

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

NOVEMBER
2016

Stonewall Japan: A Place for LGBTQIA+ in Japan

CONNECT'S Tokyo Game Show 2016 Coverage

How American Traditional Became Japanese Fashion

Friends in Ramen: Ramen Ambassador for the Masses

Japan Through a Biker's Eyes



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

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8	Monthly Photo Submission – November Grand Sumo Tournament
10	Operating an Animal Shelter: Animal Rights in Japan
14	In the News
16	Events Calendar: November-Mid December
24	Bedtime Reading
28	'Crazy for Noodles': Benjamin Weber on Media Success through Ramen
32	Ametora: Discovering the Zeitgeist Behind Japanese Fashion
34	Finding My Place with the Butterflies
36	Down We Go: The Decline of Fashion in Japan
40	Utada Hikaru's Comeback: Our First Love with J-Pop
42	November Releases
43	Video Game Recommendations
44	Stay a While and Play
51	Who What When Wear
54	Tour de Nippon
56	A Life in a Backpack
60	Travel Essentials
64	Health Spotlight: Facemasks
66	My Journey with PTSD
74	Nowhere to Hide
78	Rock Climbing in Japan A Sport in the Ascendency
82	Stonewall Japan

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome back for another issue of AJET *CONNECT* Magazine! I'd like to take a moment to thank you, the reader, for your continued support. Our family (both writers and readers!) continues to grow, and the feedback from the community has been humbling. That's what *CONNECT* is about at the end of the day. Not big-name stories or crazy headlines. It's about giving our community in Japan a platform to have their voices heard. Every story is from readers like you who have something they want to tell. If you've ever thought you'd like to write for *CONNECT*, but for whatever reason have been hesitating — don't worry. We want to — I want to — hear your story and connect it to everyone else.

Nothing exemplifies that spirit more than this month's issue. Inside is a powerful look into a former ALT's life in Japan with PTSD, and the help she received from her service dog. If you yourself are struggling and need a friend, our interview with an animal shelter in Tochigi can perhaps give you some ideas for seeking out your own furry friend in Japan.

Continuing to connect with our community, *CONNECT*'s coverage of Tokyo Game Show 2016 comes from three different ALTs' perspectives this year! If you weren't able to make it yourself, these accounts offer great glimpses into Japan's biggest gaming event. You'll also find our simple and clean take on the comeback of perhaps JRPG's biggest name in music, Utada Hikaru.

We've also continued our spotlights of the JET Special Interest Groups — this time with Stonewall Japan, a group offering fellowship and peer support for the LGBTQIA+ community in Japan. Be sure to check out their story.

Of course, all that just scratches the surface of what we've got inside this November issue of *CONNECT*. As always, our Events Calendar and entertainment recommendations will keep you busy, as well as looks into rock climbing, fashion, scary stories, and tips on traveling with no more than a backpack and a taste for adventure. I hope you enjoy this, the magazine that you all help create every month.

Timothy Saar
Head Editor
2nd Year Gifu ALT





NEWS AND EVENTS

NEWS EDITOR

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Kelsey Lechner

I was going to come up with a snazzier quote, but then two explosions happened around the corner... @_@

EVENTS EDITOR

connect.events@ajet.net

Lauren Hill

I discovered amazon deliver to the family mart around the corner. Daaangerous times.



H&M
この先
150m

TE
TOKYO

BOOK 1st.
ブックファースト
夜11時
まで
↓地下

西村
読者サービスセンター

渋谷駅前
Shibuya Sta

Matsumoto KiYo

薬

渋谷西村
Euphoria

JB

フルーツ
フルーツ

Eup

国内旅行 海

渋谷西村フル

道玄坂
Dogenzaka





Grand Sumo

[September

Bethany M

Sumo tournaments take place six times a year, and are attended the September tournament in Ryogoku not fully exhilarating atmosphere, fascinating rituals and, of course of the day was when the world's top *sumo* unexpectedly throwing their seat cushions into the ring, whilst one pool next tournament takes place in Fukuoka in November, recommend

Bethany is a private school JET from Manchester in the Tokyo. In her free time she likes to make vic

Tournament

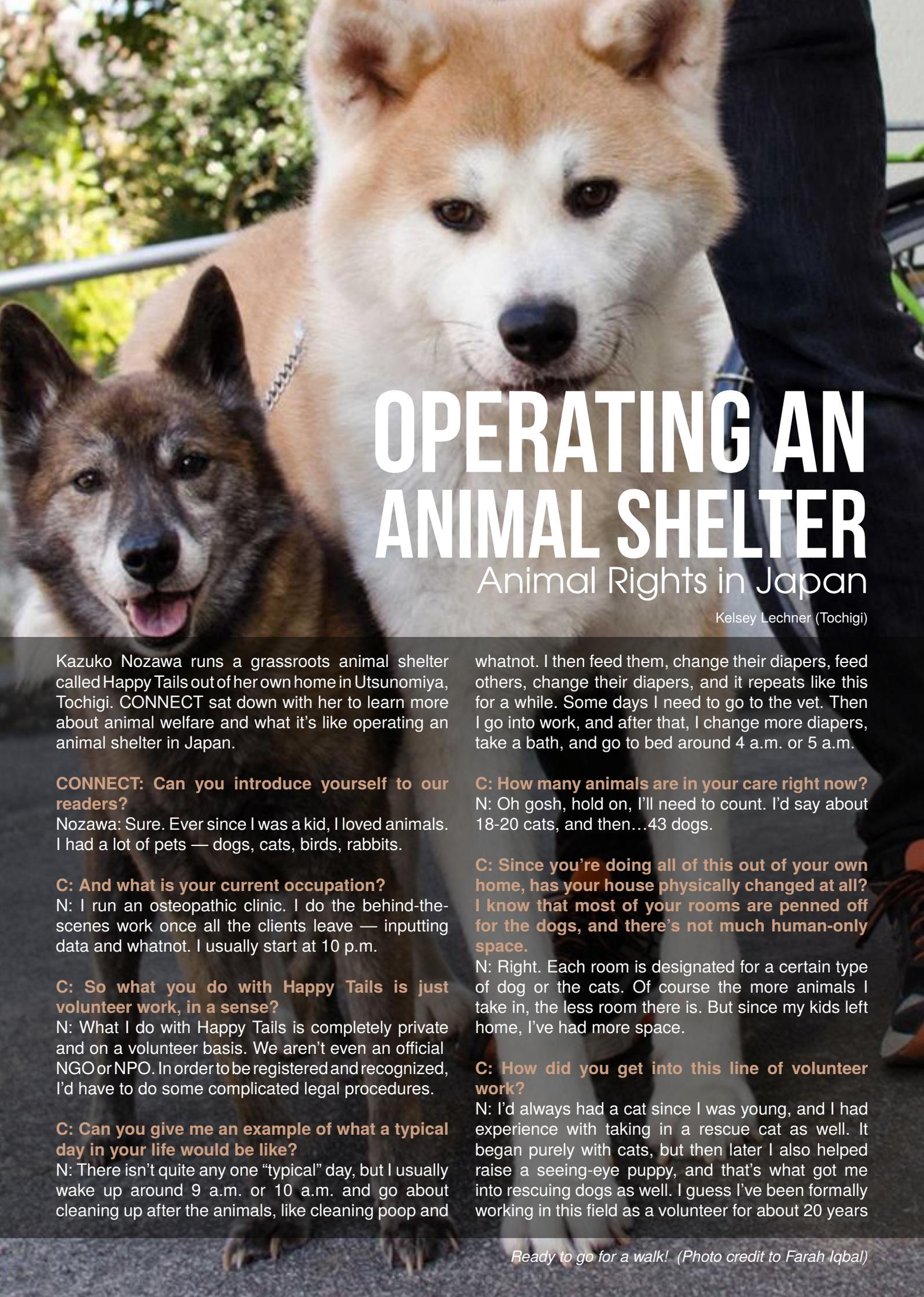
(Ryogoku)

Miller (Tokyo)

is truly an unmissable spectacle for any stint in Japan. I don't know what to expect. However, I was amazed by the atmosphere, the delicious *yakitori* sold in the arena. The highlight was the match where the favorite lost. The crowd went wild, with many people cheering. The frantic umpire desperately tried to collect them all. The atmosphere was so intense that if you're lucky enough to be in the area I'd definitely recommend you stop by.

from the UK. She works as an ALT at a Junior High School in Tokyo and makes videos about Japan for her YouTube channel.





OPERATING AN ANIMAL SHELTER

Animal Rights in Japan

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

Kazuko Nozawa runs a grassroots animal shelter called Happy Tails out of her own home in Utsunomiya, Tochigi. CONNECT sat down with her to learn more about animal welfare and what it's like operating an animal shelter in Japan.

CONNECT: Can you introduce yourself to our readers?

Nozawa: Sure. Ever since I was a kid, I loved animals. I had a lot of pets — dogs, cats, birds, rabbits.

C: And what is your current occupation?

N: I run an osteopathic clinic. I do the behind-the-scenes work once all the clients leave — inputting data and whatnot. I usually start at 10 p.m.

C: So what you do with Happy Tails is just volunteer work, in a sense?

N: What I do with Happy Tails is completely private and on a volunteer basis. We aren't even an official NGO or NPO. In order to be registered and recognized, I'd have to do some complicated legal procedures.

C: Can you give me an example of what a typical day in your life would be like?

