

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

MAY
2016

THE AINU AND DISCRIMINATION

SUMO'S CRISIS IN THE MODERN SPORTS WORLD

PERFORMING AT THE ANIME MUSIC FESTIVAL

HONG KONG SUGAR RUSH!

HOW DO YOU TRANSLATE YOUR SENSE OF SELF?



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

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2016.06.07 24:00JST

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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 May 2016 edition of Connect magazine.

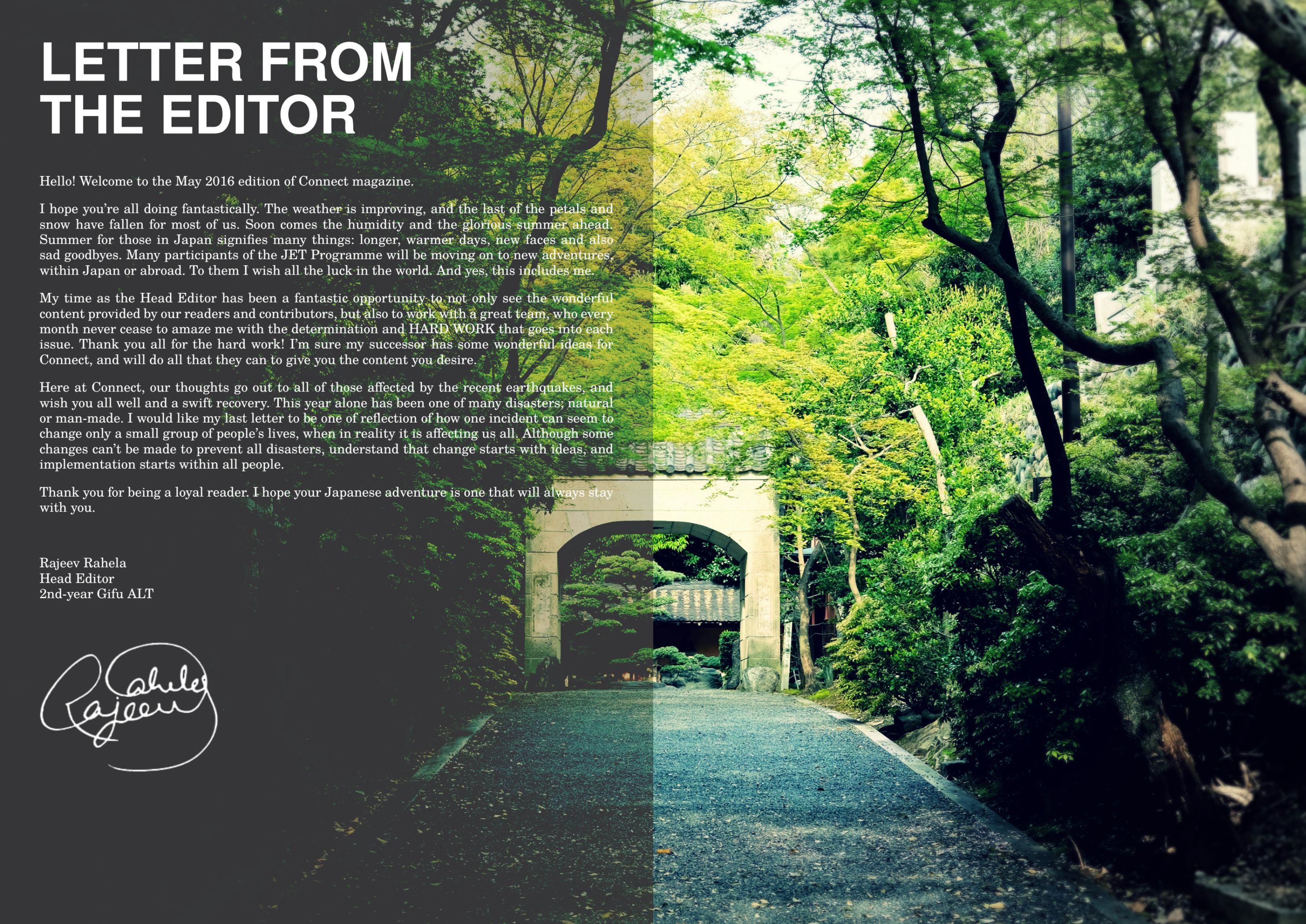
I hope you're all doing fantastically. The weather is improving, and the last of the petals and snow have fallen for most of us. Soon comes the humidity and the glorious summer ahead. Summer for those in Japan signifies many things: longer, warmer days, new faces and also sad goodbyes. Many participants of the JET Programme will be moving on to new adventures, within Japan or abroad. To them I wish all the luck in the world. And yes, this includes me.

My time as the Head Editor has been a fantastic opportunity to not only see the wonderful content provided by our readers and contributors, but also to work with a great team, who every month never cease to amaze me with the determination and **HARD WORK** that goes into each issue. Thank you all for the hard work! I'm sure my successor has some wonderful ideas for Connect, and will do all that they can to give you the content you desire.

Here at Connect, our thoughts go out to all of those affected by the recent earthquakes, and wish you all well and a swift recovery. This year alone has been one of many disasters; natural or man-made. I would like my last letter to be one of reflection of how one incident can seem to change only a small group of people's lives, when in reality it is affecting us all. Although some changes can't be made to prevent all disasters, understand that change starts with ideas, and implementation starts within all people.

Thank you for being a loyal reader. I hope your Japanese adventure is one that will always stay with you.

Rajeev Rahela
Head Editor
2nd-year Gifu ALT



NEWS & EVENTS

NEWS EDITOR

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Margaret Pickard

My last major vacation in Japan: to the sand baths, quiet forests, and steaming onsens of Kyushu!

EVENTS EDITOR

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NEWS & EVENTS

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THE AINU AND DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

CAROLINE NOEL (HOKKAIDO)



...the Ainu were put into school to remove their Ainu-ness and replace it with Japanese culture and language...

In Hokkaido, the presence of the culture of the Ainu, Japan's northern indigenous people, is inescapable. It is found subtly in place names, the decorations that line the walls and shelves of public places, and even in the design of *omiyage* packaging. It is clearly displayed by villages that place Ainu culture at the center of their tourist industry (Akan), and in communities that come together to facilitate cultural preservation and language restoration (Shiraoi). Despite being entrenched in Ainu iconography and referential nomenclature, there is also the troubling realization of how little the Ainu are talked about outside of tourist attractions and historical displays and the little knowledge that people seem to have about Ainu culture and modern realities.

Recently, two surveys revealed the discord between what Ainu people experience today and how non-Ainu Japanese people (*waijin*) perceive them. One showed that 72 percent of Ainu say they sense discrimination against their ethnic identity and culture. The other survey, directed at the *waijin* population, revealed that 18 percent "weren't aware of such issues" (1). Why exactly are some Japanese unable to

see the discrimination a vast number of Ainu still suffer?

DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

Discrimination is a vast topic that presents itself in countless ways, but I'd like to think about one institution that has contributed to the discrimination faced by modern Ainu communities: education. It is a particularly insightful lens to view discrimination through since many of us are in Japan as educators. To refine my question, what has happened, and is still happening, in Japan's educational system today that has created this current landscape of unseen prejudice against Ainu people?

The Ainu—as objects, subjects, or participants—and education have always been at odds. When Japan officially colonized Hokkaido, it brought with it Meiji era education coupled with harsh assimilation policies. After their land was taken and redistributed to *waijin*, the Ainu were put into school to remove their Ainu-ness and replace it with Japanese culture and language. At their roots, these assimilation policies meant that Ainu cultural practices were forbidden.

The Ainu language was banned, contributing one of the biggest blows to Ainu culture; current estimates put native remaining Ainu speakers at just 10. According to Shiro Kayano, an Ainu activist, there used to be more Ainu language courses that the Hokkaido government supported, but over the years these resources have vastly shrunk (3). Ainu cultural erasure by Japanese institutions left most Ainu people today without the means to reclaim their ethnic heritage.

This erasure is outright and obvious during colonial era education. Today, it continues subtly in the perpetuation of misinformation in Japan's education curriculum. A recent change to Japanese textbooks depicting the colonization of Hokkaido during the Meiji Era stated that the Ainu were "given land" by the Japanese government and that the 1899 Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act "encouraged them to practice agriculture." The Ainu community was angered by these assertions that blatantly disregarded the nature of forced migration practices and altered facts. The Ainu had their land taken from them. They lost their livelihoods and traditional cultural

grounds. Portraying the events of this era as anything other than forced removal is not only a glib oversight but historically inaccurate. It is also important to note that of the land "given" to them, was usually hostile and not suited for farming—a far cry from agricultural encouragement.

Yupo Abe, the deputy head of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, sums it up best in his response: "Depicting the protection law that discriminated against the Ainu as something positive is an alteration of history. We want the schools to teach history in a fair and rightful manner" (4). Like many countries with colonial histories, the colonized are unfairly represented, underwritten, and when mentioned, only in whitewashed passing. With this recent incident, it is clear Japan is no exception.

There is no requirement in the national curriculum to extensively overview the Ainu as historic people, let alone as people alive and fighting for rights today. Oversight and disinterest are subtle but brutal tools of discrimination that many minority groups feel in Japan. Though not violent or physical, feelings of cultural shame and social ostracization become powerful forms of social control. It quietly undermines their ethnicity when Ainu students do not get to hear much of their own history. There is a lot of stigma around being Ainu—images of poverty, discrimination, and hardship—that lead Ainu individuals to hide their ethnic background from the





LEARN MORE

- [Ainu Association of Hokkaido](#)
- [Tokyo AINU](#)
- [Foundation for Research and Protection of Ainu Culture](#)
- [Learn Ainu](#)
- [Ainu Rights Battle](#)
- [Ainu Run Radio Program](#)
- [Beyond Ainu Studies: Changing Academic and Public Perspectives](#)

public and even from their children (5). Not only are Ainu children not given the option to learn about their heritage or language in their public education, but they may not even learn about it at home. Combine these trends and you have a gradual pattern wherein each generation has fewer and fewer people identifying as Ainu. However, this does not mean there are fewer Ainu.

PROGRESS AND WORK TO STILL BE DONE

In addition to misrepresenting them, educational institutions have also abused the Ainu as objects of study. Currently, the issue of repatriation and the Ainu remains still kept in storage at Japanese universities best represents this scholastic abuse. Progress was made this March when Hokkaido University agreed to return the remains of 16 individuals to either blood relatives or to an organization set up by Ainu plaintiff's called "Kotan no kai" ('Kotan' being the Ainu word for community). Still, the university has around 1,000 remains in its collection

(6). While the settlement of this lawsuit set a powerful precedent so that more remains can be distributed back to the community in the future, it is troubling that the Ainu had to rely on a lawsuit in order to see this result. There is no policy in place by the Japanese government to repatriate the remains to the country's indigenous people, like in the United States (7) or Australia (8). Japan has only recognized the Ainu as an indigenous people since 2008, so perhaps it is only a matter of time. However, it shows that Japan's policies severely lack some of the basic tenets that other countries with colonial legacies, especially economically wealthy nations, have set up to affirm the rights of indigenous peoples (9).

