1-12 Kubota,
Okinawa City
[Website](#)

**GOT AN EVENT
TO PROMOTE?
LET OUR EDITOR
KNOW HERE!**

IN THE NEWS

January - February

JANUARY 20

A bus crash in Nagano Prefecture kills 15 people, mostly university students, on its overnight route to a local ski resort. The Ministry of Transportation released footage from a roadside surveillance camera in which the bus appeared to be driving at high speeds before crossing the center line as it approached a curve in the road. An official from another bus company noted that many drivers on chartered buses are older, as the few young people who enter the transportation field are prone to taking short-haul driver positions. The crash has inspired government and industry officials to update safety measures for similar long-distance buses.

(Source)

FEBRUARY 12

The first Japanese lawmaker to request paternity leave resigns from his position after confirming reports of his extramarital affair with a kimono-dresser. Kensuke Miyazaki, representative for Kyoto, incurred scorn from fellow politicians last month after requesting time off in a country in which only 2.3% of men exercise their right to child leave. Prime Minister Abe, who has made it his goal to increase the number of women in the workforce, praised Miyazaki's unprecedented move.

However, a weekly magazine published the details of his affair, which took place days before his wife (also a politician) gave birth.

(Source 1, 2)

FEBRUARY 13

The relationship between Japan and North Korea deteriorates further after the North announces a stop to the investigation into the fate of Japanese citizens said to have been kidnapped by the communist state. The North's announcement comes on the heels of the punitive sanctions Japan imposed after North Korea's latest missile launch. North Korea admitted to 13 kidnappings, occurring in the 1970s and 80s, though only five abductees were returned home. The rest, the reclusive country claims, have died, though Japan demanded a full investigation.

(Source)

FEBRUARY 15

Reports emerge that Japan's economy shrank by 1.4% in the last quarter of 2015, an even bigger decline than forecasted. The dismal number is said to be caused by slow exports and weak domestic demand as citizens grow older and contribute less to the economy. Prime Minister Abe, whose 2013 platform of Abenomics promised to bring the country's economy out of

stagnation, reassured the country that the situation is being monitored. Chief economist at Sumitomo Mitsui Banking, Junko Nishioka, says that "the economy is at a standstill".

(Source)

FEBRUARY 15

Sea Shepherd, the environmental watchdog of the seas, has lost track of Japanese whalers in the Southern Ocean after attempting to disrupt their annual hunt. The group asked Australia and New Zealand to "kindly" provide the coordinates for the Japanese vessels, pointing out the two countries' responsibilities as members of the International Whaling Commission. Japan has faced heated criticism for its continued hunting of whales. Japan maintains the position that the whales are killed for "research". Sea Shepherd has for a decade harassed Japan for its continued whaling, so much so that the country was forced to abandon its 2014-2015 hunt.

(Source)

Sterling Diesel



ARTS & CULTURE

CULTURE EDITORS

connect.culture@ajet.net

Rayna Healy

Joyce Wan

Everyone's posting pictures of flowers, and I'm still slipping on ice on my way to work. #ThisHokkaidoLife

FASHION EDITORS

connect.fashion@ajet.net

Elena Galindo

Erica Grainger

*March Umeshu Festival in Mito!
I'll sample 100 different kinds under the plum blossoms – yum!*

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

connect.entertainment@ajet.net

Timothy Saar

*Why is it warm? I already have to put away the kotatsu? My sweaters?
I feel cheated. Bah humbug.*

Sabrina Zirakzadeh

*Winter was short and sweet...
now it's time to gear up for spring concerts, conventions, and cosplay!*

 Lisa Wynne

ARTS & CULTURE

Lessons on Music and Living	18
Music, Video Games, and Magic Forests	22
The Way of Visual Kei	26
Go Go Mighty Music Picks	30
Hina Dolls	31
Unmasking Japan	32
Faces in Fashion	36



LESSONS ON MUSIC AND LIVING

LILLY GRAY (FUKUOKA)



Mvel
Public Domain
Creative Commons
1800-1850
Museum

Takekoto

I first moved to Toyama when I was 21, which, as we all know, is a stupid age. I was in a new country fresh out of college, and I had my first salaried job. I was trying to figure out how to be a pseudo-adult. The best thing to happen to me was meeting many different women, who not only helped me in my day-to-day life but also inspired me in more personal ways.

I've recently moved away, and, now that I'm starting over again, I am thinking about them more than ever. Particularly, my koto teacher: Tanikawa sensei.

told me, after a chilly pause.

Despite this, I ended up going to Tanikawa sensei's house every week to practice in her elegant sitting room. We progressed from Sakura to Haru no Umi, and every lesson she would give me snacks and ask about my life. I learned she had recently lost her husband, that she had lived in Fukumitsu her whole life, and that her remaining family and children lived far away. I brought her a bouquet and introduced her to my boyfriend when I went to see her perform in the city. Together, we performed twice in a much smaller

manages to be someone you feel like you should always be using the polite *keigo* language around, and the neighbor you could drop in on any time. She has played solo in the nationally famous Wakura Onsen hotel, which the Emperor visited. At one of my last lessons, she unwrapped several large pieces of thick paper from emblazoned silk; these turned out to be "koto licences," and she was a master. She is poised, kind, and accomplished. She always made perfect coffee. She owns a 17-string bass koto and an ivory shamisen pick the size of my entire hand.

sensei had a solo song and got off to a bad start; something happened that had her off-beat. Unbelievably, in front of a large crowd of parents, teachers, and students, she stopped playing mid-song and asked if they could start over, her mistake.

I never told her that this made such an impression on me. All the videos or other performances I had watched were quiet, formal; an unbroken experience, like a held breath. For her, however, while technical accuracy was an important element to doing a song justice, the real point of playing has always been to enjoy it. Watching her ask for a second chance, something that I would be too embarrassed to ask for, helped me to focus on the joy of playing, perfectly or not.

I only recently learned how Tanikawa sensei began playing the koto, which I wish I had asked her when I first began.

"Oh, I saw one in the shop window one day," she said, "and I went in and asked about it. Then I asked if the shopkeeper could introduce me to a teacher."

This is startlingly similar to how I began, basically on a whim. I had always assumed she had been playing since birth, but it turns out at age 27 she made a small decision that changed the rest of her life. I like imagining her looking through the shop window, the moment before she walks inside, a moment of positive, decisive confidence that I want to emulate in the future. I'm interested and I want to learn. So what's

Playing music, she says, is a way to bring energy to your everyday life.

stopping me?

On the JET program, we are often encouraged to try new things, to have a "cultural experience" in the country that is our temporary home. Sometimes it can be difficult to see how entering a subject—archery, calligraphy, koto—as a complete novice, with limited time to improve, will allow you to gain anything other than a limited, shallow understanding. For example, though I still live in Japan, it seems unlikely that I will ever play koto again. There are teachers to be had, but none of them are Tanikawa sensei; a year and a half was the entirety of my koto career.

But once again, mastery does not have to be the purpose of every endeavour. Tanikawa sensei recently gave me some advice that I think is rather appropriate. Playing music, she says, is a way to bring energy to your everyday life. You should do it as much as possible *when you can*, because it can only make your life better.

"And of course," she added, "You can make friends. Like how I met you!"

Lilly Gray was a JET for 3 years in Toyama Prefecture, home of the firefly squid. She now lives in Fukuoka.

 Lilly Gray, Wikicommons

Watching her ask for a second chance...helped me to focus on the joy of playing, perfectly or not.

The town where I lived was so small that we unknowingly had several mutual acquaintances, but it wasn't until my third year on the JET program that I was introduced to her through a friend. Tanikawa sensei accepted me as a student with very little reason to do so. I had never played a stringed instrument, my spoken Japanese was unreliable, I could barely read the language, and I committed an awful faux pas within minutes of entering her house. "Ah, next time walk around the koto rather than stepping over it," she

setting: once for students and finally for friends. She met my mother when she came to Japan, and I went to her house over New Year's to prove that I had not yet been murdered by *yakuza*, which was her greatest fear for me when I moved to Fukuoka.

Tanikawa sensei, who I still imagine perched on her pillow across from me, looking over her glasses, hand arched over waiting strings, came to embody everything I think of when people talk about being a lady. Among my neighborhood friends she was a "*hin ga aru*" person; she

When I started, I approached it with my usual single-minded obsessiveness. I always want to do everything exactly right on the first try. I was hard on myself and defeatist when I made mistakes. I often felt like I just wasn't good at it. Like everyone who has 0 self-confidence, I am my own worst enemy when trying something new. I mean, why do something if you can't do it *perfectly*?

At our performance at my high school a few months into my lessons, something happened that changed my approach entirely. Tanikawa

MUSIC, VIDEO GAMES, AND MAGIC FORESTS

A Connect Interview Exclusive!

SABRINA ZIRAKZADEH (OKAYAMA)

This month, Connect interviews video game composer Chris Porter. Read on to learn more about Chris, his craft, and his games!

How did you get started composing for video games?

I got my first instrument, a Fender Squire, around the year 2000. So, since as early as then I've been writing my own music. In 2003 my uncle bought me a desktop computer with Cakewalk's Music Creator 2003 installed on it. That's when I first started experimenting with writing music for instruments. Looking back, that computer and program were very primitive, but since it was all brand new to me, it was a perfect starting point.

Ever since I first got that computer, I wanted to write music for video games. I would imagine game environments or scenarios and write music that would fit. As far as actually writing the soundtrack to a video game, that started in 2013 with *Why is the Princess in a Magic Forest?!*, which I had a chance to promote at [Tokyo Game Show 2015](#). With an

actual game to write the music for, my focus was on creating music that complemented the game.

Tell us a bit about *Magic Forest!*

In 2003 I posted a status update on Facebook [asking if anyone knew of any video game producers looking for composers]. A friend of mine told me that he knew a guy who was actually working on a game. He put us in touch and, as luck would have it, he did need a composer. I used the paid-leave days I had saved up to take pretty much the whole summer off and work on the soundtrack to *Magic Forest*.

About how long did it take to go from conception to the finished game score?

I finished writing almost the entire soundtrack that summer. However, you may notice that it's now 2016 and the game still isn't out! I should mention that, other than the music and sound effects, Michael [the game developer] was doing everything by himself. When I joined the project, he had the framework of the game completed, some concept





CHECK THESE
OUT ON STEAM
GREENLIGHT!

"WHY IS
THE PRINCESS
IN A MAGIC
FOREST?!"

"IKENIE"

art, and some really rough playable demos. This was enough for me to write the music, but I could finish my part way before he could finish his.

After that summer, I was still composing as much music as I could, and slowly improving my music software and virtual instrument libraries. I got a bunch of new, really realistic virtual instruments that far exceeded the quality of the instruments I had originally used. Since the game was still nowhere near ready to be released, I decided to go back and redo the entire soundtrack with my upgraded tools and instruments. I even remixed them all since my mixing skills had also improved. It was a lot of work, but if you listen to those original recordings and compare them to how they sound now, I'm really glad I put the time and effort into it.

Are there any other games that you've worked on that are on the horizon?

Since work on *Magic Forest* has finished, I've written for other games. The first game to actually be released was *Bird Hunter* for Android. It was kind of our own take on *Duck Hunt*, where you could look left and right, there were score multipliers, and, best of all, you could shoot the dog if you wanted! While *Magic Forest's* music was largely orchestral, I gave *Bird Hunter* a bluegrass/chiptune hybrid sound. The game didn't require a lot of music, but it was fun to do.

The other released game I've worked on is *ikenie*

("sacrifice"). It's a top-down 2D adventure/puzzle game for PC. The music is a mix of synth and organic elements. There are two other projects that I'm working on as well. One is an RPG called *Turn Back Time*. The other is a top-secret project that I can't talk about yet!