N: There isn't quite any one "typical" day, but I usually wake up around 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. and go about cleaning up after the animals, like cleaning poop and

whatnot. I then feed them, change their diapers, feed others, change their diapers, and it repeats like this for a while. Some days I need to go to the vet. Then I go into work, and after that, I change more diapers, take a bath, and go to bed around 4 a.m. or 5 a.m.

C: How many animals are in your care right now?

N: Oh gosh, hold on, I'll need to count. I'd say about 18-20 cats, and then...43 dogs.

C: Since you're doing all of this out of your own home, has your house physically changed at all? I know that most of your rooms are penned off for the dogs, and there's not much human-only space.

N: Right. Each room is designated for a certain type of dog or the cats. Of course the more animals I take in, the less room there is. But since my kids left home, I've had more space.

C: How did you get into this line of volunteer work?

N: I'd always had a cat since I was young, and I had experience with taking in a rescue cat as well. It began purely with cats, but then later I also helped raise a seeing-eye puppy, and that's what got me into rescuing dogs as well. I guess I've been formally working in this field as a volunteer for about 20 years

Ready to go for a walk! (Photo credit to Farah Iqbal)

C: This line of work surely has a lot of difficulties. Can you tell us what is the toughest aspect of it for you?

N: Seeing an animal which needs saving and not being able to save it.

C: Can you give an example?

N: Right now, I am mainly focusing on saving dogs from puppy mills. Even though I go several times and rescue many of them, there are dozens of dogs. I have to choose which to take and which to leave behind. They're all waiting there for me, but I can't do it all by myself. It's heartbreaking.

C: Have you ever been on the brink of giving up or quitting?

N: There are of course days when I look at myself and wonder what I'm doing, but then I cool my head. This is what I'm meant to do. This is why I'm living.

C: Thank you for sharing. How about the opposite? What makes you feel the most satisfied with your work here?

N: Finding one of my babies a new forever home and receiving pictures. The expressions on the dogs' faces are different from before, and much better. I can tell they're being loved. Also, it's satisfying helping the younger generations realize more about life — that life isn't something you buy in a pet shop. Behind the curtains of pet shops you have mommy and daddy dogs in abusive conditions, and they learn about this. They start caring. There's a growing trend of young people who are taking notice nowadays.

C: Can you elaborate a little more about animal rights in Japan?

N: That's a very broad topic. Just by saying "animals," you have pets, test animals, and whatnot. I focus on pets and puppy mills. There, they have no rights. They're just objects for humans to make a profit from; the people working there don't think about the animals. However, compared to when I started, I think awareness about this is being raised. Famous celebrities are raising their voices and taking stances, things like that. Compared to 10-20 years ago, you see this being covered by the media, like on TV or in the news, much more widely than before. There is also more awareness about adopting pets from shelters or government centers.

C: Have you noticed any other trends?

N: Consciousness is changing, but it's still not perfect. Here, when people want to take in a rescue dog, they take in the one that they pity the most. Those who don't seem to be as sad or pitiable are on the contrary not adopted or saved. Animal control centers put an expiration date on the animals they take in — usually they kill them if they're not out in a



Chiko, afflicted with a tumor, after being rescued from the breeding facility.



The puppy mill where many of the charges come from.



*Unable to physically walk, but able to enjoy the breeze!
(Photo credit to Farah Iqbal)*

week. So people go there thinking, “if I don’t do something now, they’ll kill this dog.” But when they take them home, they are hit with reality. The dog barks too much or makes a mess. They often aren’t considering what it would actually be like to live with the animal.

C: They’re not thinking ahead.

N: Correct. Don’t get me wrong, I’m so grateful that they choose to rescue a dog from a center, but it makes the problem worse if they ultimately decide that they actually don’t want the pet and dump it on the street or return it to the center. When you take in a new pet, there’s a lot you have to think about.

C: So why do you think pet shops are still so popular?

N: Japanese people worship puppies and kittens — really, it’s like a religion. Japanese people tend to think that if they do not raise their pet from a baby, it won’t grow to love them, or they won’t be able to train

them. Also, because they just see the cute part of the animal they get sucked in, or think, “Oh it’s so tiny and cute,” and then the animal grows. Then there are the people who have a “the smaller, the better” sort of mindset.

C: So the “kawaii” culture plays into this.

N: I guess so. I really want people to stop thinking they need to raise their pets from when they’re babies.

C: Changing the subject a bit, what sort of activities are you putting the most effort into?

N: Saving dogs from puppy mills and animal control centers. Also saving and taking care of the dogs that no one’s willing to help because they’re sick,

injured, or old.

C: Can you elaborate more on the sicknesses or injuries they’d receive from their time in puppy mills?

N: Problems with their hearts, kidneys, livers; cancer;

***“This is what I’m
meant to do.
This is why I’m
living.”***

- Kazuko Nozawa

brain disorders; blindness.

C: This must cost you a lot of money.

N: Yeah, it does, but that's life. They need to go to the vet. When you die (this is totally my own ideas — I have no idea what dogs and cats think), you don't want to die in pain or alone. Dying or growing old or being worn down by living in a breeding center cage, or meeting your end in an animal control gas room... It's the young, energetic animals that people will make a stand for, not the others. No one's going to save them, so I want to.

C: How often do you make rescue trips?

N: There's no set number or time. It's basically me deciding that I have some sort of leeway physically and mentally. If I feel like there's even a bit of wiggle room, I'll go.

C: How many trips have you made this year?

N: I've been to animal control centers three times, and puppy mills I'd say around three or so.

C: How many other volunteers do you have?

N: I have one lady who comes four times a week to help. Otherwise, only two other regulars to help with dog walking, although they don't come on a regular basis (sometimes a few times a week, sometimes more and sometimes less). Then the Tochigi JET group comes once a month. I try to recruit more helpers through a local community center. I notice that a lot of the people who want to help out are tired of human interaction — people who quit their jobs or can't go to school, and want to try getting back into society through animals. By walking dogs, they become able to start work again; for example, the people in the neighborhood might see them walking the dogs and thank them, and they change. I've felt this on multiple occasions.

C: So it's mutually beneficial.

N: Yes, it's not only the animals who benefit.

C: Do you have many donors to support you?

N: Sometimes, but not much. Certainly not as much as I need. I'd say I pay about 90% of all the expenses out of my own pocket, and the remaining 10% is from donations.

C: So what can we as average citizens do to support you and other shelters like you?

N: The sky's the limit. Help walk dogs, or if you know someone who wants a pet, direct them to shelters. Help out at adoption fairs. Donate money or supplies. Conversely, think about what special skills

you possess and what you can do to help. Are you good at making posters? Taking pictures? I love it when people take cute pictures of my babies to help advertise them. Even people with animal allergies can help; for example, they can cut old towels someone's donated (you wouldn't *believe* how much this helps me) all without ever coming into direct contact with the animals.

C: Is there anything else you would like to tell our readers?

N: Yes. A lot of people who come to Japan to teach English or whatnot want dogs and cats; it's entirely understandable. However, among them are those who leave their pets behind when they return to their home countries. If you're going to do that, please don't take in a pet. Or slightly less extreme, many people take long vacations and travel to places like Thailand or whatnot, but then what is going to happen to your dog or cat while you're away? Also, many apartments don't allow pets, so people are forced to hide them. What kind of life is that for the animal? Please think long and hard before you take in a pet; don't just make it an impulsive decision. It might be better to volunteer than actually take in a pet yourself.

C: Where can people in other prefectures or cities find more information about animal shelters in their areas?

N: Every prefecture will have at least one, if not more. You can first go to adoption fairs and try talking to the people in charge. There may be some language barriers, but as long as you're heart's in the right place, they'll know and figure something out. You can go to your local community centers or volunteer centers and ask for information. There are also a lot of local information magazines printed in English. Even if they don't have information about animal shelters in the publications themselves, you could contact the center publishing them, since they're bound to have someone who speaks English, and they can hopefully direct you to somewhere.

C: Thank you so much for your time, Nozawa-san.

N: No problem. Thank *you*.

To learn more about Happy Tails, visit Nozawa-san's blog on <https://sayaxwxapr11.blogspot.jp/> or the Happy Tails Facebook page on <http://bit.ly/2fazBk5>, both of which are being run bilingually as part of a Tochigi JET volunteer initiative. To learn more about the reality of the breeding centers, please check out this recent blog post here <http://bit.ly/2eU2hKf>



In the News

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

16 September

A study conducted every five years by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research asked 8,754 single people and 6,598 married couples in Japan about their relationships and factors relating to the population. Focusing in on the population aged 18-34, it was found that about 90% of the single population wanted to get married in the future, but 30% were not currently looking for a relationship. Furthermore 42% of men and 44% of women were found to have never had sex. However, the popular interpretations of the survey have been criticized by many (<http://bit.ly/2e2sdFr>), including Maki Fukusawa, who coined the term “*sōshoku danshi*” (“herbivore man”). She says that while she made the term to be used in the positive sense that Japanese “herbivore men” are interested in but not aggressive about sex, it has come to have a negative connotation in part due to media representation. She claims that the “sensational” results found by the survey were in part due to vague wording and changing attitudes towards sex.

In addition to these findings, the survey announced that for the first time, at least 50% of women who had their first child returned to the workforce. It did not cover same-sex partners.