As exemplified by the education system, the discrimination felt by the Ainu is not easily seen by their *waijin* counterparts because of more than a century of assimilation practices. Much of the energy spent by Ainu activists is directed towards gaining more support and recognition from the Japanese government as a distinct culture within Japan, with a voice and the right to exist in full visibility. One final note: the Ainu do face discrimination and struggle for broader recognition, but it is also a disservice to portray them as disappearing. There are thriving Ainu communities in and outside of Hokkaido (e.g. Tokyo Ainu), activists fighting for indigenous rights, young Ainu people learning to redefine their heritage, and communities making Ainu

language radio broadcasts and newspapers. One of the biggest ways we can help is to recognize these people and their efforts and not to write them off as representatives of a forgotten past.

Caroline Noel is a 3rd year JET in Takikawa City. She enjoys rock climbing, guitar, movies, and longs walks on the beach. She majored in anthropology and film studies. She thinks foxes are rad and that everyone should listen to St. Vincent.

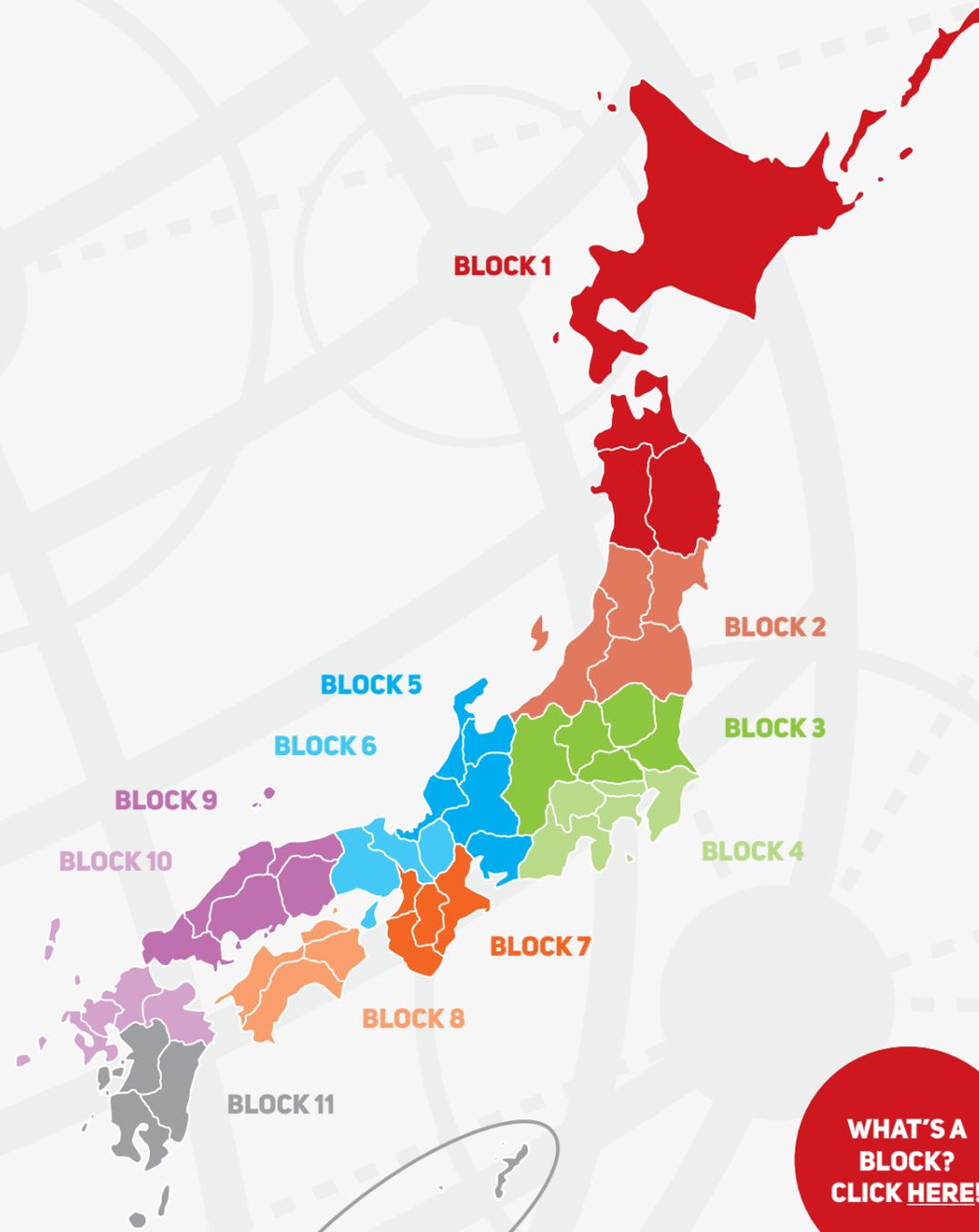
SOURCES

- (1) [Ainu Surveys](#)
- (2) [Language Revitalization](#)
- (3) [Shiro Kayano – lecture and conversations](#)
- (4) [Textbook Revisions](#)
- (5) [Watson, Mark K. "Diasporic Indigeneity: Place and the Articulation of Ainu Identity in Tokyo, Japan."](#)
- (6) [University Returns Remains](#)
- (7) [NAGPRA](#)
- (8) [Australia Indigenous Repatriation](#)
- (9) [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - Article 12, concerning repatriation of remains](#)

📷 Caroline Noel

EVENTS CALENDAR

May



SHIWA INARI SHRINE FESTIVAL

05 May
Shiwa Inari Shrine, Shiwa Town, Iwate
[Website](#)

HIROSAKI APPLE BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

06-15 May
Hirosaki Apple Park, Hirosaki City, Aomori
[Website](#)

SAPPORO LILAC FESTIVAL

18-28 May
Various locations around Sapporo, Hokkaido
[Website](#)

HIYOSHI SHRINE YOMEMI FESTIVAL

25 May
Hiyoshi Shrine, Noshiro City, Akita
[Website](#)



KIMONO FESTIVAL

03 May
Takada-cho Street, Tokamachi City, Niigata
[Website](#)

AZALEA FESTIVAL

15 May
Sanriku Area to Minami Sanriku-cho, Fukukyo City, Miyagi
[Website](#)

NATIONAL WHITE AZALEA MARATHON

15 May
Nagai Civic Center and Cultural Hall, Nagai City, Yamagata
[Website](#)

TAKASHIBAYAMA'S 3,000 AZALEA TREE VIEWING SEASON OPENS

22 May
Mt. Takashibayama, Fukushima
[Website](#)



RAMEN FESTIVAL IN MITO

03-08 May
Senba Park, Mito, Ibaraki
[Website](#)

BIG KITE FLYING FESTIVAL

03 & 05 May
Nishiho Shubana Chisaki Edogawa, Kasukabe-City, Saitama
[Website](#)

BIG WISTERIA FESTIVAL

18 April-17 May
Ashikaga Flower Park, Ashikaga City
[Website](#)

MT. HARUNA TRAIL & LAKE HARUNA FULL MARATHON

Deadline 20 May
Takasaki
[Website](#)

RICE FIELD SCHOOL

21-22 May
Donguri Mukagata Gakuen, Tenryumura, Nagano
[Website](#)

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





JIBIKIAMI AND UONOMI BBQ

05 & 15 May
Chiba
[Website](#)

AZALEA FESTIVAL

Until 08 May
Shimizu Park, Chiba
[Website](#)

MAGARIYA FESTIVAL

Until 05 May
Mabashi, Inba, Chiba
[Website](#)

MINAMIBOSO FIREFLY FANTASY

19 May - 19 June
Minamiboso, Chiba
[Website](#)

MOTHER BOKUJOU SPRING FESTIVAL

Until 29 May
Mother Bokujou, Chiba
[Website](#)

CARROT FESTIVAL

28 May
Narashino, Chiba
[Website](#)

17TH KURABIRAKI (WAREHOUSE OPENING)

22 May
Sanmu, Chiba
[Website](#)



TAKAOKA MIKURUMAYAMA FESTIVAL

01 May
Yamacho, Takaoka
[Website](#)

ETCHU YATSUO HIKIYAMA FESTIVAL

03 May
Downtown Yatsuo, Toyama City
[Website](#)

SEIHAKU FESTIVAL

03-05 May
Nanao City, Ishikawa
[Website](#)

YASAKOI YUME FESTIVAL

03-05 May
Minato-cho, Nagoya City, Aichi
[Website](#)

SHIKIBU & FUJI FESTIVAL

03 May
Higashi Senpukucho, Echizen-shi, Fukui
[Website](#)

FUSHIKI HIKYAMA "FIGHTING FLOATS" FESTIVAL

14-15 May
Fushiki Area, Takaoka
[Website](#)



YABUSAME SHINJI

03 May
Shimogamo Shrine, Kyoto
[Website](#)

TAJIMA PUB QUIZ

14 May
Izushi Shiroyama Beer Garden, Hyogo
[Website](#)

AOI MATSURI PROCESSION

15 May
Demachiyana Station, Kyoto
[Website](#)

HANSHIN TIGERS GAME

21 May
Koshien Stadium, Hyogo
[Website](#)

BIWA BOAT BALL

28 May
Lake Biwa, Shiga
[Website](#)



CINCO DE MAYO OSAKA 2016

01 May
Osaka
[Website](#)

KENPYO-SAI (ICE DEDICATION FESTIVAL)

01 May
Nara
[Website](#)

A TRIATHLON IN SHIRAHAMA

03 May
Wakayama
[Website](#)

THE 7TH KAMIKAZE NIHONSHU WORLD 2016

04 May
Osaka
[Website](#)



SHIMANAMI KAIDO CYCLING EVENT

28 May
Location: Meet at Ehime, Imabari
[Website](#)

2016 EISHINSHA SANKO AJET CUP RUGBY GAMES EVENT

04-05 June
Shikoku Saburo no Sato, Tokushima
[Website](#)

KOCHI SUMMER SALES AND SWAP

25 June
Kagamikawa Ryokuchi Park, Kochi
[Website](#)





HANAYU FESTIVAL

03-04 May
Misasa Onsen, Tottori
[Website](#)

SANBIEN CHILDREN'S HOME FUNDRAISING EVENT

14 May
Gallery 1/1 Hiroshima City, Hiroshima
[Website](#)

LET'S FILM FEST 2016

21 May
John Burger and Cafe Onomichi, Hiroshima
[Website](#)



HAKATA DONTAKU

03-04 May
Hakata, Fukuoka-ken
[Website](#)