Has living in Japan influenced your compositions at all?

I get told quite often that my music has a very Asian vibe to it. Apart from when I intentionally incorporate Asian instruments, I don't consciously try to make it sound Asian. I listen to a lot of Japanese composers though, so I guess it's inevitable that some of their influence comes out in my own work. Also, living in Japan for so long must also have an effect on me. Definitely not a bad thing, though.

Who are you favorite Japanese composers?

Some of my favorite Japanese composers are Yasunori Mitsuda, Nobuo Uematsu, Hitoshi Sakimoto, Michiko Naruke, Yoshitaka Hirota, Yoko Shimomura, and Masashi Hamauzu. There are many others who I love, but I find myself listening to them the most.

If you could pick any video game score to rewrite, what would it be?

I'd have to say [the original] *Metal Gear Solid*. That's one of my favorite games and also one of my favorite soundtracks. While it did everything right, I think scoring a stealth game like

that would be an absolute blast. It would be so much fun to try to write something as perfect as that game's soundtrack was for the game it was written for but done in my own style and with my own sensibilities.

On the flip side, what video game score do you wish you had written?

Xenogears is my favorite soundtrack of all time and one of the main reasons I wanted to get into video game music. It's a flawless soundtrack and I can only hope that one day I can create something as memorable as it is.

How have you managed to find projects while living in Japan?

Many of the projects I've worked on have been with people I met on various online game development forums. All my projects have been small indie games with even smaller teams. The best thing to do is get online and make yourself known in the indie game community. Join game development groups and forums, and don't limit yourself to only game music forums. You're not going to get hired by other composers! Express interest in what people are making. Learn a little about game design so you can speak their language. And don't be afraid to put yourself and your music out there. Get your original work up online and share it with potential teams. Usually the right gig will find you. However, that will only happen if you make yourself and your music available to be found.

Do you have any final advice to share?

I've had some really good luck finding a few really fun projects with awesome, dedicated people, and I've made some really great friends doing so. However, even those few projects would have never happened had it not been for the countless hours of composing I've done over the past thirteen years, for no other purpose than just the joy of doing it. You're going to experience a lot of disappointment and frustration finding projects, and even when you've finally found something that seems perfect, that project may be cancelled and all of the music you wrote for it will no longer be used as you intended it. But if you're composing music because you love it, it's very easy to bounce back. The most important thing is to not lose sight of why you're doing this in the first place.

Chris Porter is a fifth-year JET ALT in Okayama. He spends as much time as he can writing music, and also enjoys playing video games, board games, and spending time with his wife and son.

 Chris Porter

CHECK
OUT CHRIS'
WEBSITE AND
MUSIC.



THE WAY OF VISUAL KEI

K DUNAWAY (OKAYAMA)



A rejuvenation is coming. I've been into glam rock since I was 12 when it wasn't even remotely cool to be into that type of thing. It still isn't cool, unless you live in Japan.

Here, glam rock has morphed into something you can not only buy in stores but also define yourself by and live by. This is *visual kei*. There are many different branches, but, at its base, it's still the same: Something to live by.

Visual kei started in 1968 with RC Succession, dubbed the kings of rock in Japan but often overlooked as *visual*

bands, and the term *visual kei* was coined. *Visual kei* is characterized by elaborate costumes, makeup, and atmosphere. These are still common today even though it has now broken up into many different subgenres. Today, X-Japan is still considered one of the most influential rock bands in Japan, and many music fans unfamiliar with the term "*visual kei*" still know their name. Through setbacks and tragic deaths, X-Japan continues with world tours and recording. *Visual kei* went mainstream with bands such as GLAY, LUNA SEA, L'Arc~en~Ciel,

and style that brought them fame. Going more heavy metal and hardcore with *desugoe* ("death growl") vocals, the band toured overseas for the first time in 2005 and achieved international fame. Selling out venues in New York and California, the band has also toured in Europe, Asia, South America, and Australia. With nine albums, three mini-albums, and thirty singles behind them, Dir en grey's members have also branched off to their own creative endeavors, such as the ambient performance art group Sukekiyo, rock band DECAYS, radio shows,

There is more to the world of Japanese rock music than makeup, music, and fashion. It's about both looking the part and expressing yourself confidently.

kei's founding fathers. With a flair for fashion, makeup, and heavy influence from singer Kiyoshiro Imawano's raspy vocals, a new genre was born. By the 1970s rock was popular in Japan, but was still overshadowed by pop music. Bands were heavily influenced by the rock sounds from the West, as well as by punk in the 80s. Japan took it to another level with the emergence of bands like Boowy, BUCK-TICK, and X-Japan.

By 1989, X-Japan had become one of the most influential rock

Janne da Arc, Kuroyume, and SIAM SHADE. These bands experimented with sound and vocals outside of the popular style.

Around 1997, *visual kei* began to sound darker. Dir en grey released their debut mini-album in 1997 and their full-length debut in 1999 with five tracks on the album being produced by Yoshiki Hayashi of X-Japan. Dir en grey remained in the *visual kei* scene until around 2004-2005. Always experimental, they were one of the first to break away from the music

modeling, fashion, poetry, and art.

There is more to the world of Japanese rock music than makeup, music, and fashion. It's about both looking the part and expressing yourself confidently. In the world of *visual kei*, styles and music are always evolving, and anything can morph into what you wish it to be. The key is having the confidence to say and do what you want, when you want. Style is one's personal expression and no one else's. Just like the music you listen to, your life can

take on a unique range of paths and feelings. It is up to you to develop your own style that is unique to your worldview.

There are many different styles of *visual kei*! Here are a few:

NEO-VISUAL KEI

Blends traditional Japanese styles with punk sensibilities.

Example: X-Japan.

KUROFUKU KEI

Involves suits and/or all black clothing assembled in a sleek style.

Example: BUCK-TICK.

OSHARE KEI

“Fashionable” style, with very colorful outfits with often clashing prints and lyrics/music that don’t necessarily fit the image.

Example: An Café.

KOTEOSA KEI

A dark version of Oshare Kei that involves black clothing with a clash of pink leopard print or other bright print/color.

Example: LM.C.

IRYOU KEI

Involves wearing things related to the medical field but more grotesque, like bloody lab coats or eye patches.

Example: Sex Android.

KOTE KEI

The most classic visual kei style. Pairs elaborately colored hair with elaborate costumes in both colors.

Examples: SHOW-YA, early Dir en grey, Due le Quartz, Phantasmagoria.

EROGURO KEI

Involves bloody wounds and the use of shock tactics in videos.

Examples: Nega, early Gazette.

ANGURA KEI

Focuses more on Japanese traditionalism with the use of kimono and traditional Japanese instruments.

Examples: Kagrra, Kiryu.

SHIRONURI KEI

Focuses on childhood through school uniforms with white faces and dark/red eyes and lips. Has recently had a resurgence without school uniform. Many bands go through a Shironuri Kei phase.

NAGOYA KEI

Focuses more on natural styles based on Western punk like leather jackets. Fans focus more on the music than the style. Bands who are from Nagoya are not always Nagoya Kei.

Examples: lynch, Kuroyume.

SHIBUYA KEI

Mix between jazz, pop, and electro-pop, with over-the-top, bright, high-contrast costumes. Usually features female vocalists.

Examples: Perfume, Buffalo Daughter.

SOFT VISUAL KEI

Opposite of Kote Kei; lighter

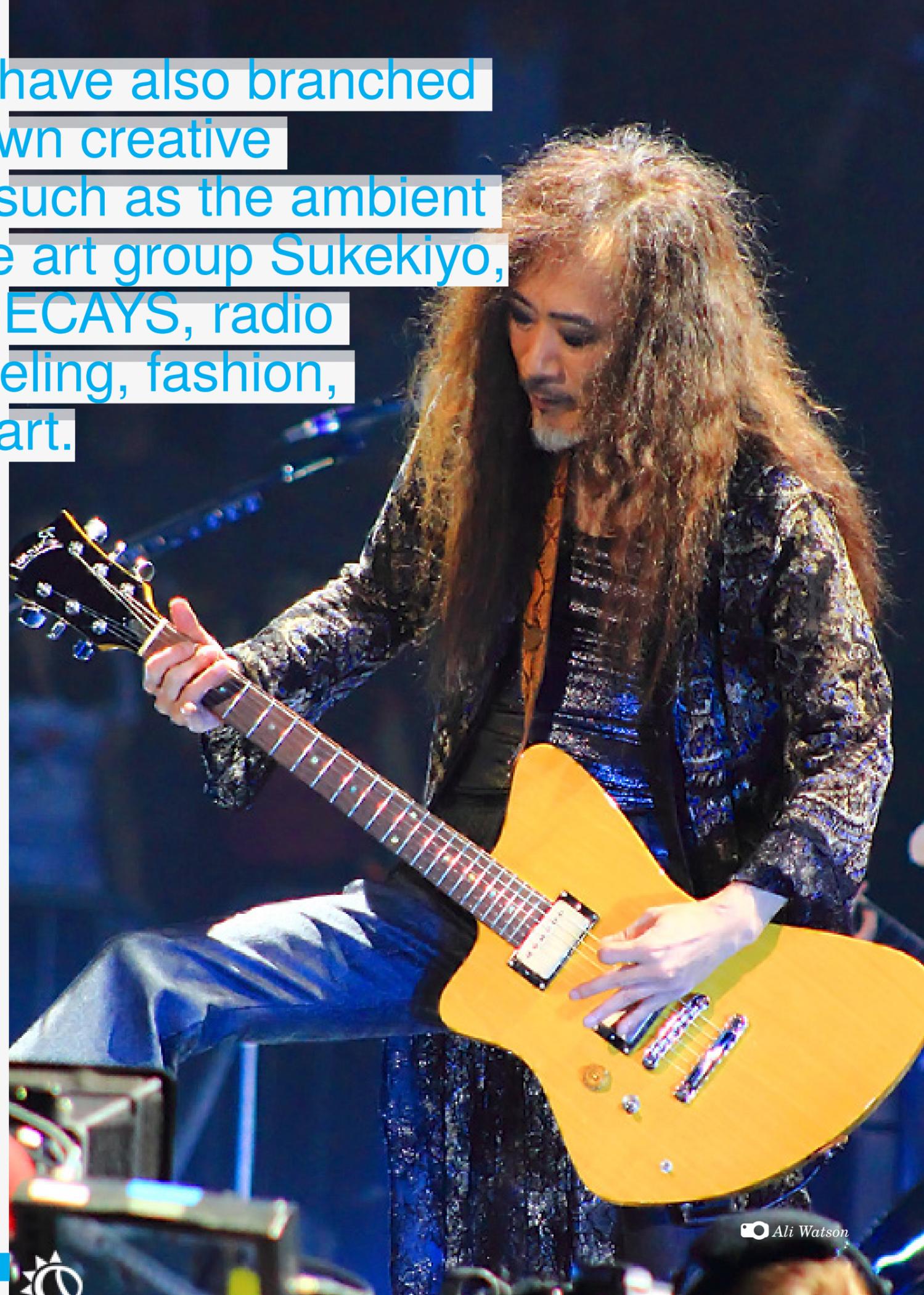
...members have also branched off to their own creative endeavors, such as the ambient performance art group Sukekiyo, rock band DECAYS, radio shows, modeling, fashion, poetry, and art.

image and makeup, and softer tone in music.

Examples: L’Arc~en~Ciel, early GLAY.