<http://bit.ly/2eclGDu>

5 October

Many Japanese celebrities are taking a stand for animal rights,

specifically dogs and cats kept as pets, in hopes of making Japan entirely no-kill in time for the Tokyo Olympics. Celebrities such as the four-person band Sekai no Owari, television personality Aya Sugimoto (who posed as PETA's first nude Japanese model), and actress Miyoko Asada have donated parts of their proceedings to animal rights groups and shelters, promoted adopting shelter pets and educating children about animal rights, and helped start up organizations themselves. Perhaps one of the most widely known celebrities in the international context would be television announcer Christel Takigawa, whose speech (which subsequently made “*omotenashi*” [“hospitality”] a boom word across the nation until this day), won Japan the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic bid. Takigawa, along with the late actress Naomi Kawashima, is striving to end all killings of relinquished pets throughout the country by the 2020 Games. The amount of cats and dogs that were killed in animal control centers in 2015 numbered 83,000. To learn more about this topic, read the article “Operating an Animal Shelter: Animal Rights in Japan”

<http://bzfd.it/2en92Yu>

10 October

Al Jazeera called out Japan for abuse within its justice system. Japan has a nearly 100% conviction rate, with roughly 90% of criminal prosecutions being based on confessions. However, critics have accused the police and legal structure of mentally abusing

suspected victims to coerce them into confessing to crimes they did not commit. Suspects can be held without bail for up to 23 days without being charged with a crime. An inside source says that prosecutors are pushed “to get a confession at all costs,” and interrogations by police can take up to 12 hours a day, even if there is no evidence against a suspect. Lawyers are not permitted, and police are not required to record interrogations. Experts say these conditions wear down suspects psychologically to the extent that they may confess to a crime they did not commit, and once a confession is made, it is difficult to prove their innocence. The police say they are aware of this problem and are currently investigating it.

<http://bit.ly/2dfAjt3>

12 October

The manager and two regular workers of a hostel in Sapporo were arrested for letting two foreign women, who were also arrested, clean and make beds for 3 hours a day in exchange for waiving the ¥2000 accommodation fee. While this agreement is legal in many other parts of the world, foreign tourists working on short-stay visas violates immigration laws in Japan. While the two women in question (from China and Malaysia) were aware of the violations, some other foreign tourists who have made the same deal at the hostel have raised their voices stating that during their stay they were unaware that it is illegal in Japan.

<http://bit.ly/2dOvckq>

Events Calendar:

November-Mid December

Lauren Hill (Tokyo)

Block 1

Hokkaido
Aomori
Iwate
Akita

Block 2

Miyagi
Yamagata
Fukushima
Niigata

Block 3

Ibaraki
Tochigi
Gunma
Saitama
Nagano

Block 4

Chiba
Tokyo
Kanagawa
Yamanashi
Shizuoka

Block 5

Toyama
Ishikawa
Fukui
Gifu
Aichi

Block 6

Shiga
Kyoto
Hyogo

Block 7

Mie
Osaka
Nara
Wakayama

Block 8

Tokushima
Kagawa
Ehime
Kochi

Block 9

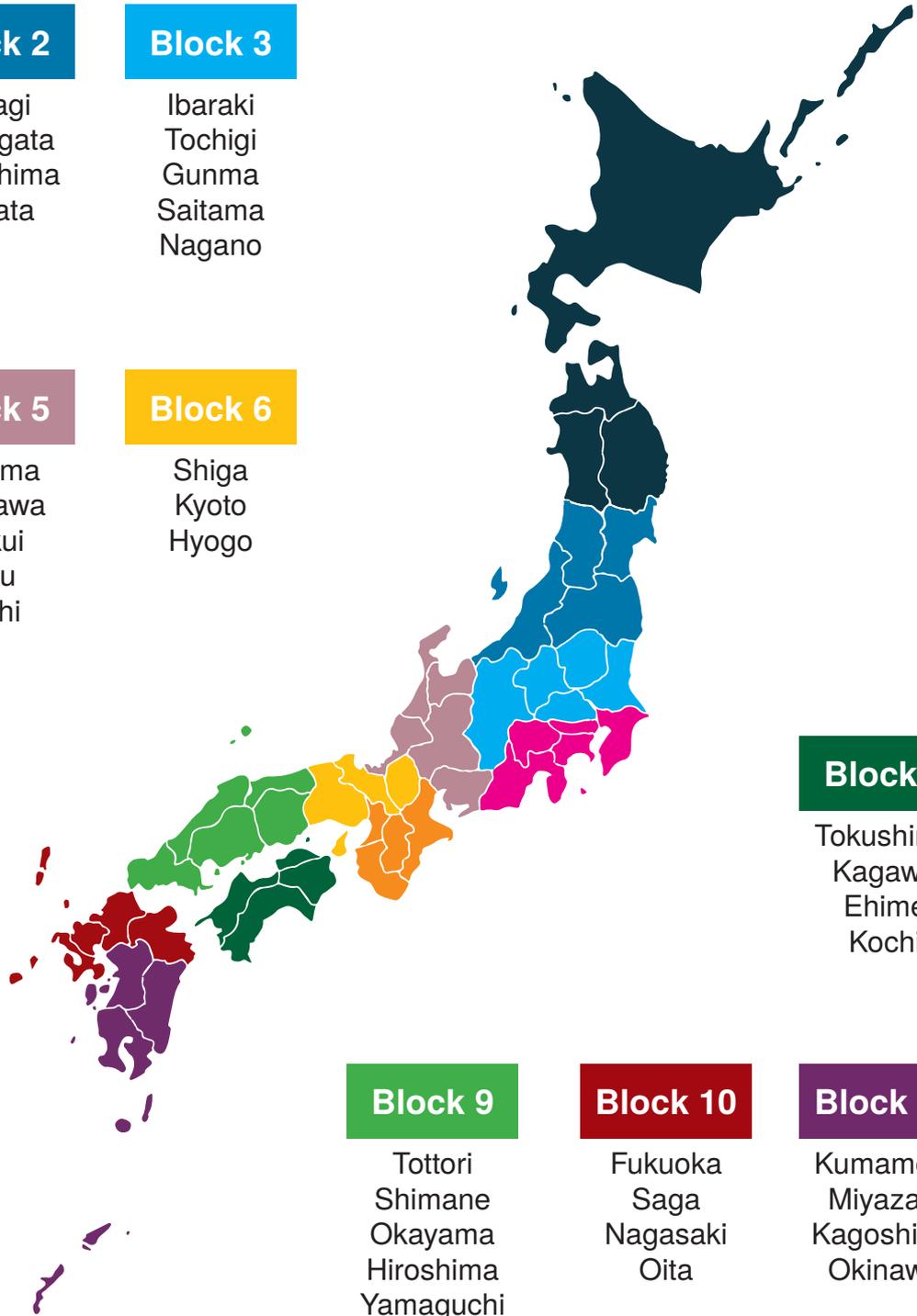
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa



Block 1

Dakikaeri Autumnal Festival

10 Oct. – 10 Nov.

Dakikaeri Valley, Akita Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hirosaki Castle Chrysanthemum and Autumn Foliage Festival

21 Oct. – 13 Nov.

Hirosaki Park Botanical Gardens, Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website](#)

Japan Mochi Summit 2016

5 Nov. – 6 Nov.

Ichinoseki Multidiscipline Gymnasium, Ichinoseki City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

Snow Story Event

12 Nov. – 12 Feb.

Otaru City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Sapporo White Illumination 2016

18 Nov. – 14 March

Odori Park, Ekimae Dori & Minami 1-jo Dori, Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Munich Christmas Market in Sapporo

25 Nov. – 24 Dec.

Sapporo City (multiple sites), Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Block 2

Nanyo Chrysanthemum Festival

14 Oct. – 6 Nov.

Nanyo City Centre Flower Park, Nanyo City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Autumn Leaves Illumination

29 Oct. – 27 Nov.

Shousanso Park, Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Taimatsu Akashi (Fire Festival)

12 Nov.

Kuriyasawa, Sukagawa City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website](#)

Toshikoshi Matsuri (Year End and New Year Festival)

4 Dec.

Sengen-ji Temple, Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Sendai Pageant of Starlight

9 Dec. – 31 Dec.

Kotodai Park, Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 3

Mt. Tsukuba Cable Car Maple Illumination

3 Nov. – 27 Nov.

Mt. Tsukuba, Tsukuba City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hannou Matsuri

5 Nov. – 6 Nov.

Hanno City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website](#)

Utsunomiya Gyoza Festival

5 Nov. – 06 Nov.

Utsunomiya Castle Park, Utsunomiya City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Oizumi Carnaval

6 Nov.

Oizumi Culture Village, Oizumi Town, Gunma Prefecture

[Website](#)

Norikura Kogen Jizake Festa

12 Nov.

Norikura Kanko Centre, Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website](#)

King of Pasta 2016

13 Nov.

Motenashi Hiroba, Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website](#)

Nagano Ebisuko Fireworks Festival

23 Nov.

Saigawa Daini-Ryokuchi Park, Nagano City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website](#)

Karuizawa Winter Festival

26 Nov. – 11 Feb.

Main Streets, Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture

[Website](#)

Chichibu Yomatsuri (Night Festival)

2 Dec. – 3 Dec.

Chichibu Shrine, Chichibu City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website](#)

Koga Chouchin Saomomi Matsuri (Bamboo Pole Lantern Festival)

3 Dec.

Koga Station Area, Koga City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Oguri Hangan Matsuri

4 Dec.

Shinji Elementary School, Chikusei City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Teppo Matsuri (Gun Festival)

10 Dec. – 11 Dec.

Iida Hachiman Shrine, Ogano, Saitama Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 4

Exhibition: The Universe and Art

30 July – 9 Jan.
Mori Art Museum, Roppongi, Minato City, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Exhibition: BODY/PLAY/POLITICS

1 Oct. – 14 Dec.
Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Sagamiko Light Illumillion

22 Oct. – 9 April
Sagamiko Pleasure Forest, Sagamihara City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Tokyo Ramen Show