OKINOHATA SUITENGU FESTIVAL

03-05 May
Yanagawa, Fukuoka-ken
[Website](#)

NIHON DOWASAI

05 May
Kusu, Oita-ken
Hita River Opening Festival
21-22 May
Hita, Oita-ken
[Website](#)

KAWAWATARI JINKOSAI "HAPPY GOD FESTIVAL"

21-22 May
Tagawa, Fukuoka-ken
[Website](#)



IE ISLAND LILY FESTIVAL

23 April - 5 May
Lily Field Park (Ie Village), Okinawa
[Website](#)

MINAMATA ROSE FESTIVAL

29 April - 15 May
Eco Park, Minamata City

HIToyOSHI CASTLE FESTIVAL

30 April - 01 May
Hitoyoshi-shi, Kumamoto
[Website](#)

HANEJI DAM KOINOBORI FESTIVAL

30 April - 01 May
Haneji Dam, Nago City, Okinawa
[Website](#)

HARU MATSURI DAI HANYA

30 April - 01 May
Waterfront Park, Kagoshima
[Website](#)

EBINO KYO-MACHI HOT SPRING MARATHON

15 May
Miyazaki
[Website](#)

KYUSHU CAMPING CAR SHOW

21-23 May
Grand Messe Kumamoto, Kumamoto
[Website](#)

IN THE NEWS

March - April

MARCH 28

Geriatric crime in Japan rises as many seniors have seen prison as a preferable situation to living in poverty. People over the age of 60 committed 35 percent of shoplifting offences, compared to 20.4 percent ten years ago. Re-offences committed by the elderly are also common, with around 40 percent of those convicted seen committing the same crime more than 6 more times. Under Japan's strict judiciary system, a conviction for petty theft can result in a 2-year prison sentence. To many elderly who live on as little as ¥60000 a month, the guaranteed meals, healthcare, and warmth of prison can seem like the best option. Experts say more must be invested into elderly care services in order to avoid a crisis as the those over 65 are expected to make up as much as 40 percent of Japan's population by 2060.

(Source)

MARCH 28

A Saitama girl kidnapped 2 years ago has been found in Tokyo, and a 23-year old man has been arrested for the crime. The girl, now 15, reports she had been held in suspect Kabu Terauchi's apartment since being abducted, with only infrequent visits outside under his strict supervision. She was able to escape after Terauchi forgot to lock the

door from the outside on his way to go shopping in Akihabara district. The girl escaped and used a payphone at a nearby train station to call home.

(Source)

APRIL 4

Japan's notorious work culture sees a new low with a record number of compensation claims due to death from overwork filed last year. Karoshi, as the phenomenon is called in Japanese, is categorized into two types: death from cardiovascular illness linked to fatigue, and suicide following job-related stress. Although labor demand in Japan is at an all-time high due to the shrinking labor force, many companies are responding by forcing more from current employees, especially new hires who are promised regular contracts after 6 months of extensive overtime. New mothers, feeling like they have few options after taking extensive leave from the work force, are also susceptible to such practices. Last year's claims rose to 1,456, though a member of an awareness group predicts the real number is much higher due to government reluctance to recognize the problem.

(Source)

APRIL 10

G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, U.K. and U.S.) foreign ministers gather in Hiroshima to discuss nuclear disarmament, maritime security, and terrorism issues. The two day meetings come with much fanfare as US representative John Kerry becomes the first US secretary of state to visit the city obliterated by America's atomic bomb 70 years prior. US public officials have in the past been reluctant to visit in fear of possible interpretations of it as an apology. However, many are hopeful Kerry's move will pave the way to a possible visit from President Barack Obama when he comes to Japan in late May for the G7 meeting to be held near Ise Shrine in Mie Prefecture.

(Source 1, 2)

Sterling Diesel

GOT AN EVENT TO PROMOTE? LET OUR EDITOR KNOW [HERE!](#)

ARTS & CULTURE

CULTURE EDITORS

connect.culture@ajet.net

Rayna Healy

Crossing items off the bucket list this month has taken me from the 8 hellish onsen of Kyushu to petting a meerkat dressed as Donald Duck in Tokyo. It's certainly going to be hard to say goodbye in August!

Joyce Wan

A rule for students and teachers: be happy whenever you can manage it. It's lighter than you think.

FASHION EDITORS

connect.fashion@ajet.net

Elena Galindo

Golden Week means golden opportunities. I'll be out, exploring. Catch me in Vietnam and Cambodia!

Erica Grainger

May means Golden Week and I'm off to Shimane and Yamaguchi, my mum's prefecture with Steph!

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

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Timothy Saar

A truck knocked a bunch of sakura petals down and they fell on me and it was like "woooah." Spring.

Sabrina Zirakzadeh

Beautiful days, chilly nights, and anxiously awaiting the holidays...yep, sounds like another lovely spring in Japan!

 Fiona Parker

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MORE THAN THE RUNWAY

PATRICK FINN (TOYAMA)
ELENA GALINDO (SHIZUOKA)
ERICA GRAINGER (FUKUSHIMA)
JAMIN LAU (SHIZUOKA)

**FASHION WEEK WAS
A 24-HOUR, 365 DAY AFFAIR**

When I go to fashion week and see a show, I am reminded of one of those flip books I had as a child. Flipping through the pages to see a short animation only takes but a few seconds, yet painstakingly hand-drawing each page must have taken a small eternity. My experiences at MBFW have helped me appreciate the relentless work and the countless hours that went into each and every single impossibly brief, 15-minute runway show.

The thing is that Fashion Week is actually made of 24-hour work days. It is 365 days a year. Models, artists, photographers, designers, producers and more hardly sleep a wink, as they run from runway, to showcase, to after party (yes—the after parties are work too!), in a mad, frenzied haste. The preparation that goes into the two, biannual fashion weeks takes up much of the remainder of the year for those involved. Fabric-buying, designing, advertising, sending out invitations, holding press and buyer showcases... The to-do list is so long it could take up the entire Vogue September issue!

Elena Galindo
Fashion Editor





**FASHION WEEK WAS
A WHIRLWIND WE
CONQUERED!**

I'm always dazzled and impressed by the grandeur of fashion week. This was my fourth time, and one learns to expect the unexpected. Each show is really unique and atmospheric, ranging from glamorous decadence to innovative and experimental. For instance, Tae Ashida at the Grand Hyatt Hotel to Yukihero Pro Wrestling at Tower Records Rooftop. My favorite show was Coohem, for its elegant Chanelesque quality. Behind the scenes, which involves rushing frantically from one show to the next, is also hectic. It's a whirlwind adventure!

One of the best things is catching up with my fellow chums from Connect: Patrick, Elena, and Jaz. Patrick always has witty insults up his sleeve. Elena's my co-editor and a fashion veteran, while Jaz is the practical one, who doesn't get overwhelmed by the fashion scene. Together, we made a great team and conquered Fashion Week!

Erica Grainger
Fashion Editor

FASHION WEEK WAS FRENZIED FUN

It was a really interesting experience as a photographer to attend. In a purely professional (or amateur) capacity, the models and how attractive they were meant very little to me apart from where they were placed, how the lighting looked, and where I could get the best angle. Meeting photographers from all over the world, and getting to grips with the etiquette was a proper treat—definitely a very different way of attending MBFW.

It would be nice to see a lot more local talent in terms of models (thumbs up to WHIZ LIMITED), but it was thought-provoking to see how designers showcased their talents—not just through clothing, but runway set-ups and the background music etc. While I would never wear a Christmas tree on my t-shirt or blow-up spider legs, it's amusing to try and figure out the rationale behind it. It was a great time with the Connect team—plenty of banter to keep up going between shows; 10/10 would go again.

Jasmin Lau
Social Media Editor



POU

LL

FASHION WEEK WAS CATCHING UP

Being the third time that I've been fortunate enough to go to Fashion Week Tokyo, I oddly look forward to catching up with my dear friend Erica, the 2015 spring/summer collections guilty of bringing us together.

I was fortunate enough to meet Jasmin for the first time too, who had to endure us arguing about the schedule, insulting a particular pair of three-coin glasses, and more. Thankfully, she dodged a bullet when Erica and I were chattering away like fools at the 5351 POUR LES HOMMES show, overly excited about our great seats, serving tea as guests walked on by.

Yes, I go for the fashion, but it's more fun to enjoy something you love with those that share similar interests. That's what you remember the most.

Patrick Finn
Head of Graphic Design and
Layout

 Erica Grainger, Jasmin Lau





ANIME MUSIC FROM AROUND THE WORLD

DIANA HERSTEIN (OHIO)

Diana Herstein was a featured guest performer at the first annual Haneda International Music Festival. After the second festival on March 12th-13th, 2016, she reflects on her experiences the previous year.

I have been working and attending anime conventions in the United States for over a decade, and attending an event in Japan was a long-standing dream of mine. As a professional singer, music has always been my favorite thing about anime culture, so when Detroit-based Youmacon, one of the most successful US anime conventions, asked me to compete to be involved in the Haneda International Anime Music Festival, I jumped at the chance.

The Haneda International Anime Music Festival, or HAF, is a three-day celebration of anime music and cultural exchange hosted by Gouma Studio and the Haneda International Airport. In March of 2015 I was lucky enough to be chosen to be a part of this incredible event. I submitted a few demo recordings of various anime songs, and I ultimately performed in cosplay at Youmacon for the final selections. I still remember the shock and excitement I felt when they told me that I had won the competition and would be flying to Japan to participate in HAF. I was honored to be selected, and I excitedly prepared to represent Youmacon at this new event.

Even my arrival at HAF exceeded my wildest expectations. The beautiful

architecture at Haneda International Airport and the recreated historic shopping area were a perfect backdrop for the many concerts and cosplayers. Being used to American conventions, which are primarily held in large hotels and convention centers, the atmosphere itself was something completely foreign to me. Most of the cosplay photoshoots and many of the smaller concerts were in public areas. It was shocking to me that so many people who were simply at the airport could just come and observe and appreciate the event. In the States, anime conventions and cosplay are still largely regarded as a private hobby, and events are usually very insular despite their size. The idea that the general population would be unfazed by such a themed event was novel to me. Cosplayers gathering in a place that was open to the general public and this being accepted as commonplace was incredible.

One of the greatest achievements and experiences about HAF for me was the coming together of so much talent from around the world. I met performers from conventions in Italy, France, Spain, Australia and the Philippines (to name a few), as well as many bands and performers from Japan. Everyone I met was full of talent and a love of anime music and what it brought to the world. Even in the short time we were together, I made true friends. Being surrounded by so many cultures and backgrounds all bound together by one common interest was one of the most

memorable experiences of my life. I attended dozens of concerts during HAF, and each one was a pleasure. The performances were engaging, the atmosphere was exciting, and the music was universal; I had little issue navigating the various performances or interacting with anyone I encountered, even with the language barriers. Fortunately, for my own concerts and interviews, I had a translator!