Special thanks to Ali Watson for her consultation and contribution of photographs to this piece. Ali Watson is the Site Coordinator and contributor for JRockRevolution. Ali has since ventured into other arenas pertaining to music, including concert photography, designing official artist merchandise, bridging opportunities for artists in movies and video games, and artist representation. [Check Ali out!](#)

K Dunaway is a Japan-based artist, writer, and concert photographer. Her passion is blending art with music. You can often find K at a variety of shows across Japan, lurking about in her house wondering why every black clothing item she owns is a different shade, or at local record shops searching for the best New Wave or Punk record. [Check K out!](#)



Ali Watson

GO GO MIGHTY MUSIC PICKS

JUNNOS

Junnos is a kind of Conor Oberst-type who gets you with his unapologetic apologies about his “悪い声”

@junnos

TOP 3 TRACKS

1. 旅の人、
2. アロコナ
3. 日明きの日

NATSUKO HARU

Natsuko Haru is one half of a female traveling band, worth tracking down if you can!

@ROCKING7 5

Pia Peterson
Travel Editor

星野源

Feel-good songs are Hoshino Gen's specialty. With tracks like “SUN” and “Week End,” you will find yourself moving your feet to the beat. Be sure to check out his new album “Yellow Dancer.”

TOP 3 TRACKS

1. SUN
2. Week End
3. 時よ

Amy Koller
Assistant Designer

サカナクション

A wholly perfect blend of electronic and rock flavored with melodic, traditional Japanese sound. Videos are a must-watch!

TOP 3 TRACKS

1. 夜の踊り子
2. 新宝島
3. アルクアラウンド

Margaret Pickard
News Editor

TOMMY FEBRUARY6 TOMMY CANDY SHOP ♥ SUGAR ♥ ME

Fun, sweet, dancy, contemporary trash. Like shaking it when no one's around? Tommy's your girl. An update to her 80s synth style.

TOP 3

1. RUNAWAY
2. FAIRY DUST
3. BE MY VALENTINE

Patrick Finn
Head of Graphic Design & Layout

Textures.com

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

IT'S TOO HEAVY... I GIVE UP!



HINA DOLLS

RAYNA HEALY (SHIMANE)

Toward the end of winter, *Hina* dolls dressed elaborately in Heian-era costume, surrounded with peach blossoms and *mochi*, appear sitting dignified in windows around town. These Empresses are surrounded by Emperors, attendants, and musicians. They are placed on steps in an intricate hierarchy. Some elaborate sets feature miniature trees heavy with cherry blossoms and tiny plates of springtime food. These Hina dolls stand tall in the brisk afternoon as good luck for girls. They hold their pose until March 3rd, or Girls' Day, when they have to be immediately taken down so as not to bring bad luck.

Hina dolls are set out by families for young daughters in the hopes that they will be as richly dressed, and have as many attendants, as their doll counterparts. But the tradition can be traced back to a slightly different purpose. In late February and early March, harsh winds still blow across Japan. A long time ago, this seemed a particularly vulnerable time

for young girls, whose lives were taken by the cold that blew in with the snow. Small dolls were crafted out of straw and prayers were said. These dolls would, hopefully, attract the bad spirits and leave the young, precious lives in tact. In Kyoto and Tottori Prefecture, traditional festivals with straw dolls still exist. Every spring, “bad-luck dolls” are floated down the river, taking the evil spirits with them.

These days, dolls aren't needed as a protection against winter, so their use is more aesthetic. Hina dolls are often family heirlooms passed down from mother to daughter for generations. Now, Hina dolls are lavish, intricate, and suitably costly. The elaborate Hina dolls have been set out since the 17th century. When the tradition first started, you could size up a Hina doll collection and determine if it had come from Tokyo (Tokyo dolls tended to come with a lot of furniture) or Kyoto (Kyoto dolls got miniature hearths) but over time, the differences have vanished.

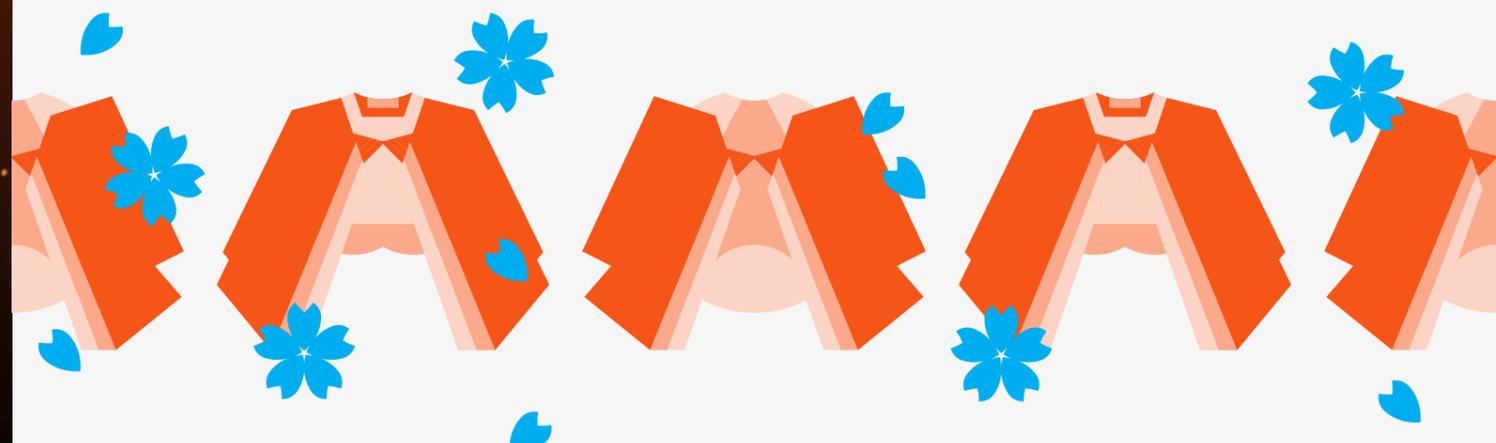
Dolls and their accompanying posse have changed in design, size, stature, and tradition over the century. But what hasn't changed is that they are ties between generations of women hoping for health and happiness during the final cold weeks of February. Whether you are trying to trick diseased spirits or simply celebrate the artistry of the Hina Dolls, March 3rd is always a good time of year to admire tiny, beautiful Empresses shaking off the cold of winter and greeting spring in their finest kimono.

SOURCES

“Hina Matsuri: The Doll Festival, March 3rd.” *Japan Visitor*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.

Kawakami, Shigeki. “All About Japanese Hina Dolls.” *Museum Dictionary*. Kyoto National Museum, n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.

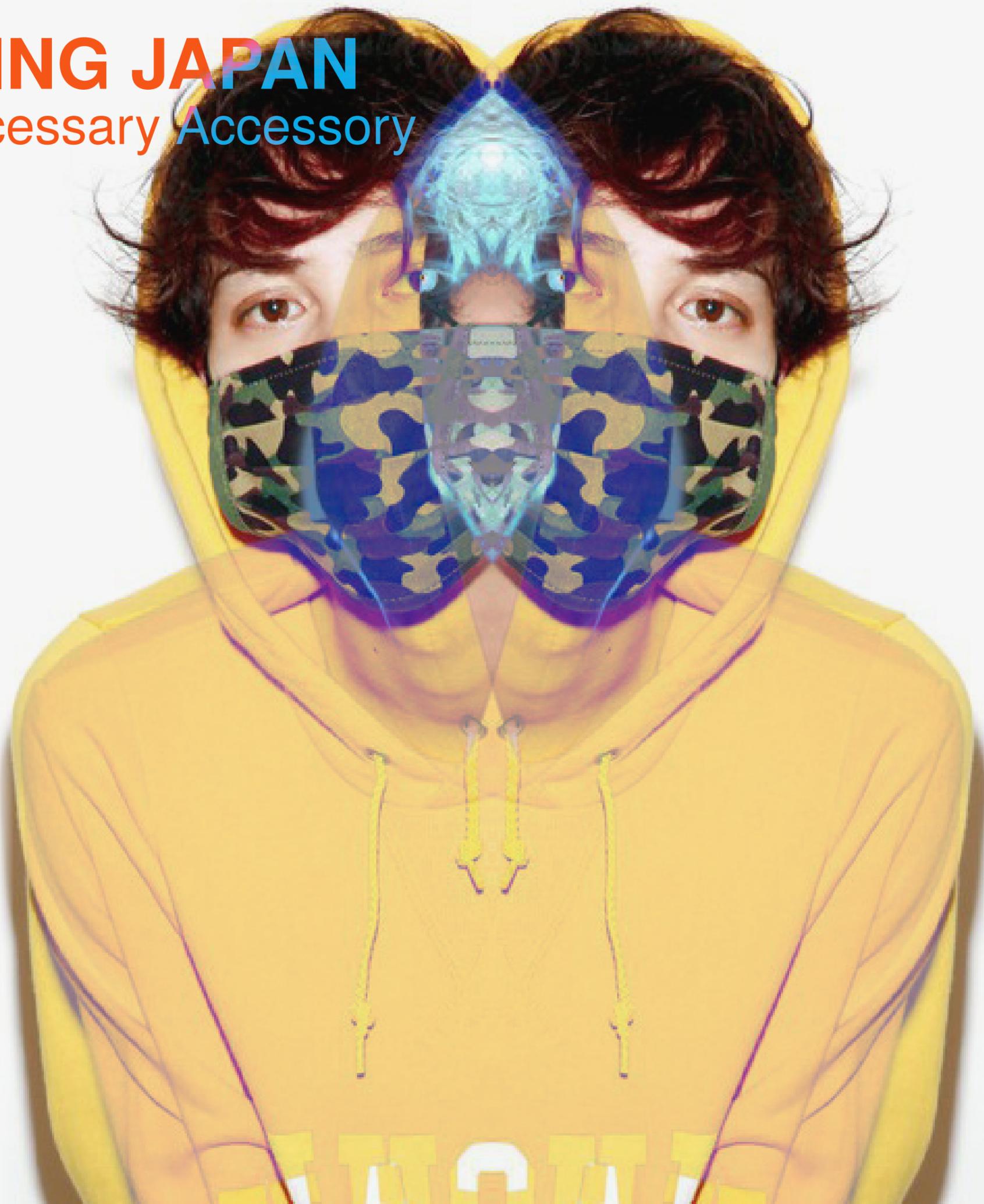
Mockett, Marie Mutsuki. “Nine. The Little Princess.” *Where the Dead Pause, and the Japanese Say Goodbye: A Journey*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print.



UNMASKING JAPAN

The Most Necessary Accessory

LIAM NOLAN (KUMAMOTO)



Sakura, a third-year JHS student, slides her surgical mask past her bob and onto her neck before starting *kyuushoku*. She doesn't talk much. She's worn a fresh mask every day since I arrived in August. Today I'm curious about why. Other students tell me it's because she's shy, but when I ask her she just coughs and smiles. This is the only time I've heard her cough.

COURTESY AND CASH

The practical reason for surgical masks in Japan is simple: keep people on a high-density archipelago from spreading illnesses. Japanese courtesy demands wearing a mask when sick, and companies manufacturing surgical masks have reaped the benefits of this courtesy. In 2013, estimates valued Japan's surgical mask industry at around 23.9 billion yen (1).

A FOREIGN FASHION

In contrast, sick people in most Western countries don't necessarily use surgical masks, and many foreigners find it initially jarring to use them in Japan. Though not everyone likes the discomfort wearing masks brings, most foreigners do wear them when sick. Few bring the habit of wearing masks back to their home countries.

MEDICAL AND HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Pandemics in the 20th century solidified Japan's relationship with surgical masks. During the influenza pandemic in the early 20th century, Japanese masked their faces. Additional

problems with tuberculosis, SARS, and bird flu have kept masks relevant (2).