27 Oct. – 6 Nov.
Komazawa Olympic Park, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

The 57th Kanda Second-hand Book Festival

28 Oct. – 6 Nov.
Jimbocho Station Area, Chiyoda City, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Fuji Kawaguchi-ko Autumn Leaves Festival

1 Nov. – 23 Nov.
Kawaguchi-ko Lakeside, Yamanashi Prefecture
Website

Maple Leaf Festival

1 Nov. – 30 Nov.
Mt. Takao, Hachioji City, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Fujinomiya Matsuri (Float Parade)

3 Nov. – 5 Nov.
Fuinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Daidogei (Street Performance) World Cup

3 Nov. – 6 Nov.
Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Hakone Daimyo Gyoretsu (Feudal Lord's Procession)

3 Nov.
Yumoto Onsen, Hakone, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Dream Yosakoi Matsuri

4 Nov. – 5 Nov.
Odaiba, Maronouchi and Akihabara areas, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Snow Bank Pay It Forward 2016

12 Nov. – 13 Nov.
Yoyogi Park Events Square, Shibuya Area, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Inasa Puppet Play Festival

12 Nov. – 13 Nov.
Hanamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Autumn Evening Illuminations

19 Nov. – 7 Dec.
Rikugien Gardens, Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Design Festa No.44

26 Nov. – 27 Nov.
Tokyo Big Sight West Halls, Koto City, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Atami Kaijo Hanabi Taikai (Fireworks Display)

4 Dec., 11 Dec., & 18 Dec.
Atami Port, Atami City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Akibasan Fire Festival

6 Dec.
Akibasan Shrine, Itabashi District, Odawara City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Hobby World Christmas Festival

10 Dec. – 11 Dec.
Shizuoka Hobby Square, Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

The 47 Ronin Winter Festival

14 December
Sengakuji Temple, Takanawa Area, Minato City, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Tokyo Comic Con

03 Dec. – 04 Dec.
Akihasan Hongu Akiha Shrine, Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Akiha Fire Festival

15 Dec. – 16 Dec.
Akihasan Hongu Akiha Shrine, Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website



Block 5

Yorokoen Momiji Matsuri

1 Oct. – 30 Nov.

Yoro Park, Yoro, Gifu Prefecture

Website

Wajima Senmaida Aze Mantou (Thousand Candle Rice Field Display)

15 Oct. – 12 March

Wajima City Rice Fields, Ishikawa
Prefecture

Website

The 13th AJU Wine Festa

03 Nov.

Tajimi Catholic Monastery, Tajimi City,
Gifu Prefecture

Website

Hinkoko Matsuri (Puppet Play)

23 Nov.

Oyatajinja Shrine, Mino City, Gifu
Prefecture

Website

Nagoya Antique Fair

2 Dec. – 4 Dec.

Fukiage Hall, Nagoya City, Aichi
Prefecture

Website

Ikenoue Purification Ceremony Festival

10 Dec.

Katuragake Shrine, Ikenoue, Gifu
City, Gifu Prefecture

Website

Minamiarato Chrysanthemum Festival

03 Nov. – 13 Nov.

Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture

Website

Takefu Chrysanthemum Figures Festival

06 Oct. – 06 Nov.

Echizen Takefu Central Park,
Echizen, Fukui Prefecture

Website

Block 6

Non-Verbal Theatre Performance: GEAR

1 Oct. – 30 Jan.

Art Complex 1928, Nakagyo Ward,
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

Website

Gion Odori

1 Nov. – 10 Nov.

Gion Hall, Higashiyama Ward, Kyoto
City, Kyoto Prefecture

Website

Kiyomizu-Dera Autumn Illuminations

12 Nov. – 4 Dec.

Kiyomizu-Dera, Higashiyama Ward,
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

Website

Autumn Exclusive Tour of Taizo-In Zen Buddhist Temple

18 Nov. – 4 Dec.

Taizo-In Zen Buddhist Temple,
Myoushinji, Hanazono Area, Kyoto
City, Kyoto Prefecture

Website

Kabuki All Stars Performance

30 Nov. – 25 Dec.

Minami-za Theatre, Kyoto City, Kyoto
Prefecture

Website

Kobe Luminarie

2 Dec. – 11 Dec.

Kobe Foreign Settlement, Kobe City,
Hyogo Prefecture

Website

Arashiyama Hanatouro (Flower Illuminations Road)

9 Dec. – 18 Dec.c

Arashiyama District, Kyoto City, Kyoto
Prefecture

Website

Parade of Little Edo Hikone Castle

03 Nov.

Hikone Castle, Hikone, Shiga
Prefecture

Website

Block 7

Exhibition: Yokai; Spectres in the Art of Japan

10 Sept. – 06 Nov.

Abeno Harukas Art Museum, Osaka
City, Osaka Prefecture

Website

Ujisato Festival

3 November

Matsusaka Castle Ruins and
City Centre, Matsusaka City, Mie
Prefecture

Website

Shitennouji Wasso (Boat Float Parade)

06 Nov.

Houenji, Osaka Prefecture

Website

Festival of the Lights Osaka

20 Nov. – 09 Jan.

Nakanoshima Park, Osaka
Prefecture

Website

Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri

15 Dec. – 18 Dec.

Kasuga Shrine, Nara City, Nara
Prefecture

Website

Apple picking (Fuji)

01 Nov. – 30 Nov.

Katsuragi-cho Imperial Palace,
Wakayama Prefecture

Website





Block 8

Sanuki Film Festival 2016

8 Oct. – 5 Nov.

Various Participating Cinemas,
Kagawa Prefecture

Website

Yura-Chara Grand Prix 2016

5 Nov. – 6 Nov.

Shiroyama Park, Matsuyama City,
Ehime Prefecture

Website

Tokushima Yokai Matsuri

20 Nov.

Fuji-no-Mori Park, Miyoshi City,
Tokushima Prefecture

Website

Ritsurin Garden Fall Illuminations

21 Nov. – 30 Nov.

Ritsurin Garden, Takamatsu City,
Kagawa Prefecture

Website

Autumn Awa Odori

26 Nov. – 27 Nov.

Asty Arena Tokushima, Tokushima
City, Tokushima Prefecture

Website

Kome Kome Festa 2016

06 Nov.

Shimanto Forest Park, Takaoka
District, Kochi 786-0011

Website

Block 9

Around the World in Sand (South American Exhibition)

16 April – 3 Jan.

Tottori Sand Museum, Tottori City,
Tottori Prefecture

Website

Onomichi Betcha Festival

01 Nov. – 03 Nov.

Onomichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture

Website

Ube Matsuri

05 November – 06 November

Ube City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

Website

Mihara Ukishiro Matsuri

07 Nov. – 08 Nov.

Mihara Castle, Mihara City,
Hiroshima Prefecture

Website

Tsuyama Castle Festival

12 Nov. – 23 Nov.

Tsuyama Castle, Tsuyama City,
Okayama Prefecture

Website

Miyajima Firewalking Ritual

15 Nov.

Daijo-In of Miyajima Shrine,
Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima
Prefecture

Website

Hiroshima Ramen Stadium

17 Nov. – 23 Nov.

Hiroshima Municipal Stadium,
Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

Website

Yamaguchi Tenjin Festival

23 Nov.

Furukuma Shrine, Yamaguchi City,
Yamaguchi Prefecture

Website

Morotabune Shinji (Winter Boat Festival)

3 Dec.

Mihonoseki Port, Mihonoseki,
Shimane Prefecture

Website

Warai-Kou (Laughing Battle)

4 Dec.

Hofu City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

Website

Illusion on the Tottori Sand Dunes

10 Dec. – 25 Dec.

Tottori Sand Dunes, Tottori City,
Tottori Prefecture

Website



Block 10

Gardening World Cup 2016

1 Oct. – 3 Nov.

Huis Ten Bosch, Sasebo City,
Nagasaki Prefecture

Website

22nd FAI World Hot Air Balloon Championship

28 Oct. – 06 Nov.

Kase Riverside, Saga Prefecture

Website

Hakushu Festival and Parade on Water

1 Nov. – 3 Nov.

Yanagawa River, Yanagawa City,
Fukuoka Prefecture

Website

Karatsu Kunchi Festival

2 Nov. – 4 Nov.

Karatsu Shrine, Karatsu City, Saga
Prefecture

Website

Usuki Takeyoi (Bamboo Lantern) Festival

5 Nov. – 6 Nov.

Usuki City, Oita Prefecture

Website

November Grand Sumo Tournament

13 Nov. – 27 Nov.

Fukuoka Convention Centre,
Sekijjomachi, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka
Prefecture

Website

Chikuraku Matsuri

18 Nov. – 20 Nov.

Takeda City, Oita Prefecture

Website

Oshiroi Matsuri (White Face Paint Festival)

2 Dec.

Oyamazumi Shrine, Kitakyushu City,
Fukuoka Prefecture

Website

Virtual Reality Horror Attraction

22 Dec. – 31 Dec.

Huis Ten Bosch, Sasebo City,
Nagasaki Prefecture

Website

Block 11

Lobster Festival

2 Sept. – 30 Nov.

Coastal Restaurants, Miyazaki
Prefecture

Website

Yagoro-Don Matsuri (Autumn Festival)

3 Nov.

Soo City, Kagoshima Prefecture

Website

Food Pal Festa 2016

5 Nov. – 6 Nov.

Foodpal Kumamoto, Mitsugu,
Kumamoto City, Kumamoto
Prefecture

Website

Tour De Okinawa

12 Nov. – 13 Nov.

Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture

Website

Okinawa International Carnival

26 Nov. – 27 Nov.

Gate 2 Street, Okinawa City, Okinawa
Prefecture

Website

BEDTIME READING

Lauren Hill (Tokyo)

Halloween's been and gone, skilfully carved pumpkins are going mouldy, and you're two thirds of the way through your stash of spooky snacks (more than two thirds? Me too; don't worry). With the autumn chill firmly settling in, there's no better time to get wrapped up and tell a scary story or two. This month, we asked about your favourite urban legends and unsettling tales from Japan. Here's what you said!