Performing at HAF could only be described as a dream come true for me. To be able to share my talent, performing music that I love, with an audience that shares my passion was nothing short of awe-inspiring. Having worked as a professional opera singer for much of my life, I am no stranger to performing. Even so, I was amazed by the experience I had here in Japan. The love and support I received from the crowds was humbling. Everyone was kind and enthusiastic, and I was inspired by everything that I experienced. The final concert by Loverin Tamburin culminating in a performance with all of the international performers gathered together for the Grande Finale is a memory I will cherish for the rest of my life.

I would recommend this event to anyone and everyone I know, regardless of language, origin or age. HAF truly represents the best of anime music and culture, and I hope that it will continue to grow and develop in the years to come. I am proud and honored to be a part of such an extraordinary event, and I pray that someday I will

return there again.

Diana Herstein is a professional musician and a long-time anime fan, ever since she was introduced to New Mobile Report Gundam Wing in 2000. She has been involved as a performer and a staff member at numerous anime conventions since 2004, though she has a particular fondness for Youmacon in her home state of Michigan. Currently, she teaches private music lessons in Columbus, Ohio.

 Diana Herstein

BRAVING 2016's SEA OF ANIME

CHEYENNE GERBER (MIE)

As a massive anime fan, cosplayer, and con-goer of 10 years, I finally made a pilgrimage to my first Japanese anime convention. Of course, I went to the most massive one of all: Anime Japan. Held on March 26th and March 27th at Tokyo Big Sight, Anime Japan 2016 was two massive days filled with announcements, promotions, amazing costumes, crowds of die-hard fans from all over the world, and exclusive first looks at all the big news in the otaku world.

The main halls were full of booths from famous publishers including Kadokawa, Bandai/Namco, Universal, Toei, and WB. Attendees got first dibs on news about upcoming new titles and continuations of old favorites.

COSPLAY CULTURE CLASH

Aside from the cool costumes and announcements, the most interesting aspect of attending Anime Japan was comparing conventions in Japan versus America. Anime

Japan was very commercial like Anime Expo, the largest anime convention in North America. However, even large industry conventions like Anime Expo have some community-run events, such as fan panels and maid cafes. These events were completely absent from Anime Japan. All events were focused on promoting the newest titles, and, instead of being in separate rooms at separate times, they were all in the same massive hall at one time.

In addition, in America you can attend and exit conventions in your cosplay for free. This is not the case in Japan! I was charged 1,000 yen per day to be my favorite characters and shoved in a dressing room full of other cosplaying females. Everybody was forced to put on all their costumes and makeup in a tiny space with no mirrors or counters. It was definitely a shock for me as I'm used to putting on my costume in the comfortable, convenient space of a hotel

and walking to the convention center in costume.

Although overwhelming at times, Anime Japan was more than just crowded halls of otaku-announcement heaven. It was a cross-cultural experience that united otaku from all over the world. Every year, Anime Japan will continue to inspire and bring the anime fandom together.

**FOLLOW ME
TO THE NEXT
PAGE!**

ANIME RECOMMENDATIONS

Cheyenne braved cramped cosplay changing rooms and squealing otaku at this year's Anime Japan to bring us the word on this season's most exciting prospects in anime! So instead of the normal Staff Picks this month, we've combined her picks with ours from this season and last. Let your heart dokidoki and get ready to binge watch *and* read!

D.GRAY-MAN HALLOW

ディー・グレイマン ハロー

July 2016

On hiatus since 2008, this classic is getting a continuation with a new cast of voice actors. The new series will continue right where the old one left off (1).

BERSERK

ベルセルク

July 2016

Originally airing from 1997 to 1998, this new adaptation of the cult classic will cover a never-before-seen "Black Swordsman" arc in its 24-episode run (2).

DANGANRONPA 3: THE END OF HOPE'S PEAK ACADEMY

ダンガンロンパ3 -The End of 希望ヶ峰学園 ("Danganronpa 3: The End of Kibōgamine Gakuen")

July 2016

Serving as a conclusion to the Hope's Peak Academy storyline of the popular video game franchise, *Danganronpa 3* will be split into two separate stories chronicling events before and after the deadly survival game (3).

SAILOR MOON CRYSTAL: DEATH BUSTERS

美少女戦士セーラームーンクリスタル - デスバスターズ

April 2016

After some staff and animation changes, *Sailor Moon Crystal* returns with the much-anticipated adaptation of the manga's Infinity arc and introductions of Sailor Uranus, Sailor Neptune, and Sailor Saturn. New episodes began April 4th.

NEW GAME

ニューゲーム

July 2016

A manga-turned-anime about a high school gamer girl that joins her favorite game company as a developer. The serialized manga written by Shotaro Tokuno began in 2013 and is continuing today.

DRIFTERS

ドリフターズ

Summer 2016

Kouta Hirano's (*Hellsing*) highly anticipated new series, which takes place in an alternate universe Japan during the Battle of Sekigahara where humans must fight among fantastical creatures such as elves, dwarves, and hobbits.

HUNDRED

ハンドレッド

April 2016

Hundred is the only machine that can save the world and pilot Hayato Kisaragi must learn to wield it. Based on Jun Misaki's light-novel of the same name, the series premiered April 5th.

ERASED

僕だけがいない街

Boku Dake ga Inai Machi (lit. The Town Where Only I am Missing)

I can't say enough about Erased. A murder mystery with a completely unique premise, it's an absolutely thrilling ride and every episode left me with my heart in my mouth. I won't say more—it's best if you go in knowing as little as the protagonist!

Timothy Saar

Entertainment Editor

CARDCAPTOR SAKURA

カードキャプターさくら

A classic magical girl favorite, the authors just announced we will be getting a new manga in one or two years! What better time to remind yourself with this sweet,

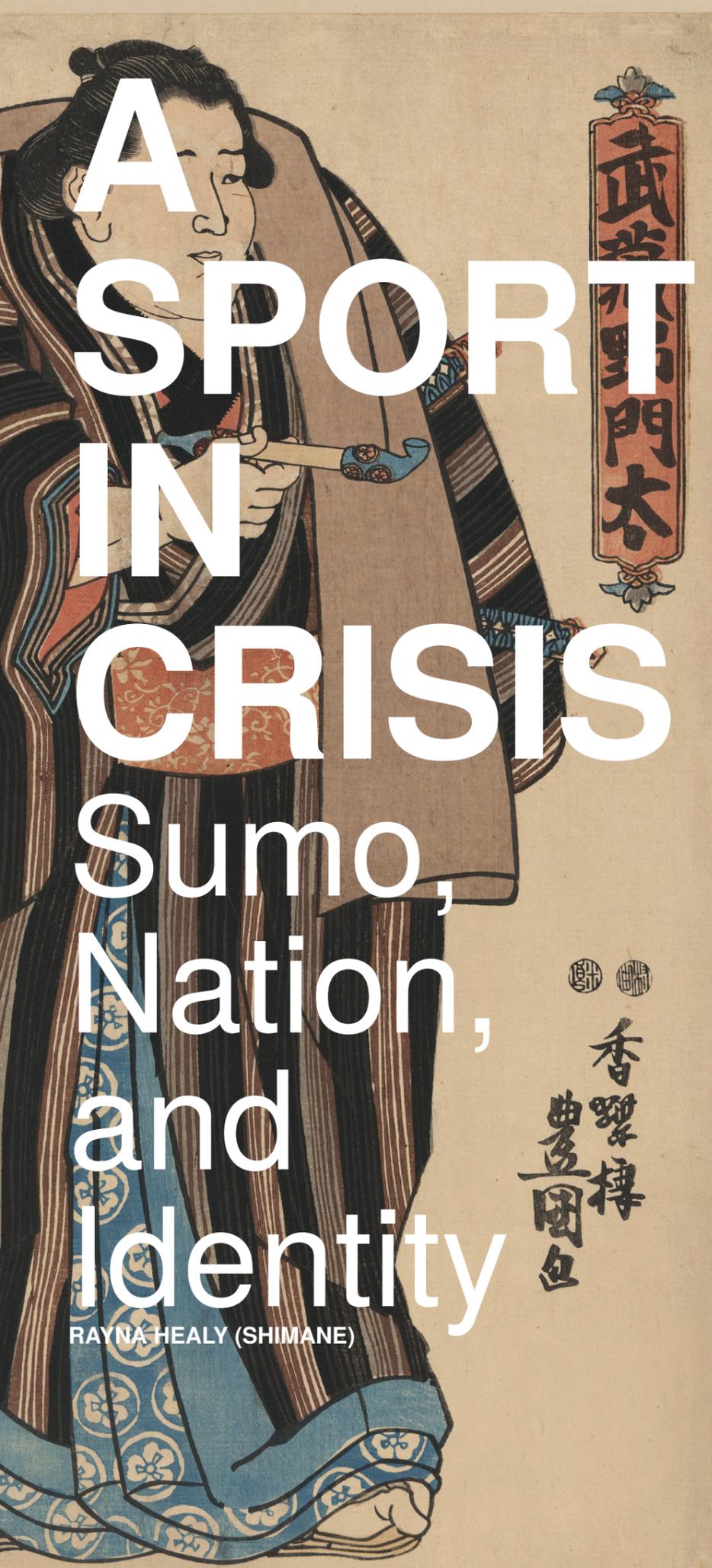
beautifully-drawn manga about an elementary school girl tasked with finding missing magical cards and learning about her own powers along the way?

Sabrina Zirakzadeh
Entertainment Editor

Cheyenne is a first-year JET in Mie Prefecture. When not traveling or watching new anime, she is cosplaying as her favorite characters. You can follow her on [Instagram](#) or her cosplay profile on [Facebook](#).

SOURCES

- (1) [Katsura Hoshino: New D.Gray-man Anime's Story is 'Continuation'](#)
- (2) [Staff and Cast Listed for Summer Berserk TV Anime](#)
- (3) [Gematsu / New Danganronpa V3 has Scrum and Panic Debates](#)



A SPORT IN CRISIS Sumo, Nation, and Identity

RAYNA HEALY (SHIMANE)

If there's anything I found out this *Haru-Yasumi* (Japan's Spring Break), it's that there is such a thing as sitting too close to a sumo *rikishi* (wrestler). But even from such a dreadfully close vantage point, I couldn't tear my eyes away from the mountainous *rikishi*, who weigh in at about the same poundage as a giant panda (1). I seemed to fit in nicely at the Spring Grand Tournament with the two overwhelmingly present demographics: stoic old men and wide-eyed foreigners. This sumo trip was made in order to cross an item off my Japanese bucket list. I didn't necessarily go out of interest in the sport which, as one reporter summed up, upon first glance seemed as simple as "crouch, glare, shove, and repeat" (1). But what I found around me was neither simple nor cliché. I found myself peering into the complexity of a scandal-studded sport. Today, sumo mixes complex ancient ritual with modern challenges that threaten to hinder the future of the centuries-old tradition.