Disease isn't the sole historical reason for masks. Concerns about pollution have also motivated mask use. Fires from the Great Kanto Earthquake increased air pollution, and post-war industrialization made smog a major problem (2). Currently, this concern about air pollution appears prominently on the websites of online retailers specializing in designer masks, like Tutem Masks, Pico Mask, and Vogmask.

FROM NECESSITY TO ACCESSORY

Recently, trends towards non-medical mask usage have been surfacing in Japan. In 2011, a survey of 100 people revealed that around 30 people surveyed wore surgical masks for reasons unrelated to health (3). Subsequent large-scale surveys corroborate these results (3). Because of the ubiquity of surgical masks, wearing one doesn't seem irregular, so people are finding non-medical uses for them (4).

This movement away from medical necessity to non-medical use isn't unique to surgical masks. Eyeliner, an ancient Egyptian invention, originally served two purposes: protecting the wearer's eyes from the harsh desert elements (5) and preventing ocular diseases (6). The practical function of eyeliner has faded, but it remains a make-up staple.

A FASHION STATEMENT

Though hygiene remains the main reason for wearing masks, new styles and trends reveal the mask making its way into the realm of fashion. This new style is called *Date Masuku* ("just for show") (7). These wearers believe masks make them appear more attractive by enhancing features like their eyes (7).

MASKING SOCIAL ANXIETY

Healthy people wearing masks are not always just attempting to look beautiful. Masks can help those with social anxiety alleviate some of their uneasiness. Companies, like Tutem Masks, list "shyness" as a reason why Asian people wear masks (5), and some pair them with headphones to stymie unsolicited interaction (3).

Emotional expression also factors into socially anxious people's choices to adopt masks. Psychologist Jun Fujikake notes: "When we deal with others, we have to judge whether to do things like smile or show anger... by wearing a mask, you can prevent having to do that..." (1). Emotional expression can be onerous for the socially anxious, and masks help to alleviate that burden by erecting a barrier between the wearer and the world.

I don't know why Sakura wears her mask. She might be socially anxious, a trendsetter trying to look cute, or she might just be sick. Whatever her reason, she doesn't seem to want to unmask herself anytime soon.

SOURCES

- (1) [Why Do Japanese People Wear Surgical Masks](#)
- (2) [A Quick History of Why Asians Wear Surgical Masks](#)
- (3) [More Japanese Youth Wearing Surgical Masks to Hide](#)
- (4) [History of Eyeliner](#)
- (5) [Egyptian Eyeliner May Have Warded Off Disease](#)
- (6) [Dear Alice: Face Masks](#)
- (7) [Why Do They Wear Surgical Masks in Asia](#)

Yagnya Ananthanarayanan, Patrick Finn, Erica Grainger, ZOZOTOWN



CLICK US TO BUY AND UP YOUR DUCK FACE GAME!



THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR WEARING A MASK. FOR A LIST OF REASONS, CHECK OUT TOFUGU'S ARTICLE HERE.



FACES IN FASHION

Rei Kawakubo of COMME des GARÇONS

MADISEN NGUYEN (PARIS)

AGE

73

OCCUPATION

Designer

LABEL

COMME des GARÇONS

French for “like some boys,” COMME des GARÇONS embodies the spirit of unconventionality through a blend of masculine and feminine motifs, alongside a simplistic yet bold color palette. This avant-garde attitude is deeply rooted in the idea of constant innovation.

CLAIM TO FAME

Rei Kawakubo debuted her first Paris collection in 1981, where she showcased the color black when it was not yet a standard in high fashion. This would become the signature color of the brand with the addition of red and gold as it continued to evolve. Her designs often employ unusual shapes that shift focus from the object to its surrounding space, evoking an all-encompassing experience.

Built around creative freedom, Kawakubo wanted to make a company that allowed her to produce a strong image without boundaries. Headquartered in Tokyo

and with stores worldwide, she is involved in all aspects of design including retail space concepts. Consistent with the notion of exploiting the unorthodox, Kawakubo included fur and velvet in her latest witch-inspired spring/summer ready-to-wear collection.

COMME des GARÇONS has a number of other sub-brands, notably the more affordable and commercial is PLAY, known for its colorful, graphic designs.

[Homepage](#)

[Instagram](#)

Madisen Nguyen is an alumnus of Tokyo's Sophia University. During her time in Japan she developed a love for (tacky) Japanese fashion and wagyu, both of which are sorely missed

 Madisen Nguyen



LIFESTYLE

FOOD EDITORS

connect.food@ajet.net

Alexandra Brueckner

House of Cards finally comes back this month, so if you need me and your name isn't Netflix...sorry.

Mira Richard-Fioramore

TRAVEL EDITORS

connect.travel@ajet.net

Leah Gray

I tried snowboarding for the first time! It was incredibly difficult, but also really fun.

Pia Peterson

Breaking out the hiking boots! Can't wait to hear about people's spring vacations.

 Hiroshi Fukushima

LIFESTYLE

Ramen 'Round Japan	40
Roasted Sunchoke Chips	44
Gochujang Butter-Garlic Noodles	46
Ethics at the Oyster Festival	48
Beyond JET	52



Not that any excuse is needed to traipse your way around Japan, but the fact that spring (and cherry-blossom season) is right around the corner is certainly a good one. And since travelers—like armies—march on their stomachs, food is just as an important component of a trip as the destination itself. Since ramen is rarely *not* cheap, delicious, and filling, it's the perfect fuel. So if you find yourself in some random corner of the country, consider checking out one of these top ramen joints, whose recommendations come straight from the mouths (and stomachs) of JETs.

MARUSHIO RAMEN MAIZURU, KYOTO-FU

My favorite ramen is *jakara* ramen (じゃん辛らーめん). This is spicy, but with so many different layers of flavor to it. It is the best salt ramen that I have ever had and I really don't want to try a different bowl at the since I like it so much.

Map

Orrin Heath (Kyoto-fu)

MARUSHIN RAMEN UKUHASHI, FUKUOKA

My favorite bowl is called *akamaru* or 'red circle', thanks to its dollop of spicy chili paste. All their bowls are *tonkotsu* ramen, with a substantial, rich pork bone broth. Try the noodles 'barikata' – very al dente!

Map

Emily Lee (Fukuoka)

はしにし家 (HASHINISHI-KA) HIOKI, KAGOSHIMA

The place makes its own noodles, but the real selling point is how much flavour the chef gets into the stock. My favorite is large *tantanmen* with *charshu*. I even went on a pilgrimage to Sapporo to try and find a better bowl. I worked my way through the Tabelog Top 10, but nothing came close. It's a must-try!

Map

David Male (Kagoshima)

TOMATO RAMEN MIYAKONOJO AND MIYAZAKI, MIYAZAKI

Tomato Ramen is perfect on a rainy day, in the middle of winter, if you're feeling down, if you're feeling up, even when you think you're only a little bit hungry and couldn't possibly eat an entire bowl of ramen, this gem satisfies every need.

Tomato Ramen takes a delicious tomato soup base and lets you go nuts with an enormous menu of additional toppings and sides. Garlic, cheese, and boiled egg? Why not. Eggplant and spicy cheese? Sure. Coconut oil? Celery? Scrambled egg? The list is seriously huge. Tomato Ramen also offers risotto ramen, which is basically a bowl of cheesy rice you add to the ramen when the noodles are all gone. Stir it up and let it meld together a bit and you have a delicious risotto!

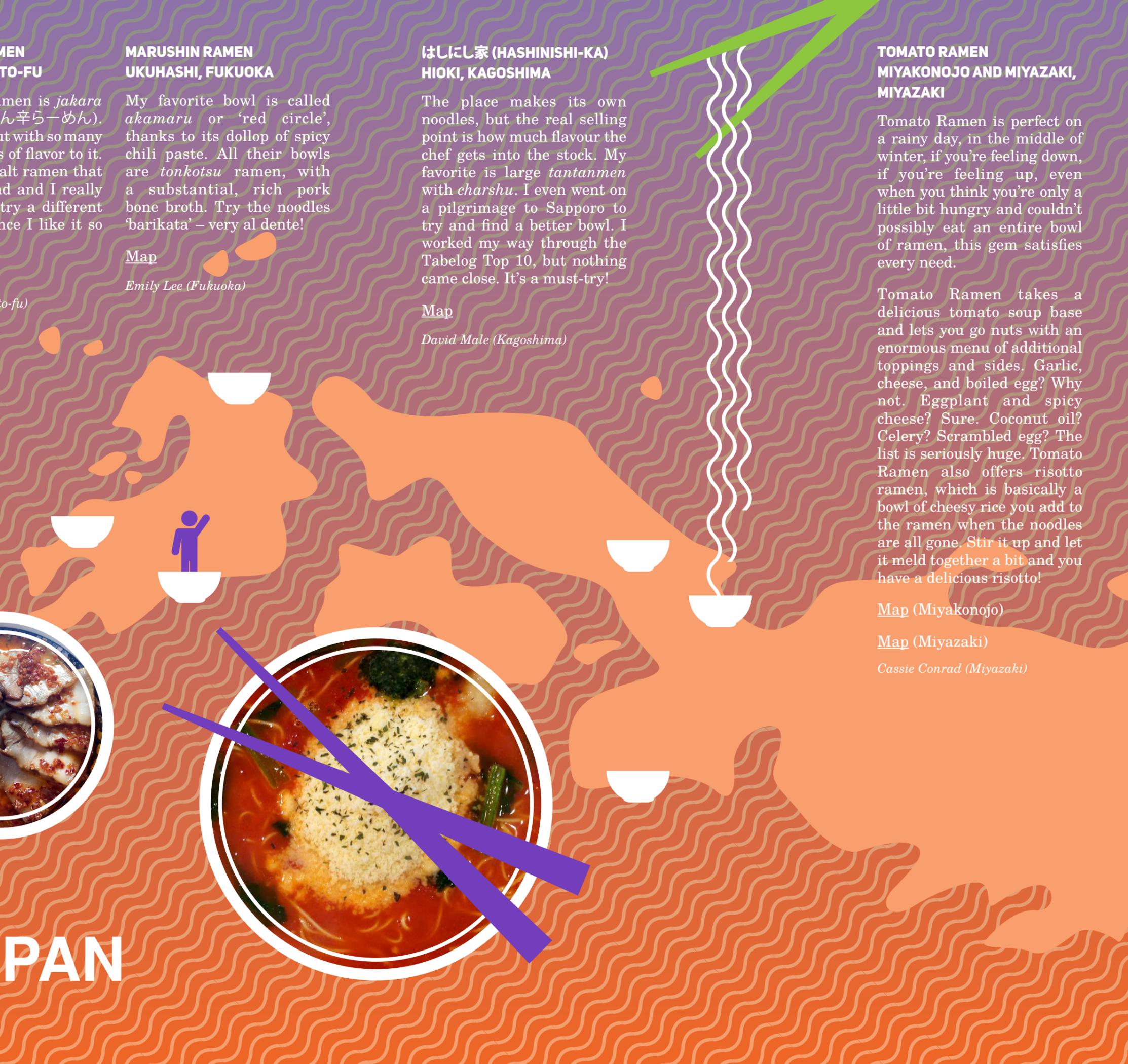
Map (Miyakonojo)

Map (Miyazaki)

Cassie Conrad (Miyazaki)

RAMEN 'ROUND JAPAN

ALEXANDRA BRUECKNER (AOMORI)



**KOBA & MORE
HIMEJI, HYOGO**

The appeal of Koba isn't just the delicious milk ramen, but the charming atmosphere of the tiny hole-in-the-wall shop. The owner and cook, Koba, is an institution in my city and he's happiest when meeting new foreign guests from out of town.

The walls are adorned with jazz posters (the owner is a big fan and always has jazz records playing in the background) and the counter with pictures of past customers with a small note by the chef himself at the bottom. Between his shop and Facebook account, one gets a bit of a yearbook of ALTs and *eikaiwa* teachers past and present.