"The *Yuurei* of Aizu-Wakamatsu has recently been one of my favorites. The story goes like this: Long ago, a man and a woman were living in Aizu-Wakamatsu. One night, the ghost of a woman appeared in their garden. She knocked on their door and called out the wife's name. The wife shouted back to her, 'Who are you and what do you want?' but the ghost had already vanished. The next four days, the couple continued to be plagued by this ghost. The wife chanted sutras and used charms but nothing worked. The ghost would walk the perimeter of the garden ringing a bell with a wooden mallet, or, most terrifyingly, appear in the fires of the burning stove. The wife went to the local shrine and prayed, and for one night their house was quiet. Still, the next night, the ghost appeared again, and she began to caress the wife's feet with her cold, dead hands. The man and his wife promptly moved out of their house the following morning. The couple is untraceable after that, and to this day nobody has been able to discover the ghost's identity."

- **Corinne Morier, Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture**

"The *Kuchisake-onna* was a beautiful but restless woman in life. When her husband discovered she was having an affair, he slit her mouth from ear to ear in a blind rage, screaming "who will think you are beautiful now?" as he did it. After her mutilation she donned a surgical mask to disguise herself, but was too distraught over her lost beauty and eventually killed herself. They say that her spirit now wanders the streets, asking anyone she meets "do you think I'm pretty?" If you say "no" she'll kill you with scissors. If you say "yes" she then removes the mask, showing the huge gash across her mouth, and asks "how about now?" If you then say "no" then she cuts you in half, but if you say "yes" again she gives you a smile like hers."

- Alyssa Thull

"In my town there's a house where no-one goes. People say there's a ghost there, and if you try to sleep there through the night they suck the breath out of you. My friend's friend tried to do it and crawled out of the house gasping for air, or so they say..."

- Julia Mace, Mitoyo City, Kagawa Prefecture

"This isn't a regional story, but my teacher told me about Hanako-san, a ghost who can be found in the third toilet stall. She is described as a little girl of elementary school age wearing a red skirt. To summon her, knock three times on the third stall and ask, "Hanako-san, are you there?" If she replies, you must promise to be her friend and play with her or she will strangle you with her skipping rope."

- Jess Williams, Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

"A man wakes up in a dark room, surrounded by bodies. He sees a plate piled high with meat in the middle of the room. He suddenly hears an unfamiliar voice. It says "you have one hour to eat all the meat in the room. If you fail to complete this task, you will die as punishment." The man looks at the plate and scoffs. He says "piece of cake. I'm starving." He soon gets started, devouring the plate and finishing just as the time runs out. He stands up and says triumphantly, "I did it! I ate everything!" The voice replies "the punishment will now begin."

- Renee Hayse-Porter, Shinjo City, Yamagata Prefecture

"While there are many great ghost stories in Japanese folklore, my favorites are the ones that revolve around schools. Often called the

"Seven Wonders of the School," these stories are passed down through rumours schoolchildren tell each other. Because of this, there's a lot of variety on the fates awaiting those who encounter these otherworldly visitors. There are two in particular I really enjoy. First, careful on the stairs! Count them as you go — and avoid the 13th step. Stepping on the 13th step will transport you to another world, or worse, a noose beckoning to your doom. Are your stairs normally only 10 or 12 steps? Don't worry, the 13th step appears without fail after sunset. Secondly, be on the lookout for the anatomy model. It moves around the school at night when no-one is watching, searching desperately for a heart. Don't let him find you, or he'll take yours."

- Emily Harris, Tokyo Prefecture

"I'm a huge fan of scary stories, and these are my favourite two. *Teketeke* is about a woman who died in a train accident. It's said that if you're alone at night, you can hear her wandering around using her hands while searching around for her lower half. If she sees you, she will try to cut you in half to "retrieve" her lower half. Despite her missing legs, it's impossible to outrun her. Her name is derived from the sound of her nails against the ground as she crawls around.

The story of *Hitori Kakurenbo* goes that at around 3am, if you cut open a stuffed animal and replace its stuffing with uncooked rice and fingernail clippings, then bind it together with a red thread, you can summon a spirit to play hide and seek with. When it's the spirit's turn to be the seeker, you must hide well with sake nearby just in case. If it finds you before daytime or before you end the game, it will kill you."

- Lisa Kha, Katsushika Ward, Tokyo Prefecture



ARTS AND CULTURE

CULTURE EDITORS

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Annamarie Carlson

Forget sweater weather, it's finally time for scarves and hot coffee!

Michael Sosnick

Who needs Slime Season or Yeezy Season when it's Vending Machine Corn Soup Season?

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

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Sabrina Zirakzadeh

Keep your pumpkin spice and knitwear, November is all about writing time! Happy NaNoWriMo, all!

Travis Shaver

*Everyone is excited about autumn stuff and I'm just ready to vote. Seriously though...
VOTE!!*

FASHION EDITORS

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Erica Grainger

November - My last month to wear Autumn colours and begrudgingly my wardrobe turns to winter wear!

Roxanne Ghezzi







Crazy for noodles

Benjamin Weber on Media Success through Ramen

Mike Sosnick (Kobe)

Benjamin Weber loves ramen. Although originally from New York, the programmer has lived in Osaka for five years now. During his time in Kansai, Weber has chronicled his passion for noodles in broth on his blog, Friends in Ramen <http://bit.ly/2dYQqKM>. Through his extensive coverage of ramen shops, Weber and his site have generated numerous appearances in Japanese media. CONNECT sat down with Benjamin to discuss running a successful blog in Japan, navigating the Japanese media landscape, and, of course, ramen.

Q: What first brought you to Japan?

A: I'm kind of an *otaku* and I always knew that I wanted to visit Japan because I've liked Japanese video games ever since I was a kid. Once I was working and had a bunch of money, I was like, "Alright, let's do it. Let's make that trip."

Q: How does the balance between your job [as a game programmer] and your blog work?

A: It can be a little rough, especially on weekdays, which is why I end up going to a lot of shops within Osaka city. I don't mind spending some time walking around or taking the train, so after work I'll often go somewhere that's not too far, but it does mean that I go to places that are really far — places in Kyoto, places in Hyogo, even places in the far north of Osaka — a lot less than I would like to.

Q: What made you decide to start the site in the first place?

A: Before I lived in Osaka I lived in Tokyo, and in Tokyo is where my love for ramen really picked up. I mean, I knew I liked ramen, but being there and trying different kinds of ramen, I found out I liked it more and more, and it ended up becoming kind of a hobby. So I figured I should do something

with that information, but I didn't really know what to do. When I got my job in Osaka, I realized there was no English information here. Combined with the fact that I was already taking photos, I said, "I will be the English information in Osaka."

Q: How did the opportunity to appear on a Japanese outlet come about if your blog was only in English?

A: Originally, there was something on a Yahoo campaign where they were looking for foreigners who liked ramen as a weird way to bring tourism and get foreigners to look at Yahoo. So I spoke with them and I became one of the ramen ambassadors, foreigners who like ramen. A couple of the others and I were picked out for this. The TV show I was on was a foreigner special and it was in the ramen section of the foreigner special.

Q: One of the reasons I like the site is that it's in a pretty short format that's easily digestible. How did you decide on that compact format?

A: It was for a couple of reasons. I started a blog before my ramen blog when I got to Japan. You know, everyone starts that Japan blog. I wrote a couple of long posts and it was really exciting, and then I sat down and said, "I should write another long post ... or I should watch some anime," and I didn't end up writing that long post. So when I started my ramen blog, one of the goals was to keep it narrow, and keep it goal-oriented when I sit down to write a post. I'm going to write it about one shop, I'm going to say a few things about it, I'm going to say the simplest things that I would like to know, whether or not it's worth going to. And then I can be done with it. I'm not going to keep procrastinating forever.

Q: Do you think when your Japanese fanbase reads your blog and sees your media appearances, they treat you as just another informative ramen blog, as a token ramen nerd novelty, or as something in between?

A: I don't know what they think, but I'd imagine it's somewhere in between. I'm kind of aiming to be somewhere in between. I don't want to be the super crazy foreigner, but I'm happy to be a different take on ramen. My Japanese is fine enough, but it's not native-level Japanese, so I hope they forgive that for the different perspective, and take it for what it is.

Q: What was your first Japanese media experience [the Yahoo show] like? What is it like for someone who is writing an English-language blog to appear in Japanese media?

A: It was a little weird, and it was intimidating. It was really weird because they had me do a bunch of stuff — it was super low-budget. I had to go out and make my own video with a home camera, and it was super awkward. It's embarrassing, but whatever.

Q: How did the media appearances keep happening?

A: It happens in fits and starts. A lot of times when I get noticed in one way, it creates a bunch more. Through the ramen ambassador thing, I got that morning TV show. Then, I put my business card on the wall of a shop and that serendipitously got me an Asahi Shimbun interview, which spawned a couple other things. There will be a few of these chain reactions, and then it'll be quiet for a little while.