HISTORY AND RITUAL

Sumo dates back 1,500 years and is "steeped in Shinto ritual" (7). The bulk of the match is spent performing rituals that purify the wrestlers' minds and spirits. The *rikishi* clap to ensure their heavenly audience is watching before powerfully stomping to drive evil spirits away from the *dohyo* (ring). After a bit of intimidation and glaring, the *rikishi* synchronize their breathing, put their fists on the ground, and fight for about ten seconds. The fight is over

Strong wrestlers, with a lull in interest in Japan, may need to come from abroad to keep the sport alive...[they] are the only ones who can determine the future of sumo...

when one of the *rikishi* is either pushed out of the *dohyo*, or a part of his body, besides the bottom of his feet, has touched the ground.

There are six Grand Tournaments a year, and the *rikishi* train tirelessly to take home the prize: the Emperor's Cup. There is a hierarchy in sumo that is determined by each *rikishi*'s performance at these Grand Tournaments. Because their performance determines their paycheck, the stakes of these matches are quite high. The very top tier of sumo is the *yokozuna* rank. It was created in 1749 and has only been bestowed on 71 *rikishi* to date (2).

SUMO RIKISHI TODAY

Today, sumo struggles to attract Japanese *rikishi* because it is largely seen as old-fashioned in Japan. In its heyday, sumo pulled boys from large rural families, who were used to a tough lifestyle and needed money and a chance to make something of themselves. Now, however, there are a plethora of other career options that are much cushier than sumo, because, quite honestly, sumo is not

just a career, or even a sport: it's a lifestyle (2). Most boys join sumo at age 16. They then move into sumo stables and begin a schedule of waking up before dawn and getting pummeled before breakfast. *Rikishi* sign up for a life of grueling discipline and dedication in a traditionalist sport that doesn't allow for creativity and individuality (2). For many, this is not as appealing as joining a baseball team.

Now, many foreign *rikishi* have entered the ring to the dismay of some traditionalist fans. In the 1980s there was an influx of wrestlers from Hawaii, Mongolia, and Samoa. These countries all boast strong wrestling traditions of their own (2). However, there is no money to be made in those sports. The wrestlers who join sumo from abroad are often the rural boys of sumo's past—*rikishi* looking to make money and support their families.

These foreigners have certainly made a name for themselves. Currently there are three *yokozuna* level wrestlers in Japan:

Hakuho, Harumafuji, and Kakuryu. All three men are Mongolian. There hasn't been a Japanese *yokozuna* in over a decade. In 2013, of the 42 highest level *rikishi*, one third were foreigners. Which is especially startling because only seven percent of the wrestlers that year were non-Japanese (4). Foreigners have dominated sumo in the past decade, causing a bleak outlook for Japanese *rikishi* hoping to leave their mark on their own national sport.

One foreign sumo wrestler in particular put a bad taste in Japan's mouth. The wrestler was sumo's bad boy, Asashoryo. He was an incredible *yokozuna* and became the only wrestler to win all six Grand Tournaments in one year (2). He was unstoppable in the ring and his behavior outside of it added fuel to the fire of national dislike of foreign sumo wrestlers. Asashoryo lacked *hinkaku*, a word meaning grace, dignity, or quality of character (2). *Hinkaku* is a prerequisite for becoming a celebrated *yokozuna*. He was forced to retire after a drunken brawl

in a restaurant. A *rikishi* should be emotionless in both victory and defeat, and punching a waiter was not a refined way for a *yokozuna* to solve a problem (2).

CONNECTING SUMO'S LONG HISTORY WITH A VIABLE FUTURE

Sumo is a sport unique among sports in its ability to remain untouched for hundreds of years. So are the problems it's facing today threatening to end its historic reign? Like Japan as a whole, sumo is facing an identity crisis (2). Its very Japan-ness is being tugged at. How much can a sport that has a history of staying true to its ritual afford to change?

Today, the top *yokozuna*, and one of the best *rikishi* in history, is the Mongolian Hakuho. He is practically unstoppable and boasts the

to face an opponent straight on. This wouldn't have been a big deal for a younger wrestler. But for a *yokozuna* fighting another *yokozuna* for a Grand Tournament title, the *henka* incited boos from the sold-out crowd (5). He apologized during the post match interview, but most of the fans had already left the arena.

"Winning a Championship has seemed far away over these last eight months," said Hakuho, who took long pauses before answering as he struggled to hold back tears. "... I never planned to win on the final day with a henka and I feel really bad about that" (5).

The sidestep is an example of the impact that foreign wrestlers have had on sumo. They have introduced more technical moves to the sport. Now the match

(1). As the only sport of this nature, "history in motion" is a valuable asset worth preserving.

This past New Year's tournament was exciting for traditionalist sumo fans. A Japanese wrestler, Kotoshogiku, won the Emperor's Cup for the first time in a decade (6). Fans of the sport hoped that this victory would mark a new era for sumo (6). Perhaps a future where Japanese people could imagine themselves holding the Emperor's Cup would compel a domestic revival in the ancient sport.

With that in mind, Hakuho's dishonorable victory at the Spring Tournament was a step backwards. Now the country waits in limbo to see the future of sumo. Looking forward, Hakuho, who despite his dishonorable victory is still arguably the most

sport that is both grittily raw and spiritually refined. These wrestlers are the only ones who can determine the future of sumo, and that future can't materialize with a lone Japanese wrestler. He'll need a rival in the ring with him.

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 Wikicommons

...[sumo is] a lifestyle (2)...a life of grueling discipline and dedication...

most Grand Tournament wins under his *mawashi* (sumo belt) in the history of sumo. He won his 36th title this March at the Spring Tournament while I was wide-eyed in the bleachers (5). He used a *henka* sidestep to beat out his opponent, a fellow *yokozuna* (5). Unfortunately for Hakuho, the sidestep is considered dishonorable in Japan, where the only honorable move is

is not just about brute force against brute force, but also about strategy. For some, these moves are seen as advancement for the sport. For others, it is worrisome because change poses a threat to the rigid traditions of sumo. "... modern sumo hasn't changed much since the original *Edo* Period, and to watch a sumo match today is to watch centuries of Japanese history in motion"

successful *yokozuna rikishi* ever, makes an important point: "Sumo is impossible with just one person. Strong wrestlers and rivals make it what it is." (3).

Strong wrestlers, with a lull in interest in Japan, may need to come from abroad to keep the sport alive. These wrestlers should ideally embody the sacredness and profundity of a sport that's centuries old; a



LIFESTYLE

FOOD EDITORS

connect.food@ajet.net

Alexandra Brueckner

No sakura for me...I'm trading hanami for New Zealand lakes and mountains. And I'm totally cool with that.

Mira Richard-Fioramore

Looking forward to a hot summer and all of the upcoming natsu matsuri where i'll be eating my heart out!

TRAVEL EDITORS

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Leah Gray

I'm staying busy with the start of a new school year, but I'll get some time off when I visit Taiwan during Golden Week!

Pia Peterson

May every day of your life be a wondrously fantabulous adventure!

 Illaura Rossiter

LIFESTYLE

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HONG KONG KONG BYWAY OF SUGAR

PATRICK FINN (TOYAMA)

“What do you want to do when you’re here?” my friend foolishly asked.

“Eat.”

When traveling, there are those that try to cram in every site and experience they possibly can, never taking a break, and those that wander, aimlessly eating their way from spot to spot.

I’m the latter.

Having just come back for my third trip (in three years) to Hong Kong, a city notorious for its delicious, cheap food, that’s exactly what I did. Actually, that’s how most trips are for me.

A little past 1 a.m. on a Saturday morning, I slowly made my way through customs, hopped on a bus to my friend’s place in Wan Chai, arriving around 3 a.m. Catching up as we always do, I collapsed on his guest bed, waking hours later, hungry.

My friend whisked me off to a vegetarian restaurant called Tung Fong Siu Kee Yuen for a late breakfast-lunch hybrid (no, not brunch) where we were presented with a platter of various tofu, from sweet, to spicy, to fried, to melt-in-your-mouth. However, the star was a faux fish made of tofu wrapped in a seaweed skin, pea eye included, swimming in a pond of tangy sauce. Even our French companion was impressed.

Now, I’ll warn you, from here on we’re mostly talking about desserts because I have a constant lust for sugar. Real food was eaten, but does anyone care about a fancy

feta omelette served with a green salad? No, they don’t.

The first victim in my dessert crime spree was an innocent warm molecular coffee drop with caramel pudding and coconut pudding (yes, that was its official name) at 甜入心 Heart’s Desserts. The pudding, similar to the *purin* found in Japan, bobbed amongst the coffee jelly in a sea of coconut milk. It didn’t last more than five minutes, as I found myself scraping the fleshy innards of the coconut with my spoon, consuming every last piece.

Next was yogurt ice cream with honey in a “mystery” cup from Alice Wild Luscious, located in PMQ. The ice cream was a well-balanced blend of tangy yogurt and sweet cream, but the real star was the “mystery” cup.

“What is this ‘mystery’ cup,” you might be asking? Well, we had no idea and apparently neither did the cashier. She had to ask her co-worker who simply responded with “dry ice”. Now did this do anything to the actual ice cream? Not at all. However, it looked like some sort of wizardry and that’s all I wanted for 10 extra dollars.

Embarrassing side-note: We neglected to notice the “mystery” cup was advertised in front of the shop on a giant poster...

“Hey, there’s a new branch of a famous dessert place that opened nearby. Should we go?” asked my friend as I signified “YES” by beginning to walk out the door in pursuit of sweets.

stomachs
winners
coffee
company





The scene, Cong Sao Star Dessert. The target, durian with ice cream and black glutinous rice. The staff, rude. Us, afraid of being equally so to gain her attention and place our order without having it spat in.

Thankfully we got our food (spit-free). Durian has a bad reputation, but don't knock it until you've tried it. The creamy, pungent fruit was complemented by the sweet vanilla ice cream. The black glutinous rice, flavored with a touch of sugar, provided additional texture, keeping the dish from becoming too soupy.

Before my trip, I met up with Jaz, one half of our stellar social media team, who recommended the matcha egg tart from Winstons Coffee. Never one to pass up a sweet suggestion, the cramped, yet cozy establishment was soon in our sight.

Richly colored matcha egg tarts were stacked on the counter and soon made their way into my mouth. Having lived in Japan for nearly five years, you know when something is made with 100 yen shop matcha powder and when it's the stuff they sell in Kyoto. This was Kyoto-quality matcha. The bitter tea was offset by the creamy egg-based filling, melting in your mouth, keeping the outer pastry moist enough to enjoy.

Personally, I would have liked it a bit saltier, but I'm American and we must have everything in excess. Including our seasonings.