Map

Sylvain Parent (Hyogo)

**BAKAMATSU
GOBO AND TANABE,
WAKAYAMA**

Bakumatsu specializes in *tonkotsu* ramen. The broth is rich and savory without being too heavy, and the *chashu* is thick and melts in your mouth. If you're feeling up to the challenge you can attempt to make the wall of fame by eating three or more bowls of ramen.

Map (Gobo)

Map (Tanabe)

Lauren Debussy (Wakayama)

**ASHIRA RAMEN
ARAKAWA, NIIGATA**

It's a small shop with long lines of people often stretching outside the shop. My recommendation is the spicy miso ramen—very thick, rich, creamy, nicely-spiced broth with a heap of bean sprouts on top.

Map

Michelle Maczka (Niigata)

**HARU
SAPPORO, HOKKAIDO**

I went to Haru in Sapporo last time I was here, and I went again this year, because it's that good. It's the best ramen I've had in Japan. The ramen type is miso cheese, which doesn't sound delicious... but it is so good. I've been in Japan three years, and it's the best I've had to this day.

Map

Spencer McGill (Saitama)

**ASARI
AOMORI-SHI, AOMORI**

Everyone goes there for the *negi* ramen. It's a great combination of sweet and spicy (from *rayu*) with some of the best *chashu* I have had. You can order it with different levels of spiciness on a scale of 1-5, one being the spiciest and five being the sweetest. The numbers refer to the amount of *rayu* used, from one cup to one-fifth of a cup. Seasoned veterans just order by the scale's numbers, and my favorite is a 3.

Map

Anthony Nelson (Aomori)

**KINTARO
KANEYAMA, YAMAGATA**

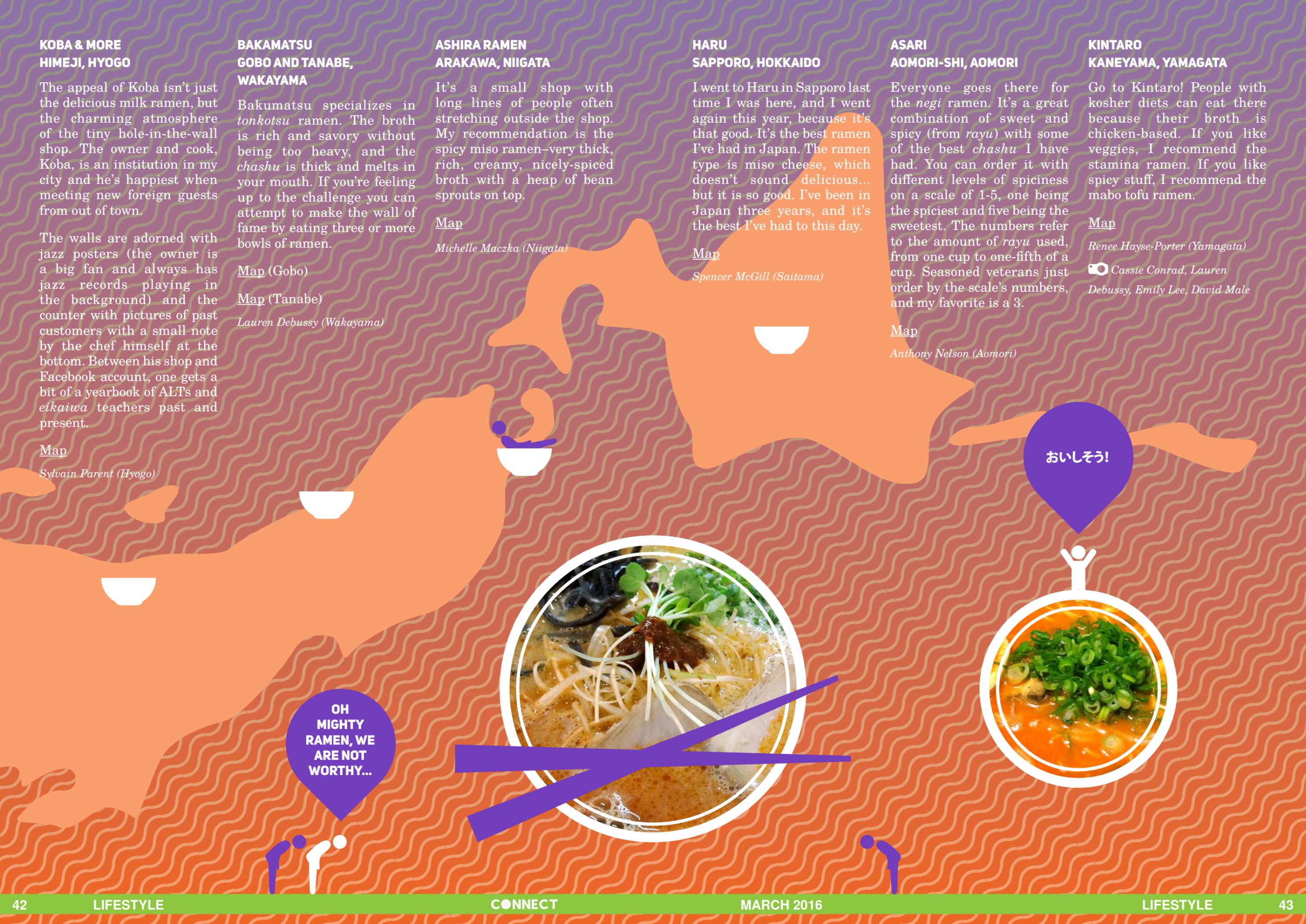
Go to Kintaro! People with kosher diets can eat there because their broth is chicken-based. If you like veggies, I recommend the stamina ramen. If you like spicy stuff, I recommend the mabo tofu ramen.

Map

Renee Hayse-Porter (Yamagata)

 *Cassie Conrad, Lauren*

Debussy, Emily Lee, David Male



OH MIGHTY RAMEN, WE ARE NOT WORTHY...

おいしそう!



ROASTED SUNCHOKE CHIPS

ANISA KAZEMI (OKAYAMA)



...they store “inulin”...this specific quality of the knobby-looking vegetable makes them a suitable for both diabetics and those seeking low carb foods...

I'm very lucky. I live next door to an organic farmer with an incredibly generous temperament. The other day, when G-san gave me a large bag of sunchokes, AKA Jerusalem artichokes (which FYI are neither from Jerusalem nor an artichoke), my brain immediately likened them to the *hafu* children of a Mr. Ginger and a Mrs. Potato.

“So, how do you eat these things?” I hear you ask. Just like a potato! Sunchokes can be baked, mashed, roasted or puréed into soup. They don't need to be peeled—just scrubbed well.

Personally, I like my sunchokes in chip form. And here's how!

1. Wash sunchokes, then slice 'em thin—best to use a slicer. Again, no need to peel; the extra fiber is good for you.
2. Rub between paper towels in order to draw out as much moisture as possible.
3. Place sunchoke slices on an oven tray and bake on high heat, in small batches, until crispy. Depending on your oven, bake them between 190 and 220 degrees Celsius. For good measure, keep an eye out by turning them once a while.

That's it. Nothing else, no oil, no spice, no salt. Just as is. You'll be surprised at how flavorful and sweet they are *au naturel*. Enjoy as you would regular chips: with a

Sunchokes (菊芋 *kikuimo*) are a pretty special root vegetable. I say special because, unlike most roots, sunchokes don't store starch as their main carbohydrate. Instead, they store “inulin” which is a carbohydrate that is a polymer consisting of fructose units, instead of glucose units.

In other words, this specific quality of the knobby-looking vegetable makes them suitable for both diabetics and those seeking low carb foods.

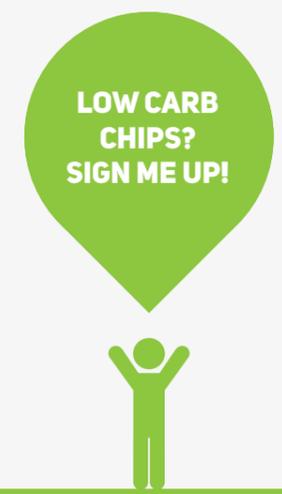
Lastly, they taste good. Like, really good; a sort of marriage between a crisp chestnut and an artichoke. They grow all-year round, but according to G-san they taste the sweetest now!

[Sunchoke are] a sort of marriage between a crisp chestnut and an artichoke.

movie, smothered in dip, or at 3 a.m. in your lonesome bed. Nah, just kidding, no one does that.

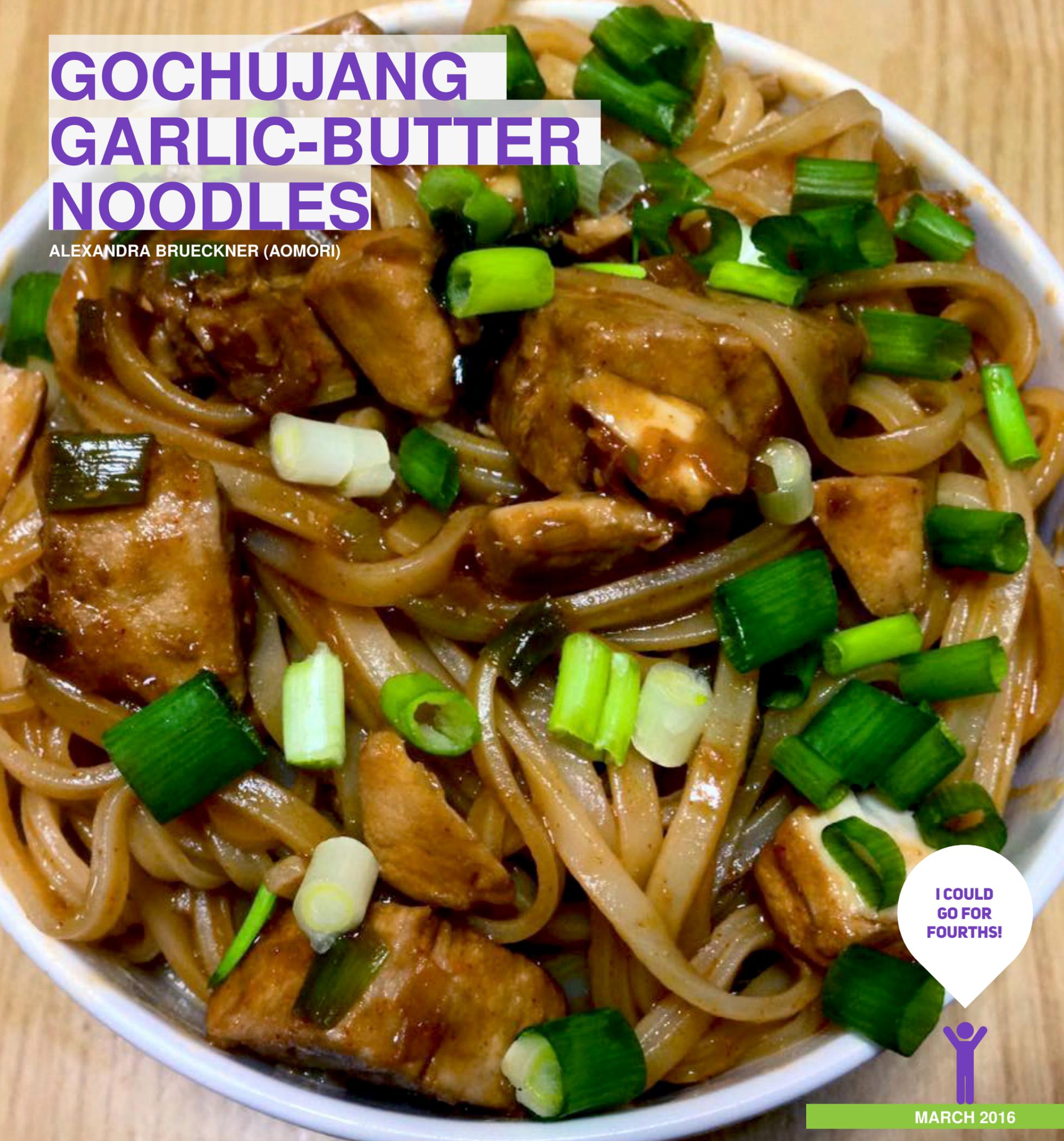
Visit Anisa's blog, [I Accidentally Ate the Whole Thing](#), for foodie, Japan stories and more.