Q: Is there a greater ramen community that you've become a part of?

A: A little bit. I first started paying attention to ramen in Tokyo, where a guy who I became friends with writes a blog called Ramen Adventures. We live in different cities, so we don't hang out all that often now, but when we're in each other's cities we'll hit up a couple joints. Recently, I've also started to meet some Japanese ramen people and have gone to some ramen events.

Q: How did you get to know the Japanese ramen people?

A: I met someone in a bar! I started talking about ramen because that's a pretty common conversation topic for me, and I met one person who works at a ramen shop. Then I met that person's friend, who was this long-time ramen blogger like 20 years ago or something. She was like, "Ben, you're cool. I'm going to introduce you to a bunch of people."

Q: What advice would you have for someone who's looking to get their blog past the "that Japan blog" stage?

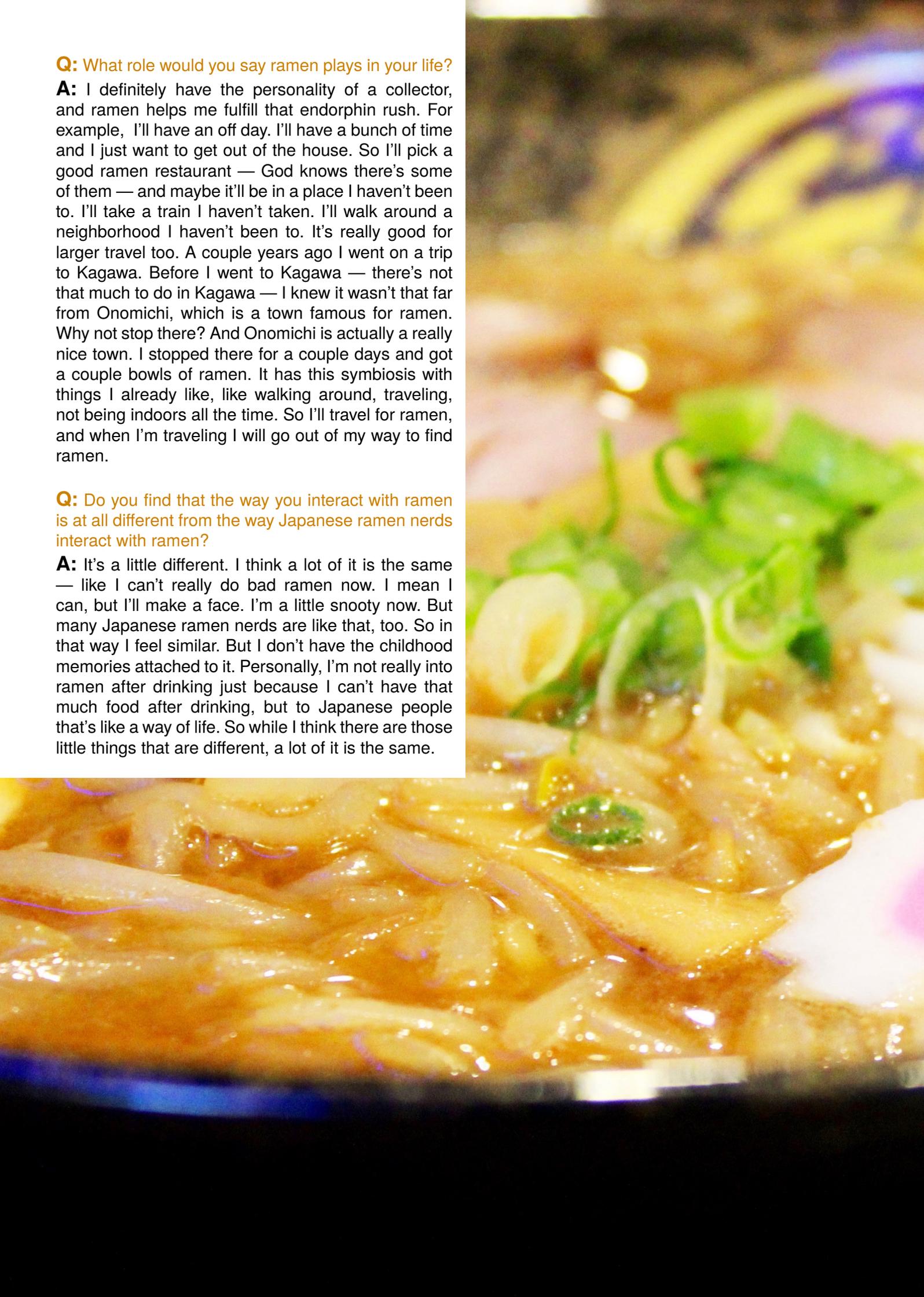
A: For me personally, it's important to have a goal. I made a limit. I said this was going to be a ramen blog, each post is going to be about ramen. That really motivated me to write it. If you can keep up the general Japan blog, that's great, but it got difficult for me because I'm lazy and I didn't really know what to write about. But having a narrow topic as a goal has helped motivate me. Similarly, it really helps you carve out your niche. You can work SEO (Search Engine Optimization) around that. You can have a one-line title that's about that. You know that when people look you up, it's going to be for that. It means that when you go to post on Reddit, you know which subreddit you're going to.

Q: What role would you say ramen plays in your life?

A: I definitely have the personality of a collector, and ramen helps me fulfill that endorphin rush. For example, I'll have an off day. I'll have a bunch of time and I just want to get out of the house. So I'll pick a good ramen restaurant — God knows there's some of them — and maybe it'll be in a place I haven't been to. I'll take a train I haven't taken. I'll walk around a neighborhood I haven't been to. It's really good for larger travel too. A couple years ago I went on a trip to Kagawa. Before I went to Kagawa — there's not that much to do in Kagawa — I knew it wasn't that far from Onomichi, which is a town famous for ramen. Why not stop there? And Onomichi is actually a really nice town. I stopped there for a couple days and got a couple bowls of ramen. It has this symbiosis with things I already like, like walking around, traveling, not being indoors all the time. So I'll travel for ramen, and when I'm traveling I will go out of my way to find ramen.

Q: Do you find that the way you interact with ramen is at all different from the way Japanese ramen nerds interact with ramen?

A: It's a little different. I think a lot of it is the same — like I can't really do bad ramen now. I mean I can, but I'll make a face. I'm a little snooty now. But many Japanese ramen nerds are like that, too. So in that way I feel similar. But I don't have the childhood memories attached to it. Personally, I'm not really into ramen after drinking just because I can't have that much food after drinking, but to Japanese people that's like a way of life. So while I think there are those little things that are different, a lot of it is the same.



AMETORA

Discovering the Zeitgeist Behind Japanese Fashion

By Angela Hsu, Ibaraki

“Ametora: How Japan Saved American Style”

By W. David Marx

Basic Books, 2015, 253 pp.

Although I teach at a public high school, my students have no uniform. To see them is to know what jeans are in, and which nail polish colors are trendy. But recently, I've noticed a plethora of clothes and accessories advertising themselves in their jarring familiarity — oversized UCLA sweaters, tote bags with maps of Portland, and thermoses pledging allegiance to the Brooklyn Bridge. Considering most of my students have never traveled outside of Japan, I am surprised by the consistency with which they rep this gear.

American Aspiration

Once I couldn't resist asking a first-year in a San Diego t-shirt if he knew where the city was. “Mexico?” he queried hopefully. Close, but no cigar. Clearly my students' views of the cities I knew when growing up were not the same as my own. Their relation to America was more nebulous and aspirational, an expression of coastal hipster lifestyle rather than an affirmation of physical geography.

American Traditional

I'm not the first person to notice these quirks. W. David Marx's book “Ametora” — a word which is Japanese slang for “American traditional” — documents the long history of Japan's funny affair with American culture and fashion. Starting with the life of businessman

Kensuke Ishizu in pre-war Japan, Marx guides us through Ishizu's creation of Ivy League style, along with the subsequent trends his band of influencers remixed for a globalizing Asian country.

At surface level it is like any nonfiction book. But especially for an American living in Japan, it is historical trivia on crack — closer to going on an archaeological dig than reading an explanatory text. As my neural synapses sparked connections between what I saw in daily life and what I read, all I could do was stab exclamation points to show appreciation for every reveal in Marx's timeline. CONNECT

Take Ivy

On the origin of improper English slogans:

Take Ivy was a project for a fashion photography book, where Kensuke Ishizu went to the East Coast with his clothing company VAN to document actual fashion on Ivy League campuses.

“The project needed a name. “Take Ivy” [was proposed]...but fluent English speaker Hasegawa countered that “Take Ivy” would make no sense to Americans. Like always, employees ignored Hasegawa's proper English corrections when they got in the way of artistic ambitions. To this day, Kurosu still proudly claims, “Someone who knows English never would have thought of that name!”” (64)

I realized that it's not necessarily because Japanese speakers

don't know English that I see rampant abuse of my language everywhere! It's because the act of appropriating English has long been deemed cool.

Ivy League

On the creation of fashion periodicals-cum-rulebook manuals:

“In the United States, Ivy League style was steeped in tradition, class privilege, and subtle social distinctions...they just imitated their fathers, brothers, and classmates. In Japan, [magazines] needed to break down Ivy into a distinct protocol so that a new convert could take up the style without having ever seen an actual American.” (48)

Well, that explains why female clothing in Omotesando is suspiciously formulaic: loose trench + Stan Smith sneakers, high ankle sock + Mary-Jane heel, pearl earrings + French braid.