During some dessert

downtime, between which I discovered my love for Toblerones, we made our way up the Central-Mid-Levels escalators to a Korean-fusion bar called Edition. Being not much of a drinker, I quickly turned to the food menu and knew that the kimchi French fries would be in my future.

Even after a heavy lunch at The Red Pepper (highly recommended if you like spicy food), my stomach demanded more. Taking my fork, as a classy individual like myself does, I shoveled fry after fry, covered in kimchi-cheese goodness, into my mouth.

"Ugh, I don't feel good," I moaned.

"Should we go to Honeymoon?"

"YES!"

The final casualty was a double durian dessert in a coconut sauce with strawberries. When I ordered it, even the woman behind the register double checked to make sure it was what I wanted. Before handing it to me, she took a wiff of it and snickered.

My friends held their noses in disgust, as the smell was rather pungent (durian smells and tastes like dirty socks to most, so naturally I love it), while I inhaled my final victim. The sweet, creamy coconut and gooey durian swirled around my mouth. The tart strawberries fighting off the sugar overload.

If you haven't traveled by way of food, I highly recommend it—even if it's to a nearby town that you don't visit often. Walk. Explore. Eat. As

someone who finds booking a flight to Taiwan two months in advance spontaneous, this is how I step away from my obsessive organization and unwind.

📷 Patrick Finn

JAPANESE BRAISED PORK BELLY



豚の角煮

MIRA RICHARD-FIORAMORE (SAITAMA)

 Mira Richard-Fioramore

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4

- 800g pork belly (not cut)
- 1 ginger root
- 1 long green onion (*naganegi*)
- 6 sheets *konbu*
- 5 tbsp soy sauce
- 3 tbsp brown sugar

STEPS

1. Cut your pork belly into 16 chunks. Slice your ginger into thick slices and cut the *naganegi* into 3 long pieces.
2. Add the pork belly to a large frypan and fry on all sides until golden crispy. This helps the pork keep its shape when we will boil it.
3. In your pressure cooker, add the pork belly and cover with water. Add half of the ginger, *konbu*, and *naganegi*. When the water is boiling, close your pressure cooker. Cook for 40 minutes. If you don't have a pressure cooker, boil it in a pot of water for 3 hours. Don't forget to keep on adding water as it will evaporate.
4. Meanwhile, boil some water in a pot.
5. Cut the stems off the spinach and green beans. Slice the spinach into 2-3 pieces depending on their length. Slice the green onions and place aside.
6. Boil the spinach. Once blanched, put aside.
7. Boil the beans 3-4 minutes. Put aside.
8. Boil the eggs for 8 minutes. Peel them and put aside.

- 2 tbsp mirin
- 4 eggs
- 40 green beans
- 300g spinach
- ½ cup sake
- 3 tbsp honey
- 3 stalks green onion
- 1 tbsp Japanese mustard

9. After 40 minutes of cooking time, turn off the gas to allow the pressure cooker to open.
10. While the pressure is being released, place 1.5 cups of water into a large pot/wok with the rest of the ginger, *kombu*, and *naganegi*. Bring to the boil.
11. When the pressure cooker opens, carefully remove the pork belly chunks and transfer them to the boiling pot/wok. Cover with the sake and let the alcohol evaporate on high heat for 5 minutes.
12. Add the soy sauce, brown sugar, honey, and mirin. Cook for another 8 minutes while spooning the liquid over the pork to give it colour and flavour.
13. Add the eggs and beans into the broth with the pork to also give it colour and flavour. Turn off the heat once the liquid has considerably simmered down.
14. Slice your eggs in half.
15. Place your blanched spinach on a plate. Place the pork belly over. Add the eggs and green beans. Pour some of the sauce over. Cover with green onions and squirt some *karashi* on the side.



COMFORT FOOD OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

SAMANTHA MARTIN (AOMORI)

Sometimes we mess up a recipe, and it gives us a story. It's an opportunity to come together and produce something...

Like so many other bright-eyed, bushy-tailed newbies, I came to Japan with a “try anything once” kind of attitude. One of the things that helped keep this positive attitude of “I’m gonna smash it!” was definitely the system in place in Aomori where we get Big Siblings to help show us around our placements. I was lucky enough to not only have a Big Sister in Mutsu, but also have Amy, a former JET who was privately contracted by our city, to round us all up for local events.

The main get-together these two beauties took Newbie-Sam to each month was a cooking class. Everyone is welcome, and we know the recipes a couple weeks beforehand just to make us even more eager to eat. We can even submit our own recipes! Usually they’re themed, catered either to the weather, what we’re craving in particular, or a holiday coming up. For Halloween, we made meatloaf “rats”, banana “ghosts”, and *mikan* “pumpkins”.

The novelty of the class is twofold. First, the chance to make a recipe in both English and Japanese is invaluable, especially for new JETs who

may or may not have been left with lots of cooking appliances. Maybe they’ve seen some recipes they want to try, but they haven’t been

while cooking. Sometimes we mess up a recipe, and it gives us a story. It’s an opportunity to come together and produce something: a warm meal to

I probably wouldn’t have gone as long as I did if it were only Japanese foods, to be honest.

brave enough to yet. Or maybe they’re lazy and just want a chance to cook with someone because they get bored doing it by themselves. (Hint: that was me, big time.)

The second reason to go to a class like this is because it gives you a good sense of community. Amy and I participate in tea ceremonies together, along with a couple of other women from this class, and we got a chance to talk over dinner. I’ve met ALTs not just through JET but also through Interac and the International School in a city about two hours south

then be shared over warm conversation.

Originally, when I first started going to cooking class, I kind of expected it to be a class to teach me how to cook Japanese foods while living in Japan. And in a way it was, but after going a couple of times it became something so much more than that. Sure, sometimes we had interesting dressings or sauces that we might not use in America for the same dish—but most of the class was filled with Japanese people, and they wanted to learn more about us through

our own recipes. This then gave us—as foreigners—an excuse to try to emulate the foods we were missing in Japan.

You bet your bottom dollar I requested biscuits and gravy once homesickness started kicking in. In essence, it was less of a cooking class and more of a “feel more at home” class. I probably wouldn’t have gone as long as I did if it were only Japanese foods, to be honest. I loved that I felt included, like my city was welcoming me by listening to what food I was craving and then *appreciating* the food. It made me feel like they knew where I was coming from, craving the creamy saltiness of sawmill gravy afterwards. It gave us a foothold in multicultural cuisine from then on for future conversation.

I’d highly encourage ALTs to not only search for local cooking classes, but lead them as well. I’ve submitted recipes before from my state or my family that speak volumes to who I am, probably more than me speaking could convey. Cultural exchange doesn’t have to be just in the classroom; it can (and in my opinion, should) be in the kitchen as well!

Samantha Martin likes corgis more than she should, and literally only seeing one pass by on the street will cause her to make the most ungodly sounds of happiness you’ve ever heard. She sometimes writes blog posts on JET-related (and unrelated) subjects [here](#).

 Samantha Martin



Since moving to Japan almost eight months ago, it’s safe to say I’ve had my fair share of ramen. I’ve savoured the wholesome pork broth of Hakata ramen, been delighted by the buttery warmth of sweetcorn-packed Hokkaido ramen, and waxed lyrical over some particularly tasty ramen near Nishi-Kawaguchi station on my way home from work. I’m an equal opportunities ramen appreciator. However, today I want to tell you about the most exalted chapter in my ramen adventures thus far: my trip to Tsuta in Sugamo for Michelin-starred ramen.

First, a warning. If you too want to eat the fanciest of ramen, a fair level of effort will be required. On the day you want to make your ramen dreams come true, you will have to head to Tsuta at around 7:30 a.m. to collect a ticket. This magical ticket will display the time at which you can return and eat like ramen royalty.

I must admit I was dubious that any ramen was worth an early morning on a weekend, as I’m a big fan of sleeping. However, I’m glad my ramen-obsessed companion convinced me otherwise, because it definitely was worthwhile. I promise. When you return at the time on your ticket, you will still have to queue for a little while as the seating area is very small, but again, it is definitely worth it.

Now to the ramen itself. As I said before, I have eaten a lot of ramen, but the ramen at Tsuta is something else. It is light and refreshing, whilst somehow managing to be tasty and satisfying at the same time. The egg was cooked to perfection. The noodles were substantial but not too heavy. The flavour of the broth was perfectly balanced, especially with the addition of truffles. The pork melted in my mouth.

All in all, the best way to describe

Tsuta ramen is as the ramen of your dreams, assuming that you dream about ramen. If you don’t, maybe this is because you haven’t been to Tsuta yet. You should definitely rectify this.

What’s more, it will cost considerably less than you might think to indulge yourself with a Michelin-starred meal. A hearty bowl of ramen, with pork, egg and vegetables, came to around 1200 yen, which I would say is an absolute bargain. Go forth, and enjoy the delicious miracle that is Tsuta ramen.

Location

11 a.m. – 4 p.m., closed Wed.

Nearest Station: Sugamo on the JR Yamanote Line

Rhian is a history nerd masquerading as an English teacher, who can generally be found being over-excited.

 Sam Fox



RAMEN DREAMS COME TRUE IN SUGAMO

RHIAN MCLAUGHLIN (TOKYO)

SUMO IN FUKUOKA



LEAH GRAY (HIROSHIMA)

Ever since I was a child, I had heard about sumo and seen pictures of the wrestlers from one of Japan's most famous sports. However, I never would have thought I would actually get to see a sumo tournament in person. My opportunity came last year. Every November, there is a sumo tournament at the Fukuoka Kokusai Center in Fukuoka City. Hiroshima AJET organized a trip to Fukuoka, which included attending the tournament.

During my time in Japan, I want to see as much I can of Japanese culture, both traditional and modern, so naturally I jumped at the chance to go.

SUMO RULES

Sumo has an elaborate system of rituals, but the rules themselves are relatively straightforward. The first person to leave the ring or to touch the ground with a part of his body besides the soles of his feet loses and the match ends. Matches take place on an elevated ring known as a

“dohyō”. As “there are no weight restrictions or classes... wrestlers can easily find themselves matched off against someone many times their size”. This means “weight gain is an essential part of sumo training” (1).

SUMO WATCHING

The sumo matches were planned for the entire day, but our resident sumo expert Emily suggested that we go in the afternoon for the best matches. Our seats were reserved, so we were able to come whenever we wanted to. We had fairly basic stadium-

style seats in the nosebleed section of the arena, but the view of the ring was still good. The section in front of ours had mats for people to sit on and room to stretch out. Food and drinks were allowed inside the venue, so everyone was snacking throughout the matches.