 Anisa Kazemi



GOCHUJANG GARLIC-BUTTER NOODLES

ALEXANDRA BRUECKNER (AOMORI)



I COULD GO FOR FOURTHS!



UGH... FIFTHS?

SIXTHS...?! SOMEONE STOP ME!



As cathartic as cooking can be for me, there are some days that I get home from work and the time it would take to chop vegetables, wait for rice to cook, and lovingly simmer something over low heat might as well be a month. When I'm hungry (and I mean *hungry*), this is one of those recipes that I turn to. It's done in less than twenty minutes, requires fewer than a dozen ingredients, and is so delicious that it's hard not to stand over the skillet and fork leftovers directly into your mouth. It's got a great *umami* flavor profile thanks to the butter and soy sauce combo, and the addition of *gochujang* means that there's enough heat to warm you up without causing steam to come out of your ears.

INGREDIENTS

- 300g tuna, diced into bite-sized chunks (optional; can be replaced with chicken, salmon, tofu, or any other protein you desire)
- 1 Tbl olive oil
- 3 Tbl butter
- ½ cup + 1 Tbl diced green onions, white and green parts
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/3 cup soy sauce
- 1 Tbl *gochuchang* (Korean chili paste) (optional)
- 400g cooked noodles (like soba, ramen, or spaghetti)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. First, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat in a large skillet. When the oil is hot, add the tuna (or other protein) and cook for about 3-4 minutes until it's cooked through. Remove from the skillet and set aside.
2. Next, melt the butter in the skillet and add the half-cup of green onions and garlic. Cook, stirring constantly, for about 2-3 minutes. Add in the soy sauce and *gochujang*. Raise the heat and stir vigorously to break up the *gochujang* and distribute it throughout the sauce. Add the tuna and cooked noodles into the pan. Stir everything together so that the sauce coats the noodles. Taste and add more butter, soy sauce, or *gochujang* as needed.
3. Divide into bowls and sprinkle with the reserved green onions. Eat! And then go back for seconds... and maybe thirds.

 Alexandra Brueckner

ETHICS AT THE OYSTER FESTIVAL

PIA PETERSON (YAMAGATA)

My friend likened the consumption of shellfish from Japan's Pacific Coast to eating organic, or eating the prepared foods at convenience stores. "Some of those onigiri have up to 15 chemical ingredients," he said. "If you're concerned about your health, shouldn't you start there?"

Recently, a friend of mine from Tokyo came up to visit Yamagata. I was a bit nervous about how my sleepy mountain town would compare to the megalopolis, and so I tried to manage his expectations of Yamagata in the winter: "The food is delicious, but the nightlife is a little slow. There's nothing going on, actually. And... there's a lot of snow."

To his credit, the prospect of trudging for kilometers in the snow to get to a one-room *izakaya* that may or may not have been empty didn't dampen his enthusiasm. Over beers, roasted chicken, and *saba* mackerel flame-grilled at our table by a chef who announced his every move in the kitchen in a radio-announcer's voice, we plotted our escape from the snow.

Our target? Sendai and the Matsushima Oyster Festival, both just an hour bus ride away, across the rice paddies and over a mountain range.

Matsushima, or the Pine Islands, is an archipelago of between 260-280 islands off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture in Matsushima Bay. It features in most of the 'top places to see' lists for Japan, including one in the 17th century where Edo scholar Hayashi Gaho added it to a

list of 'Three Scenic Views of Japan'. When we told others of our plans to visit Matsushima for the weekend, my friends and the bartender smiled and nodded, "Ah, Matsushima." When we told them about the oyster festival though, they were more skeptical: All day out in the sun, they warned, be careful! Don't get sick!

To be honest, I was worried about the oysters at the festival—but not in the way that they intended. Because

of its unique geography, Matsushima itself was largely unaffected by the 2011 earthquake and subsequent tsunami. But what about the effects of the Fukushima plant meltdown on the ocean and its inhabitants? Five years later, when the tourist town was effectively back on its feet and booming with restaurants and shops selling omiyage, what did the oystermen think of the state of recovery for the fisheries?

On Sunday, Festival Day, my friend and I roused ourselves in our AirBNB room in Sendai and stumbled out into the light of a surprisingly mild February morning. We grabbed quick conbini coffees and critiqued the new spring clothes being sported by people on the train platforms. Everyone apparently felt optimistic about the sun despite the lingering piles of lumpy snow on the ground. On Sunday, the trains

leaving our small station were few and far between, and we wandered back and forth on the platform talking about what we were going to eat, as well as the last time we'd eaten oysters, fried, raw, or raw and in a glass of champagne (a weird New England specialty).

Arriving in Matsushima an hour or so later, the sunny weather just highlighted the beauty of the incredibly jewel-blue water and the view of the islands. Ducks swam by eyeing the people walking by, and brown seaweed framed the outline of the jetty in the water. From the train we had seen inlets with boats docked and sailboats rocking on moorings. Here there was a line of fishing boats tied to one another along the shoreline with names like

幸福 (*Koufuku*, Happiness) and Big Waves, which my friend pointed out was an unlikely name for someone whose job depends on luck and calm seas.

We didn't have much time to linger by the boats, however, as the oyster festival was well underway by the time we arrived in the early afternoon. The festival is held every year in a park lined with food stalls and trucks, their beds full of oysters in blue plastic baskets. Grills were lined with shells, and giant pots of soup simmered nearby. Some of the stalls were family affairs, with junior high school students taking money and making change as grandmothers in headscarves handed over bowls of steaming seafood soup. Others had teams of men in blue jumpsuits bulging with sweaters and yellow rubber gloves, shucking oysters as fast as people queued up to buy them. I tried to remind myself to be discerning about the raw shellfish and other seafood up for grabs, but animal instinct and the pressure of the crowds jostling for a place in line took over. Before I knew it I was juggling plates and a beer and jostling with the best of them for a spot to eat.

Scallops grilled alive, oysters with lemon on shells the size of a child's forearm. Oysters on rice with pickled ginger. Oysters breaded and fried and slathered in brown sauce. Scallops and oysters wrapped in spring rolls and deep fried. Ankimono, a miso broth stew with vegetables and the liver of the anko fish—a fish with a face that's tough to love but

that makes a dish that's hard to hate. At pop-up tables in the center of the park, we watched a middle aged woman in a brown leather coat sing on a small stage set up for a karaoke contest. Three masked men who were dressed up in incredibly elaborate Transformers costumes swayed to the music behind her, I guessed that they were a team of competing singers nonetheless moved by the woman's soulful performance.

As we ate, occasionally returning to the stalls for more scallops or a glass of hot sake or cold beer, I asked people what they thought about eating the seafood on this side of the ocean. Most of them, obviously, had come here to eat, and any misgivings others like myself might have had soon dissipated into thin air like the smoke off the grills. It wasn't that people were unaware—for most of the younger generation, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake was one of the most terrifying and defining moments of their lives. Many nearby towns are still struggling to recover, and people are very much aware that while it is difficult to assess the extent and damage of the aftereffects of the Fukushima meltdown, they are still very much present.

That said, those I talked to said that it was a very personal choice whether or not you felt safe eating shellfish here, shellfish whose main job is to filter out nutrients and other particles from the water they live in. Sure, you could opt not to eat seafood sourced from Iwate,

Ibaraki, or Miyagi prefecture, they argued. But when you eat out at a restaurant, it's not so easy to know where the fish comes from.

And what of the fishermen in affected areas trying to get back on their feet? A father of a young girl told me that he knows that he was taking risks, eating from the "bad side of the ocean." But he wanted to support local restaurants owned by friends and community members, and he wanted his daughter to grow up eating traditional Japanese food—fish of all shapes and sizes—brought to the city in the early morning from small fishing towns like Matsushima.

My friend likened the consumption of shellfish from Japan's Pacific Coast to eating organic, or eating the prepared foods at convenience stores. "Some of those onigiri have up to 15 chemical ingredients," he said. "If you're concerned about your health, shouldn't you start there?" I relate to this logic, and think that, for most people, convenience trumps possible future consequences in food security. I often choose not to buy organic vegetables, especially in winter, because I argue that I just can't afford it instead of budgeting more for food. When I buy fish at the grocery store, I don't question where it comes from, nor do I consult the [Seafood Watch](#) chart for responsible seafood and stay away from shrimp and tuna, two industries that have been linked with serious environmental problems that could have far greater impact worldwide.

As I watched the families and the fisherman start to sell out and wrap up shop, I realized that the seafood issue is complicated—more complicated than I'd anticipated...

As I watched the families and the fisherman start to sell out and wrap up shop, I realized that the seafood issue is complicated—more complicated than I'd anticipated even when I first heard of the Oyster Festival. Even in a developed nation like Japan, incomes and industries are fragile and complex. The tradition that holds up regional festivals like the Oyster Festival in Matsushima is linked to modern economic policies and health concerns that are difficult even for experts in the field to predict and plan for. While I believe that on an individual level I can start making better and more responsible choices about seafood, I'm not sure that it rules out the Matsushima Oyster Festival. I think that next year I'd like to come again and talk to some of the same fisherman about their hauls.

 Pia Peterson



BEYOND JET

Taking Your Love for Japan and Travel and Turning It Into a Career

AMY BOWINSKI (GIFU)

I was part of the JET Program for 3 years – a little longer if you count the extra project I took on after my contract officially ended. In the grand scheme of a lifetime, that's not a whole lot of time. In the life of a 20-something? It is much more significant.

The thought of leaving JET was a little scary. I didn't know what I would do, where I would go, what sort of profession to look into. For those who aren't looking to be a teacher long-term, there are a lot of question marks.

When I got back from my time in Japan, there were a couple of jobs that I had applied for and was waiting to hear back from those I really wanted, but none of them were panning out. I then signed up with a Japanese/English bilingual job placement agency, but didn't expect anything to come of it. About 2 months later I got a phone call telling me of a job using Japanese at a local travel agency. I figured, sure, why not?

That is how I ended up working at InsideJapan Tours.

I never pictured myself as a salesperson. I never thought

I would do well or enjoy working in a sales job. I also was never really interested in working in the travel industry unless it was on a cruise ship. Still, this job was a really great find. It's a job that lets me use Japanese, my knowledge of Japan, and my love of travel to make other people's dreams come true.

However, being a travel consultant is a stressful job – you get a lot of complaints, you have to have a lot of patience, and you go through some very stressful times (especially around March and October). But with that said, it's really rewarding. There is nothing that compares to a honeymoon couple sending you origami that they made in their class with a note saying you made their dream honeymoon. Or a family sending you a picture of themselves dressed as maiko with a note that says it was the best trip they've ever had. Or that single traveler who choose to go halfway across the world to get away from his mid-life crisis and sends you an email to thank you for helping him put things in perspective.

My job teaches me about areas of Japan I wasn't

familiar with before, deepens my knowledge of those I was, and lets me share my own expertise and love of a country that I adopted as my own for 3 years of my life.