Globalization of Fashion

Marx understands how predisposed we are to taking today's apparel for granted, and uses this to delightfully subvert any assumptions we might have about the globalization of fashion. His opening anecdote is about policemen arresting students for wearing button-up shirts in Ginza. Its sheer absurdity sets the tone for the entire book, and also douses a bucket of cold perspective over the reader — because really, when was the last time any of us thought about how revolutionary it is for Japanese people to wear Western clothing at all?



In many ways, “Ametora” is a reminder that truth is often stranger (and funnier) than fiction. But what gives Marx’s narrative torque is its push to show how Japanese fashion evolved far beyond copying WASP sensibilities. The “tying of vintage American garments to centuries-old forms of Japanese craftsmanship” was a process of internalization, allowing Japan to develop its own aesthetics and brands with cult followings. From Evisu jeans to A Bathing Ape hoodies, we have reached another turning point where it is Americans who now salivate over Japanese goods.

Hypocrisy

The allure of these clothes is not lost on me, either. I stroll around the PARCO in Shibuya window-shopping wistfully; even Western brands like Margaret Howell become beguiling through the lens of Japanese veneration. Then one day I catch myself considering an Adidas jacket that says “Tokyo” and realize I am no different from my students. Why would I accept this jacket but roll my eyes at a shirt which says Los Angeles?

Foreign Culture Fetishism

Ultimately, perhaps what one considers cool is simply what one finds to be foreign. Marx notes that “American tradition” was born in post-war Japan, out of the disparity between impoverished Japanese and their exotically affluent landlords. Such differences were tantalizing; they symbolized the possibilities of what Japan could become. If the subsequent Westernization of fashion reflected Japan’s desire for prosperity and status, my Tokyo Adidas jacket represented a desire for worldliness as an American expat.



Fashion as a form of self-expression

This was not a pleasant realization. Still, it was a reminder of how dressing is a way of voicing our subconscious self. We imbue clothes with our hopes and dreams, wear them to project our feelings, use them to delineate the person we were from the person we are. It’s no mystery then why fashion has always been the preoccupation of young adults. As the trend-making and rabble-rousing protagonists in “Ametora,” they are the ones trying to discover themselves amidst the upheavals of modernization.



Marx suffuses this adventure with equal parts romanticism and humor to give his work the zing of an extra espresso shot. Unlike most cultural history books, which must be broken down into x chapters per day, “Ametora’s” stories urge you onward, in rhythm with the restlessness of its characters. In this way it weaves an account of not only fashion, but also the youth and yearning of a growing Japan.

Angela is a 3rd year JET from the United States living in Ibaraki. She likes books, billiards, and bad jokes. You can follow her whereabouts on Instagram (@a_hs_u)

Finding My Place with the *Butterflies*

Amanda Garcia (Shizuoka)



All participants with the butterfly district got these temporary tattoos.



Every three years my town, Fujieda, holds a big local festival which has been happening for over 300 years. When the festival is held in early October, my town splits up into districts, and each district has their own *dashi* (portable float). During the festival, a group of individuals who live in each district will pull their *dashi* around town for hours, all the while performing traditional Japanese dances.

A Rare Opportunity

A group of friends and I were lucky enough to be invited by one of the districts to pull a *dashi* around town with them during the two days of the festival. We of course accepted the invitation. Not only would we be able to have the experience of pulling a *dashi* while wearing a *happi*, but we finally would be able to get more involved with our community.

I've been living in Fujieda for over a year now, and while I feel connected with my students, JTEs, and other ALTs in the area, it has been hard to feel like a real part of my town. Sure the *konbini* workers know my orders by heart, but it's been a bit hard to become a part of a medium-sized town in the middle of Shizuoka Prefecture. I have been looking for an opportunity to get to know others who live in my town, and this was finally my chance to do so.

So we did it. We pulled that *dashi* for a combined total of 23 hours over the two days of the festival with many of the others who live in the "butterfly district," which was the symbol of our float. To be honest, it was exhausting. Dancing, jumping, shouting, and pulling for hours on end, you're in for a serious full body workout.

The Real Reward

While pulling the *dashi*, I had the honor of meeting many of the wonderful people who also live in this town that I

now have come to call home. Not one of the people who were also pulling the *dashi* gave us looks or questioned why a group of foreigners were joining in this long-running, traditional festival. The only thing we were greeted with were smiles and unconditional, immediate kindness. These people who were strangers to us became fast friends. We got to know not only them but also their families, from their children to their great grandparents. We laughed, sang, and danced together, despite barely knowing any of the dances at the beginning of the festival and the language barrier. We ate our meals together and took quick naps together. Once all was said and done, we all exchanged LINE information and parted ways with promises of seeing each other again in the near future.

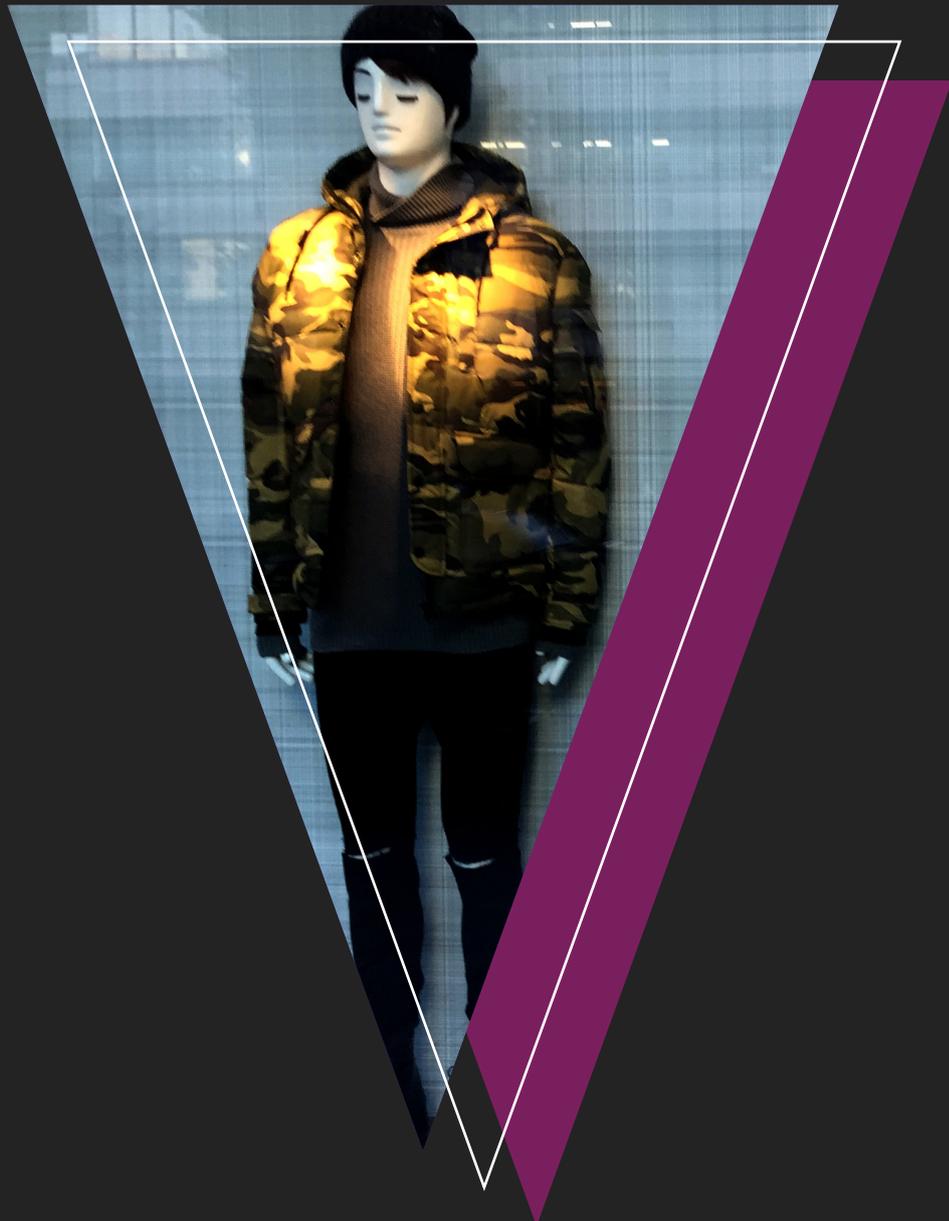
After over a year living here, I finally felt I was part of my town's community. Before the festival, I never thought there was a chance I would be fully accepted into my community. I heard plenty of stories about other JET's succeeding in it, but to me it felt like an impossible task. How was I supposed to put myself out there? Would they be too scared to talk to me once they figured out how limited my Japanese was? If I did a weird American thing would that be the deal breaker for a potential friendship? Turns out, making friends in the community was far easier than I expected. Also, my limited Japanese and American ways had no effect on my ability to make new friends in this midsize town in Shizuoka Prefecture. Turns out all it took for me to finally feel connected to my town was just answering an invitation with "yes."

Amanda Garcia hails from the concrete jungle of New York yet was raised among the reptilian beings who rule central Florida. Growing bored of her constant gladiator gator battles in the harsh marshes, she journeyed far to the East to see what adventures were awaiting her.

Down We Go

The Decline of Fashion in Japan

Patrick Finn (Toyama, JET alumni)



When did every store in Japan become an H&M knockoff?

Long ago, even before arriving in 2011, one could frequent shops dedicated to different style subgenres, and find shops that catered to their needs, wants, desires, and fantasies. Now everything's a blur. What happened?