One of the first things I noticed was that the preparation actually took longer than the matches themselves. Before the matches even began, the wrestlers circled around the ring so that everyone could get a good look at them. Then, before each match, the wrestlers grabbed handfuls of salt to toss around the ring, which is an ancient Shinto purification ritual that has carried over into modern times (1). They also carefully stretched beforehand. The excitement of the matches more than made up for the time we spent waiting. While we waited, my fellow JETs took to guessing who would win, and it was fun to see whose predictions came true most often.

Some matches were over within seconds. The more entertaining matches lasted nearly a minute as the crowd enthusiastically cheered for their favorite wrestlers. My favorite match was one of the longer ones. Usually, it's easy to tell who is going to win soon after the match starts. As most matches end quickly, it doesn't take long to figure out who has the advantage. This match was different though; the opponents seemed evenly matched. One moment it seemed like one of them had the upper hand; the next, the other did. As the

match continued well past the average time, the excitement in the air became palpable. People cheered and shouted, reacting to every shift of weight, every slip of the foot. Finally, the winner managed to knock his opponent off his feet, and the crowd went wild! It was a match to remember.

AFTER THE TOURNAMENT

Even if you have only a passing interest in sumo, I would highly recommend going to a tournament if you get the chance! They are held every year in Tokyo (in January, May, and September); Osaka (in March); Nagoya (in July); and, of course, Fukuoka (in November) (1).

Make sure to take in the local food culture while you're at it! For us, no visit to Fukuoka is complete without eating *Hakata*-style ramen, with its distinctive thin noodles and pork-bone broth. Fukuoka is also famous for outdoor food stalls, or *yatai*.

Japan Guide's website has an excellent guide to getting sumo tickets. For more information, please visit their [website](#).

SOURCES

(1) [Sumo](#)

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Cameron Joe

*New teachers, new students, new projects!
Starting the new year and ending the JET
year at full speed! Ganbare!*

 *Illaura Rossiter*

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IDENTITY AND CONNECTION

A Meditation on Community Building in the Countryside

CAMERON KOICHI JOE (CHIBA)

One of the most fundamental human qualities about us as a species is the desire for connection. Whether that takes the form of shared interests, hobbies, identities, or values, we seek out others because we find ourselves reflected within them. When we think about identity (in the West), we often think about the self in isolation, as an entity that is independent and that stands on its own—I am young, I am American, I am male, etc. However, I think identity and identity formation are anything but solitary things/processes: we build our identities and our sense of self collectively, negotiating the boundaries of who we are in relationship to those around us.

For example, for many of us working abroad in Japan, our identity as foreign, immigrant, and expat is a new one, one that is often thrust upon us by Japanese people. Discovering and negotiating this (new) identity with and through the people around us is a large component of culture shock—how we reconcile and recalibrate our identities to adapt to Japanese life. Through this disorientation, I believe we are hyper-aware of the ways we connect (or don't) with the people around us who may or may not share the same identities. We learn how to “be,” how to “become” ourselves in a new place by finding and building connections with others—despite our differences.

We see this desire for connection in the small pockets of foreign communities that band together and in all the ways we try to integrate—

We learn how to “be,” how to “become” ourselves in a new place by finding and building connections with others—despite our differences.

however successfully—into our work places. We see this desire for connection when we encourage our Japanese students/co-workers to explore the world like we have and when we find the foods that remind us of home—which we inevitably share with everyone around us. We seek to be understood, to be recognized, to be seen, as a way to actualize our identities and our sense of self. Connection and identity, it seems, are inseparably linked together in a delicate dance, one that we've learned about growing up; and one that we continue to learn about as we navigate the cultural landscape of Japan.

But what happens when an identity or community you held central to yourself back home doesn't translate or exist in the same capacity in Japan? What changes: the ways you connect with others or the identities that you hold close to your heart?

I grew up in the suburbs of San Francisco, Calif., a queer, Japanese-Chinese American

with a liberal upbringing and a family that loved me unconditionally. After coming out at the age of 15 to love and support from those around me, I grew into my queer identity—quickly finding community, safe spaces for me to explore my gender/sexuality, and mentors who guided me along my own path of self-discovery. My queerness was an identity that I held primary, a lens that I saw the world through, something that felt important and essential to my being.

A decade later at the age of 25, I've been living in the Japanese countryside of Chiba for the last four years. My (Japanese) friends know me here as an educator, a dancer, a poet, and a writer, but not as a queer person. I'm not “out” about my queer identity to most of my Japanese friends, and the closest friend on the LGBT spectrum is a two-hour train ride away in Tokyo.

The shift in what my communities and networks of support look like in America

and Japan has been a long, complex process. Geography and proximity play a large role in how we find others with similar interests, and how much contact we have with them. There is not a large and visible LGBT community in my small countryside town, and so I was forced to adapt—like we all must—as a part of moving abroad.

Given the conditions of the conservative environment in the countryside, paired with a foreign culture that I cannot claim to ever fully understand, I felt as though coming out about my queerness served no real purpose other than to fulfill a selfish desire to “declare” myself for others to know. In other words, it seemed to me that coming out—sitting someone down and “revealing” that I prefer to date people of the same gender as me—wasn’t appropriate or relevant, especially with coworkers and my students. Although the politics of coming out in Japan is a larger conversation beyond the scope of this piece, my own choice to remain quiet about a large part of my American identity has sparked a meditation on the ways the human spirit is able to adapt—by necessity—to conditions previously unimaginable.

It wasn’t easy. I struggled terribly. To cope, during my first two years on JET, I lived a double life: I visited Tokyo every weekend to see friends and hang out with other queer people, and on the weekdays I went to work and spent time with other English teachers. This splitting of myself was not

sustainable; I spread myself too thin and often felt burned out. Although I did find people I genuinely connected with in Tokyo, distance (like I’m sure many of us know) made maintaining these relationships increasingly difficult. Camaraderie with other LGBT people was my go-to in America, something I was surrounded by daily. But in the countryside of Japan, I needed to learn how to be and exist without them.

It took me many years to realize that this process of compartmentalization, this fragmentation of myself into different communities occupying various geographical spaces (America, Tokyo, the countryside), was a survival tactic, a coping mechanism, and a way to feel connected: to feel whole.

In my countryside town, I reconnected with my love of dance and music, joining a team of *obachans* who danced in local festivals and competitions. I met a few people who shared a love for philosophy and anthropology who planned international BBQs and events in my town. I became friends with an artist who owns a beachside café that reminds me of the Californian shores I grew up on. Although my queer identity still remains incredibly important to me, it was not a foundation for any of these relationships in my local community. These relationships have taught me—and continue to teach me—about other aspects of myself that are just as important as my queerness:

the essentialness of art, how highly I value cultural exchange, dance as a form of self-expression, and my connection to my Japanese heritage.

Contrary to what I strongly believed in America, you don’t have to reveal everything about yourself to everyone you meet. You don’t have to show everyone what you bring to the table, all of the knowledge and experience you’ve accumulated over the years. I’ve discovered that sometimes, speaking the same language is enough to connect—even if we come from the opposite ends of the globe. I’ve found that with some people, my queerness simply isn’t relevant, isn’t common ground to build a relationship from—just like my experience in Japan will most likely be irrelevant to people back home.

This August I’ll be boarding a plane back to San Francisco with some new identities in tow—*yosakoi* dancer, an expat lost in the *inaka*, and someone who has proudly established ties with their Japanese ancestry. Maybe it will take time to fall back into an American identity that my friends and loved ones remember me for. And maybe these new lenses to look at the world with will connect me to entirely new communities of people back home. No matter how we build it, ultimately it is the community of people that shape how we see ourselves, and how we leave our imprint upon the world.

 Pixabay



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people that shape how we see
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imprint upon the world.

THE IRONMAN

GREG HOWES (KUMAMOTO)

For anyone who isn't sure, a triathlon involves three sporting disciplines: swimming, cycling, and running. Although there are a few exceptions, the aim is to complete them all in the shortest time possible. That time includes the time to make the transitions between the swim and the bike, and between the bike and the run, known as T1 and T2 respectively.

Although modern triathlon developed in the United States in the mid-1970s, there are reports of similar events taking place in France in the early 1900s. Probably the most famous of all triathlon races, and the race which now hosts the amateur and professional world championship race, is Ironman Hawaii. *The race came about as a result of a disagreement over which athletes were the fittest: swimmers, cyclists, or runners. What better way to settle the matter than to combine three existing long-distance events into one grueling ultra-distance event?* Of the 15 men who started the race, only 12 finished. This laid the foundations for the race that became the ultimate goal for many triathletes, including myself.

Triathlon, however, comes in many forms. I've been a runner all of my adult life and continued to run as competitively as I could when I moved to Japan in 2005. My first taste of triathlon was when I entered the Amakusa Triathlon in Kumamoto Prefecture in 2009. The Amakusa triathlon was the first Olympic distance (1.5k

swim, 40k bike, 10k run) race to take place in Japan. Although I remember taking swimming lessons at school, they were focused more on survival skills and swimming continuous breaststroke for tediously long periods of time. Unless the triathlon swim required me to pick up a brick from the seabed while wearing pyjamas, there was no way I could attempt the race solo. Consequently, I entered the team event with a few good friends, with a borrowed bike for the cyclist and, quite possibly, borrowed speedos for our swimmer. As soon as we'd finished the race (in a fairly creditable ninth place) I knew I was hooked.

After spending a year battling in the pool learning how to swim in a passable fashion, I entered the same race again in 2010. The 2010 race was notable for the 1.5 metre waves that buffeted the swimmers. More adept swimmers than me might complain that the swell interrupted their rhythm, but having very little concept of the idea of maintaining a rhythm when swimming I simply tried to enjoy the sensation. Having survived the swim, I quickly realised that running fitness doesn't count for very much when it comes to cycling and spent most of the bike leg being passed by even slower swimmers than myself. Although I generally dislike being passed in races, it at least made me smile (inwardly—it's all about the game-face in races) to know that I wasn't the worst swimmer in the race. I finished my first real triathlon in 81st place out of 502 finishers, which

...the mental element is just as important as the physical.

although much lower down the rankings than I'd grown accustomed to in running, it wasn't a total disaster.

I did the Amakusa Triathlon every year subsequently, with my best result being in 2013 when I finished in eighth place overall and second in the 35-39 age group. In those years I managed to reduce my swim time from 34 minutes down to—a still depressingly average—26-ish minutes. My run improved only ever-so-slightly, but the biggest gain was getting the bike split down from 1:17 to 1:04. It's often said that a triathlon can't be won or lost on the swim, but it certainly can on the bike. That's where most athletes spend the majority of their racing time. Personally I'm just content if I can pass a few slightly overweight triathletes on one-million yen superbikes during the bike leg!

With my long-term interest in the marathon, it was only natural that I attempt a long-distance triathlon. A typical long-distance triathlon generally consists of a 3.8km swim followed by a 180km ride. These are then nicely finished off with a full marathon. My experience of long-distance races has been at the Goto, Nagasaki International Triathlon, generally referred to as the Baramon King Triathlon.