There's also the benefit of travel yourself. Since starting this job a year ago, I've had the chance to visit our international offices in England and Japan, and while in those countries visited France and South Korea. Who knows, I may get the chance to visit Vietnam next year through our sister company.

There is nothing that compares to a honeymoon couple sending you...a note saying you made their dream honeymoon.

I never saw myself working in the travel industry – but I'm glad that it's where life has taken me.

Amy Bowinski is a former JET and loves to write, cook, and forge her own way in life. She graduated in 2010 with a BA in Frames of Identity; Writing, Culture, and Art.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, TAKE A LOOK AT INSIDEJAPAN TOURS' FACEBOOK PAGE AND COMPANY BLOG.



Amy Bowinski

COMMUNITY

SPORTS EDITORS

connect.sports@ajet.net

Hiroshi Fukushima

Juu-nin to-iro (Ten people, ten colours)

Becca Simas

COMMUNITY EDITOR

connect.community@ajet.net

Cameron Joe

 *Illaura Rossiter*

COMMUNITY

Yuki-Yama	56
Don't 'Get Involved'	60
The Athletic Amami Islands	64
Contributing to Connect	66



YUKI-YAMA

TONY GRANT (TOKYO)



If you're experiencing your first winter in Japan, you're probably oscillating between the highs and the lows that we all live through in the cold months. Shivering the evenings away in unheated housing is not great, but *onsen*, *nabe* hot pots, and frequent cloudless, azure skies make a nice counterpoint. But if you really want to make the most of winter in Japan, you've got to head to the high country. Whether it's skiing the world's best powder snow or breaking out the crampons to climb a summit, the mountains are where it's at.

TIPS FOR THE BEGINNER HIKER

If you've never hiked or climbed during winter before, you'll probably want to start gently and build up to greater things as you develop your skills and experience. There's a lot more equipment needed to keep you safe, and with shorter days and far lower temperatures out there certain skills come to the fore, such as route-

finding, interpreting weather forecasts, managing clothing systems to stay warm and dry, and many others. These can take time and experience to develop, and one of the best ways to fast-track this initially is to head out in the company of a guide or more experienced partner.

Once you feel comfortable tackling the hiking trails on bigger mountains, you may be ready to try some of the classic *yuki-yama* snow hikes, such as Nikko's Mt Oku-Shirane (奥白根山 2578m) or Mt Asama (浅間山 2568m) near Karuizawa. Both these mountains receive huge dumps of snow in a typical winter. They may even require snowshoes to get up to the more wind-blown higher elevations, where crampons will usually allow better passage on the firm compacted snow.

ICE AXE CHALLENGE

If you're good with heights and confident at self-arresting with an ice axe, you might be ready to try the classic ridge hike at the southern end of the Yatsugatake

(八ヶ岳) range in Yamanashi, over Mt Aka (赤岳 2899m), Mt Yoko and Mt Io. With chains and ladders in places and some dizzying drop-offs on the Akadake-kosen side of the ridge, this amazing route is not for the faint-hearted, but the views up there are incredible.

MT. KAIKOMA

Once you've done that, consider the granddaddy of Japanese ridge hikes, the famed Kuroto ridge of Mt Kaikoma (甲斐駒ヶ岳 2967m). With a total elevation gain of around 2000m, this hike will certainly test your endurance. Most people break it up with a hut stay at the 7th station on the ridge, about 600m below the summit.

The views from the top of Kaikoma might just be some of the best in Japan, taking in Mt Fuji (富士山), the South Alps, Yatsugatake and stretching all the way to the North Alps!

SPRING ALPINE SNOW ADVENTURES

For those who are really adventurous, the next logical step is to try a climb that needs ropes to protect it. As we enter the second half of winter, with spring round the corner, we'll soon be into the season for the classic spring alpine snow ridges. The main ridge of the east face of Mt Shirouma (白馬岳 2932m) is the first major milestone on the path for aspirants here. With knife-edge snow ridges and whipped cream cornices, and a 60 degree snow wall barring the way to the summit, this route has plenty of excitement. You'll definitely want a guide for this climb if

you've never tried anything of this sort. The resources at the end of this article can help you get started!

SAFETY FIRST

There are so many amazing experiences to be had in the Japanese winter mountains. Don't forget though that the most important thing is to have fun and come home safely, so prepare well and get to know all the possible hazards before you leave home, or even consider going in the company of a professional. Here's to a great winter!

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CLIMBING JAPAN'S GREATEST PEAKS

You can find route descriptions and photos of all these hikes and climbs, and many more, on my [Climb Japan website](#).

If you're interested in trying some of the great alpine variation routes of the Japanese Alps, you can download my new book "10 Classic Alpine Climbs of

Japan" in the [Amazon Kindle Store](#) or through the Kindle reading app on your tablet or desktop.

If you're looking to hire experienced trip leaders to take you safely up some of these hikes, visit the [Kanto Adventures website](#) or get in touch with me directly through Climb Japan.

Tony Grant first came to Japan in 2006 as an English teacher at the British Council, with whom he has worked for the past 15 years. He learned to climb in the High Tatras of Poland, and has since climbed all over the world, including the European Alps, the Caucasus in Azerbaijan and the Himalaya in Nepal. He is based in Tokyo, and can usually be found on a mountain somewhere in Japan on the weekends.

 Tony Grant

ICE CLIMBING IS COOL! (LITERALLY)

UH OH!



DON'T 'GET INVOLVED' 6 ALTs Get Creative and Get Connected

VICTORIA VLISIDES (CHIBA)



Ganda pointed out that her new connection with the community has allowed more people to recognize her as “Kenyah” and not as “that random foreigner”.

To-do list: Join Tinder. Get drunk with Japanese people. Ask where the locals hang out. Walk instead of drive.

Got it? Ok, now, let me explain:

Online apps, becoming a “regular” somewhere, word-of-mouth recommendations, and just being physically present in your city are obvious ways to get connected, though they aren’t always expats’ first routes to do so.

Shout-out to the people doing taiko drumming, practicing calligraphy at the library, or dancing their butts off with their Yosakoi teams—because that’s great. But, it’s just not for everyone. Too often expats get stuck thinking that these types of activities are the only way to “get involved

in the community.” Some of us start to realize the necessity of thinking about—and conducting—our social patterns in different ways than we did at home.

Less structure can be a little more unnerving at first but ultimately just as rewarding. While there’s no “how-to” formula, there are examples all over Japan of expats

who are meeting people and finding new places in creative, non-traditional ways.

ONLINE APPS

Don’t know if you’ve heard, but there are tons of online apps that can efficiently connect people for dating and friends. Dating apps like Tinder and OKCupid are used by foreigners and Japanese people alike for both friends and romance. While these are just two out of many, there are more people using them than you might think. Tinder alone has generated more than 800 million swipes a day, according to an online dating stats site, [Business of Apps](#). What’s more, Japan is among Tinder’s “top 5 markets in Asia,” Tinder’s Chicago-based chief marketing officer Phil Schwarz said in an e-mail exchange with their PR agency in February. (Swipe your eyes “right” to read more...)

Simply being on an app, without even going on a date, widens the perspective of what kinds of people are around.

Lucy Niess is a second-year ALT in Ibaraki who has had some modest success using online apps in Japan. She mostly uses OKCupid but has also tried Tinder.

“The apps allowed me to meet friends and dating partners outside my immediate area as to not start any rumors or cause drama,” she said, adding that she’s been on a few dates.

So how did they go?

“In the grand scheme of

things, pretty good,” she said. “It also allowed me to find people who think the same way I do since my lifestyle is a tad niche. It helps to find those with similar experiences as me, and apps are a simple way of finding them.”

Some people do actually use apps and websites as a way to meet friends. For example, Amanda Garcia, a first-year ALT in Shizuoka, met one of her best friends on [JapanGuide.com](#). She said they helped each other with English and Japanese, and when they finally met in person, she even hung out with him and his girlfriend.

Yet sometimes it can be a little bit of both friendship and romance, like with Saitama JET, [Selene Della Queva](#). She married her Japanese tutor after they met on “[Lang-8](#)”, a language exchange site. What sparked their interest is a mutual love for drift racing.

GET ON THE STREETS

Of course, if you don’t want to use apps, there’s always good ol’ fashioned face time, like when second-year Chiba ALT Kenyah Ganda got stopped on the street at 4:30 a.m. this past summer.

See, Ganda basically doesn’t sleep, so it’s not all that strange for her to be outside running that early. An elderly woman came up to her and attempted to communicate something in Japanese. Normally it would be against our intuition to follow a stranger to their house in the early morning hours, but as a foreigner in her small inane

town, she decided to go with the flow.

“There’s 25 old people in this room, and I walk in and they just started clapping,” she said with a laugh.

Unfazed, Ganda hears “*Douzo*,” and starts with a self introduction. They had the only fluent English speaker translate, a 73-year-old Japanese woman, the youngest of the group. After, Ganda pulled her aside.

“I was like, ‘What is this? Why are you here?’” she recalled.

Though the exact translation is still a bit unclear—the group talks about morals and ethics bright and early every morning, Ganda said. That was in March, and she returned to this mysterious group of “obaachans” and “ojiisans” each week until the end of the year. Since then she’s stopped going, but says she still spends time with the woman who translated for her, as well as her family.

Ganda pointed out that her new connection with the community has allowed more people to recognize her as “Kenyah” and not as “that random foreigner”.

“It’s really nice to see people around, and you can just say hello,” she said.

BECOME A REGULAR

While connections found Ganda, often times making that first move can be the hardest part. You see a bar or restaurant, but it looks like only locals go there. Time to find out. That’s what Jacob Wiering did—and it worked out.

How we choose to participate among the people and places around us, of course, is entirely up to us. But make no mistake, whether you crack a joke with someone at the grocery store, cheers with someone at the bar, or join the local tennis club—you’re already in it.

Wiering, a first-year ALT in the countryside of Chiba, found an izakaya (local bar) after walking past it each day to and from his job.

“I was bored one Friday night, and I decided to go,” he said.

Now, he’s become a regular, going at least a few times a month. He’s met about a dozen people from the community, both men and women, including some local shop owners. And the bar’s owners, while they don’t really speak English, were very welcoming, he said.

Some spots in the countryside seem to be passed down from ALT to ALT, so owners are used to some new faces, but Wiering carved a place of his own at this local establishment.

WORD OF MOUTH

Along with simply walking into a place and hoping for the best, there’s word of mouth. Well, duh... This has been around since people could talk. But growing up with cell phones, the Internet and apps like Yelp!, this often isn’t our first route in finding a new place.

But for Laurence Hind, a third-year ALT in Chiba, it was an absolute necessity. He said that outside of big cities, many bars and restaurants don’t have a very accessible online presence, so word of mouth is essential.

“A young local told me of an izakaya that has an open (space) tatami room that is only frequented by young locals, and we go there relatively regularly,” he said.

It’s sometimes a challenge to link up with young people in his area. But, by asking around, he was elated to find a place where he meets “people of all walks of life.”

“I’ve never been there and not met new people my age,” Hind added.

He said he hopes other expats take the chance to branch out of their regular social circles to see what else is in the community.

“JETs often, without realizing, pigeon-hole themselves with Japanese people three times their age and don’t get the chance to explore their local areas with locals their age,” he said.

He also suggested simply

asking where young people “hang.”