My first experience in 2012 is memorable for me because I have only three memories from it. First is the total panic I felt the morning of the race—in contrast to the feeling of total peace in the seconds before the start of the race whilst floating in the water waiting for the 'washing machine' to commence. The second is having to ride a bike for 180km with my triathlon aerobars set in a ridiculously uncomfortable, practically unusable position thanks to an over-officious bike safety checker the previous day. With the wonder of hindsight I see that it was more to do with woefully incompetent bike maintenance on my part. But the overwhelming memory is the feeling of indescribable glee and relief upon crossing the finish line. It went something like: see the finish line, run, cry, cross the line, cry, fall down, get picked up by volunteers, collect bag, sit down, cry, call the wife, sob. The final part of that sequence was swearing to never enter another long-distance race as long as I lived. How little did I know!

From scraping under 12 hours on my first attempt I improved to 10:35 with a 12th place finish in 2013, followed by 10:14 in 2015 with a sixth place overall and managing to sneak first place in my age group.

Triathlon has given me so many wonderful memories and experiences. It's taken me places I most likely wouldn't have visited otherwise. It's taught me that the mental element is just as important as the physical. It's taught me that while it's easy to pee standing up in a wetsuit on the start line of a race in front of hundreds of people, it's incredibly difficult to do so whilst cycling (unless it's a very long downhill stretch!). I understand that to be as good as you want to be requires a huge time commitment, which in turn requires a hugely supportive wife. I've met some wonderful people who will go out of their way to help other triathletes.

My goal ultimately remains to qualify for the World Championships in Hawaii at least once in my life. Whether that happens or not, I'll always look forward to lining up for a race in my wetsuit. But not as much as I'll look forward to taking it off again if I survive the swim.

Greg Howes, a man with the iron will to endure the sport of triathlons and also daring as he has completed an Ironman Triathlon race. He is a local celebrity in the marathon running circles with strong performances in races. While he is not busy training for his triathlon pursuits he is looking after his family, an English teacher and thanking his faithful wife for her endless support for his audacious pursuits.

 Greg Howes





EXPLORING THE SOUTH ON TWO WHEELS

HENRY MARTIN HARRIS (OKAYAMA)

It was a bright cool morning in August as the clocks struck seven. I had just disembarked from a 20-hour ferry trip from Okinoerabujima to Kagoshima City. My clothes, bike tools, and toothbrush were jammed into two panniers attached to the rear of my trusty steed, Sancho. This was the start of my 17-day, 1350km bike ride through nine prefectures of southern Japan. The plan was to ride north up the east coast of Kyushu, take a ferry to Shikoku, cycle part of the 88-temple pilgrimage, and then ferry back to Kyushu and ride down the west coast back to Kagoshima.

EQUIPMENT ESSENTIALS

The necessity of Lycra (spandex) cycling shorts was made all too clear to me in the first few days of my trip. I had left my Lycra cycling gear in Australia because I had never found it necessary before. I thought the only outcome of wearing it was to wind up as the target of heckling. However, after about three days into my trip, my rear end was red, tender and very unhappy. No amount of stuffing towels down my shorts dulled the pain. I searched for the nearest sports store on my trip to purchase some well-padded cycling shorts to appease my angry rear. This piece of information is probably blindingly obvious to most cyclists, but I had to learn the hard way.

I also recommend a well-cushioned saddle for your bike. I started out with a thin racing saddle and quickly changed over to a larger, touring-style saddle.

For tyres, I went with a pair of 25c Schwalbe GreenGuard Rigid Road City Tyres. These tyres have high grip and I didn't receive any punctures on my 17-day trip.

For a long biking trip, a waterproof phone case is an essential too. I went with the Topeak Waterproof Ride Case, which I could attach to the bike by the head stem. I used Strava and Google Maps to navigate, so I needed my phone even in the rain.

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS IN JAPAN

On the way to Beppu, I had to cross some nasty mountains. I was low on food but there was a distinct lack of shops. I stopped at a gas station to ask for directions, but the owners told me there weren't any around. So they cooked up a huge multi-course lunch for me. Their son was preparing for an English university entrance exam, so we had great English conversation. Moments like this made my journey so special.

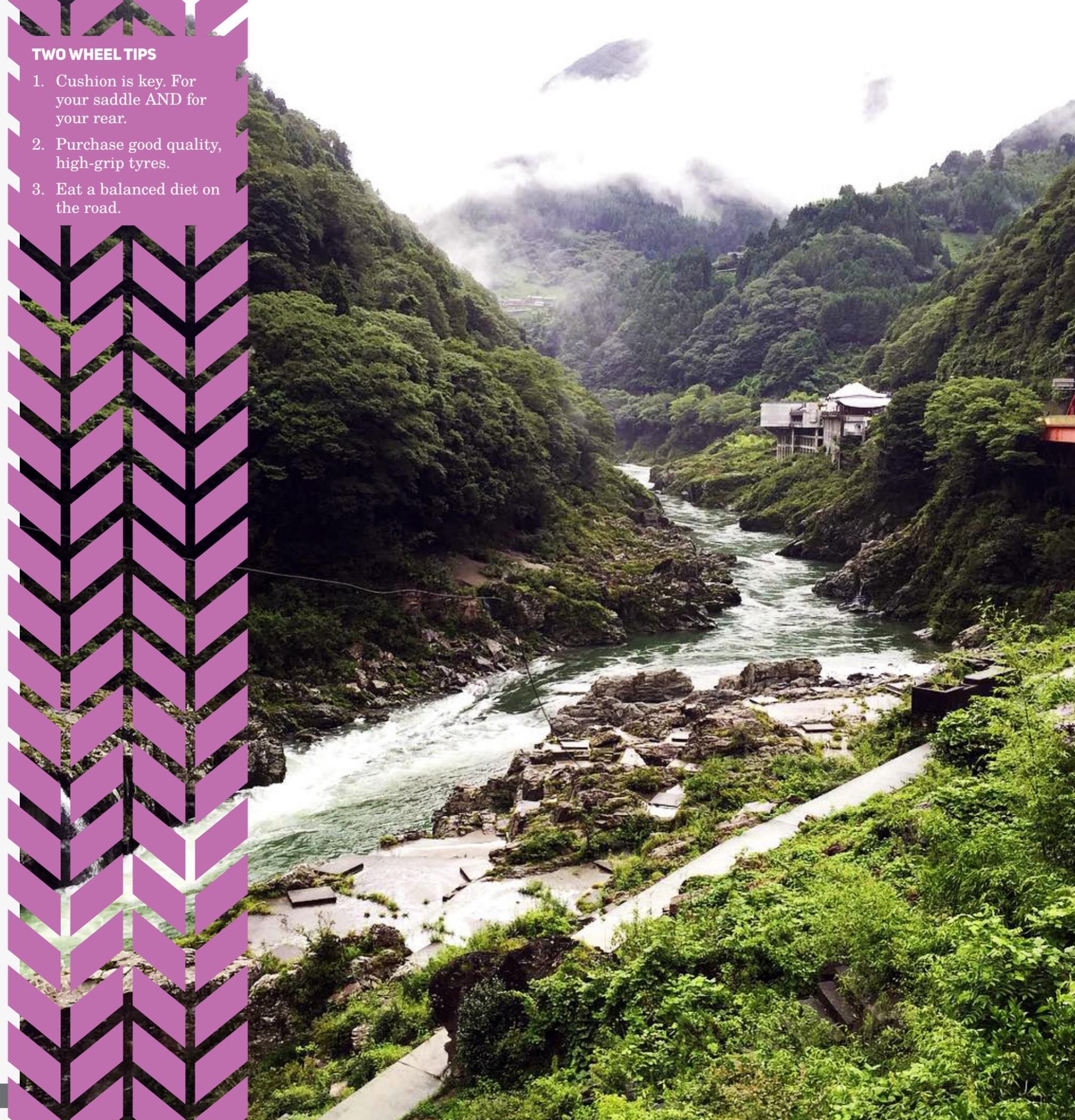
For the remainder of my trip, ramen performed the role of providing me sustenance. My personal favourite of the trip was the nutritious butter ramen. But after a few weeks of this high-ramen diet, my GI tract was clearly below peak performance.

GHIRI GHIRI!

Narrow, *inaka* roads don't leave much margin for error for cars and cyclists. Unlike South Korea and Taiwan, cyclists in Japan must ride on the shoulder alongside many trucks. Almost every driver I encountered was

TWO WHEEL TIPS

1. Cushion is key. For your saddle AND for your rear.
2. Purchase good quality, high-grip tyres.
3. Eat a balanced diet on the road.





SHARING THE ROAD

1. If you see an obstacle up ahead, slowly move into the lane of traffic to go around it. Do not swerve at the last second.
2. Make yourself seen by wearing bright clothes and pimping up your bike with reflectors.
3. Be careful in tunnels because they are often poorly lit and slippery. Some have sidewalks, but those are often too narrow for bikes. It's also impossible to tell how close oncoming cars or trucks are, so it will sound like some devil-vehicle from Mad Max is tailgating you as you bike through the tunnel.

polite and patient with me. From all reports though, the Shimanami Kaido is a great cycling route between Shikoku and Honshu.

BE PREPARED FOR ERRATIC WEATHER

On my ride back down, a forceful typhoon swept through when I was stopped for the night somewhere between Kumamoto and Kagoshima. The next morning roads were littered with fallen trees and power lines. Many times I had to turn around and find an alternative route because I couldn't get my bike over some of the larger fallen trees. Eventually, I had to carry my bike up some steps along a steep mountain path for a clear route.

I was officially delusional by the time I reached Kagoshima City. I was talking out loud to 'someone' about why they had put a hill on the road that I was using. Exactly who I was talking to and what they had to do with the formation of Japan's topography remains a mystery. I finally arrived in Kagoshima City as the sun was setting and my friends were headed out for some shabu shabu. The first beer that night was one of the best I've ever had.

REFLECTION

I set out with the vague intention to see how far I could ride around southern Japan, and it ended up being one of the best holidays I've ever had. Reaching my destination day after day by bike was an incredibly rewarding way to explore

Japan. Even if I ended up in some seemingly boring town, the fact that I got there by my own power added a little magic to wherever I ended up. It made the beer at the end of each day twice as good. I was overwhelmed by the constant kindness of strangers who wanted to help me out because I travelled by bike. The Japanese countryside, its people, and the ramen made it a great trip. And not dying.

Two thumbs up, would ride again.

Henry Martin-Harris spent three years in Okinoerabujima, Kagoshima Ken as an ALT. Currently working in an international preschool in Okayama City. Hobbies include, cycling (obviously), drinking craft beer, scuba diving, history podcasts, racquet sports, and pretending to study kanji by reading manga.

 Henry Martin Harris

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, Rajeiv 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.



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