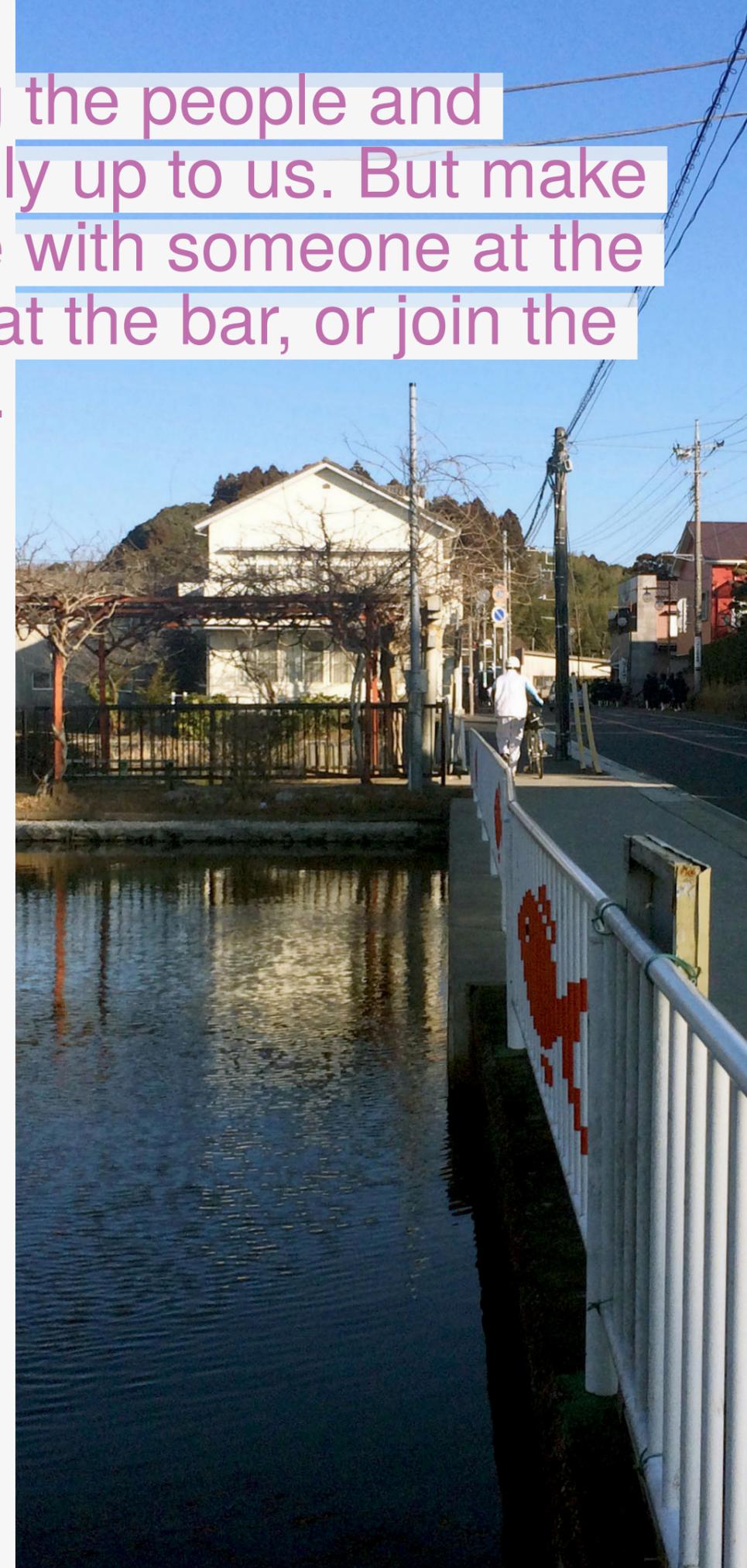
“It’s the only way you’ll find out,” he said.

With that, take a second to challenge your perspective of community, as well as what it means to get involved.” Being involved is simply a choice we make or don’t make. We are already here.

How we choose to participate among the people and places around us, of course, is entirely up to us. But make no mistake, whether you crack a joke with someone at the grocery store, cheers with someone at the bar, or join the local tennis club—you’re already in it.

Victoria Vlisides is a second-year ALT in Chiba. She currently writes for [JapanTravel.com](#) and [TokyoArtBeat.com](#). She’d like to thank everyone who cooperated with this and each article she does. Her efforts would be useless without their help. Follow her on [WordPress](#).

 Ganda Kenyeh, Victoria Vlisides



THE ATHLETIC AMAMI ISLANDS

MICAH MIZUKAMI (KAGOSHIMA)

There is nothing like running under the cherry blossoms on a warm February morning. For most of Japan, the cherry blossoms don't bloom until March or April, but in the Amami Islands in southern Kagoshima, the tidings of spring come early. These bright pink *hikan-zakura*, commonly referred to as the Taiwan Cherry, grow in more subtropical regions and bloom in the cold winter months.

The Amami Sakura Marathon took place on Sunday, February 7th in Kasari on northern Amami. Saturday saw heavy rain, but fortunately the rain stopped and the sun shared its warmth for the runners during the Sunday morning race. More than 1,700 runners participated in the event, which included 3.5km, 5km, 10km, 15.5km, and 21.09km half-marathon courses.

The southern islands are warm enough to host marathons and other running events at a time when many parts of Japan are buried under snow and ice. Participants came from as far as Hokkaido and Aomori in Japan's frozen north, from Tokyo and the greater Kanto area, Shikoku, Kyushu, and even Okinawa to the south.

ISLAND LOVE

While bringing together runners from all over Japan,

the marathon also brought together ALTs within Kagoshima Prefecture, connecting mainland ALTs with the island ALTs. Thanks to the locals cheering at every leg of the race and the charm of running in the sunshine beneath the cherry blossoms, most of us Kagoshima and Island ALTs ran personal bests.

April:

- 2nd Annual Kikai Marathon

June:

- 29th Annual Tokunoshima Triathlon (half ironman)

The cherry blossoms here will soon fade away, but there

The southern islands are warm enough to host marathons and other running events at a time when many parts of Japan are buried under snow and ice.

UPCOMING SOUTHERN ISLAND ATHLETIC EVENTS

Although the Amami Sakura Marathon is over, there are other races and athletic events on the Amami Islands coming up in spring and summer.

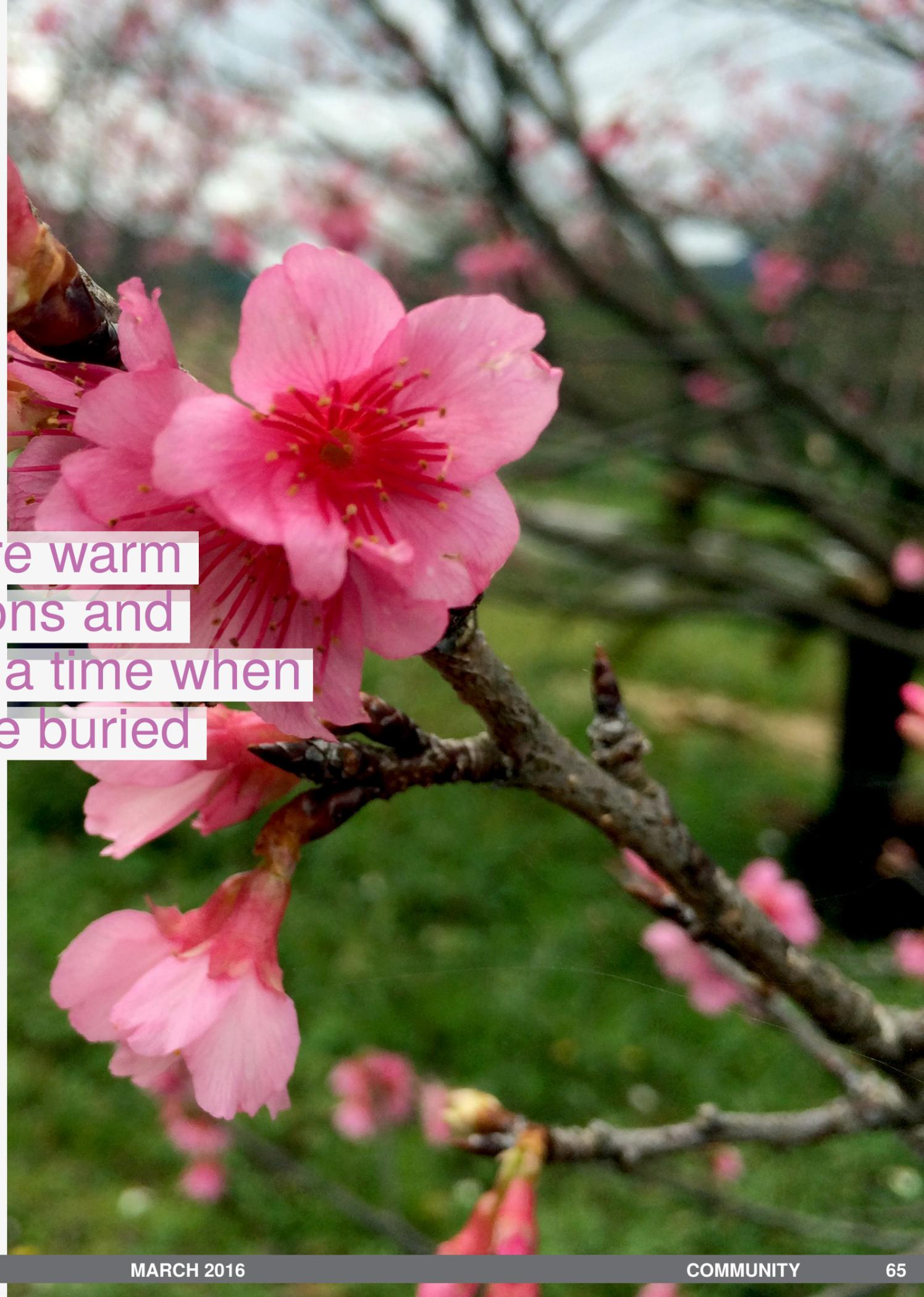
March:

- 30th Annual Yoron Marathon
- 35th Annual Okinoerabu Jogging Competition

is something for runners and athletes in the Amami Islands all year round.

Micah Mizukami is a third-year ALT on Tokunoshima, a charming little island that is part of Kagoshima Prefecture. Micah loves to run, bake, origami, photograph, and a billion other fantastic verbs.

📷 Becca Simas



CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT



Connect is a magazine for the community in Japan, by the community in Japan. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! If you have an idea you want to see in these pages, reach out to our Head Editor, or any of our awesome section editors. We'll work with you to make it the best it can be and share it with our audience of thousands. Not every article needs to be an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, photo spreads, travelogues, and more.

Contact the Head Editor of Connect, Rajeev Rahela, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

ARTICLES

Write about something you're doing. Write about something you love. Tell us a story.

SPOTLIGHT

Tell us about someone in your community who's doing something neat and noteworthy. Cooks, collectors, calligraphers—we want to hear about the inspiring people around you.

COMMENTS

Let us know what you think. Click the comment button at the end of any article, or interact with us on Facebook, Twitter, and issuu.com.

PHOTOS

All of Connect's photos are provided by the community, from the cover to the articles and everything in between. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Patrick Finn, at patrick.finn@ajet.net.

HAIKU

Each month Connect will feature haiku from our readers. Haiku are simple, clean, and can be about anything you like! If you're an aspiring wordsmith with the soul of Basho, send all of your haiku along with your name and prefecture to connect.editor@ajet.net.

COMICS

You asked for it, and now Connect features comics. Whether you're a desk doodler or a published artist, we want to see your panels and strips about life in Japan.



CONNECT WITH US

Interested in contributing to Connect? Want to stay up-to-date on interview opportunities, photo requests, and Connect announcements? Sign up to be a contributor at the [Connect Contributors Circle](#) online to receive updates from us, pitch your ideas, and get involved with the Connect staff and community. You can find the current Connect team and their contact information [here](#).

You can also like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#), and interact with the magazine via CLIP at [ISSUU](#).