The Past

Remember Harajuku, the hidden alcoves filled with fashion forward boutiques, not those awful shops on touristy Takeshita Street? It had nuggets appealing to all shoppers; that's if your wallet could handle it. Shibuya's PARCO and the dearly-missed 101 City housed slightly more affordable brands. Even low-end shops like WEGO, SPINNS, and newcomer GU would stock styles unique to Japan. UNIQLO was king of basic work wear and puffy jackets. Muji, was for slightly overpriced mountain gear. Or rather, what *mori* boys and girls thought people in the mountains wore.

The Problem

Now, it's a different story. With the rise of fast fashion brands like H&M and Forever XXI in Japan, and an overbearing global style (thanks to a number of factors which warrant their own

article), Japan's fashion scene, particularly for men, has become a sea of sameness.

These days, there are two choices: UNIQLO basics or Korean knockoffs.

Furthermore, famous brands, not only limited to men's fashion, are closing left and right in Harajuku. This is due to not being able to compete with fast fashion brands "borrowing" their ideas and selling them for a fraction of the price.

"What happens when all the brands being plagiarised are forced to close shop..."

Misha Janette goes into more detail about this in her three-part article on knockoffs in Harajuku, starting here <http://bit.ly/2e0e8H9>.

The Solution?

So, what would the ideal men's fashion be like? Well, that's a tough question to answer, since the previous and current scenarios have their positives and negatives.

Looking back, in Japan predating my time (2011-2016), when

fast fashion didn't dominate the market, one invested in their clothing. Choices were limited and expensive. Buy a piece and it was going to last you for a long time. Certain brands, and more adventurous choices, were out of the general public's reach. One of the advantages was that people maintained more of an identity.

Now, most people have access to a plethora of styles that they would have otherwise never been

able to afford. People can experiment and express themselves more fully. On the flipside designs are being plagiarised, causing original creators and brands to suffer financially. Furthermore, with the ability to buy cheap, trendy clothing, pieces are no longer made to stand the test of time. There's been a huge increase in the negative consequences

associated with fashion on a global scale. Watch *The True Cost* <http://nflx.it/2ejQUPo> on Netflix if you want to learn more.

The Future

What happens when all the brands being plagiarised are forced to close shop and those new ideas stop flowing? Will fashion reach a plateau of evolution, regurgitating the same trends over and over? Will it find new sources of "inspiration"? Will these innovators give in to corporate culture?



The latter has already happened, with collaborations between fast fashion brands and designers becoming a regular occurrence. One example of this is Alexander Wang's 2014 collaboration with H&M. The price range for such collaborative collections is still higher than the store's usual line, but the quality's heavily diminished. Also, the demand is so high it's rare to even see pieces in the stores themselves. EBay ends up being the new marketplace, with extremely inflated prices..

Oddly enough, and thanks to my dear friend Chrissy, whom you might remember from the April 2014 issue of *CONNECT* <http://bit.ly/2dmture>, I've been following the cosmetic industry and the impact the online community, i.e. YouTube and Instagram, has had in recent years. How does this relate to fashion? Well, social media moguls have been gaining more ground in the cosmetic industry, releasing their own products and doing collaborations with companies like MAC. Perhaps this is what will happen to fashion on a larger scale as well. The consumer becomes the new inspiration and designer that the market may need to survive. However, even with all this gloom and doom, not all is lost for fashion!

The Optimism

Street fashion lives and has become a blend of high-end and fast fashion pieces, put together in a way only possible in Japan. The same type of clothing might be taking over the world, but exploring how to wear it is a different story. Shying away from the hipster-eque aesthetic overtaking the market (raises hand as an occasional victim), websites

TokyoFashion.com

<http://bit.ly/1Pswe0n> share these gems.

The Dream

Iris Apfel once said “fashion you can buy, but style you possess.” No matter the road which fashion in Japan takes, or anywhere in the world for that matter, it all rests on the people wearing the clothes.

Cheaper brands aren't necessarily bad, as they give the everyday person more freedom to play with fashion. But when those businesses oversaturate the market and begin to copy each other to the point that any individuality is lost, then there's an issue. The dream would be a balance of both. Possibly this:

- Higher-end brands with their own character
- Mid-tier options for basics and other timeless pieces, affordable by most and the base for experimenting
- Cheaper lines that respect not only others' designs, but also their global impact

Of course, what will actually happen is another story. Things will certainly change, as they always do, but only time will tell.

Patrick Finn is the former Head Designer for CONNECT, ex-Toyama JET of five years, and definitely not a fashion expert. He currently spends his time doing design-related work when he can and photographing what he eats, because, let's face it, who doesn't crave those Insta-likes? Follow him on Instagram

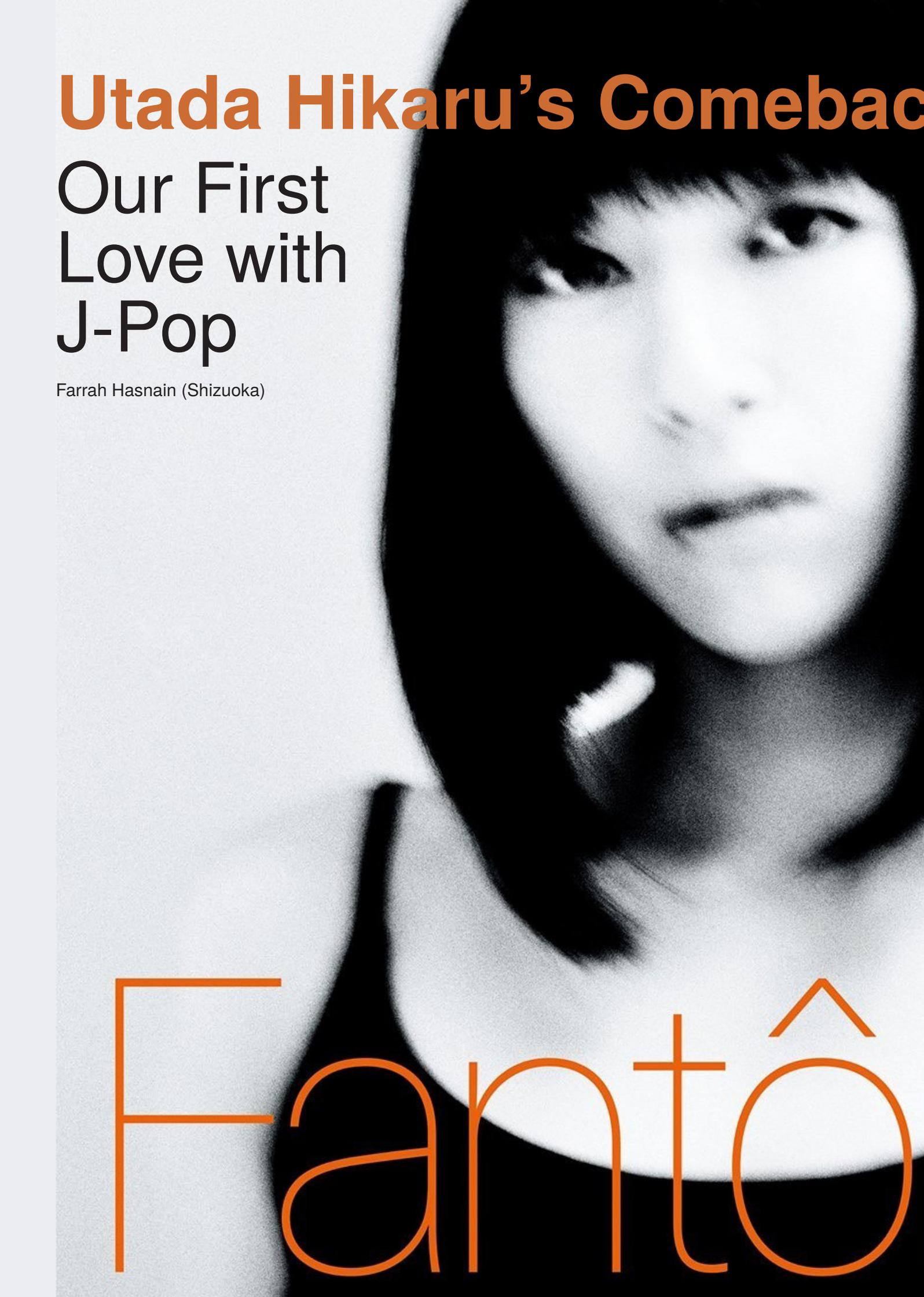
*<http://bit.ly/2efXZPs>], [Twitter](https://twitter.com/pmfinn)
<http://bit.ly/2e6uRwa>, and check out his website, pmfinn.com
<http://bit.ly/2dze2Xz>.*



Utada Hikaru's Comeback

Our First Love with J-Pop

Farrah Hasnain (Shizuoka)



Fantô

ek

My first J-pop song was “Simple & Clean” by Utada Hikaru, which was featured in the video game “Kingdom Hearts” in 2003. By junior high school, I had listened to her major hits thousands of times. The daughter of renowned enka singer Keiko Fuji, Utada carries her family’s legacy as she draws her audience with her individuality. Fans can play through Utada’s life in her discography. Her new album “Fantôme” especially reflects her personal growth as an artist.

The Making of “Fantôme”: Mourning & Closure

Utada has confirmed that “Fantôme” is dedicated to her now deceased mother, who took her own life in 2013. In past interviews, Utada mentioned her mother’s mental illness, made several references to motherhood in her lyrics, became a mother herself in 2015, and was pregnant while she was recording this new album. “Fantôme” composes Utada’s eulogy for her mother and the end of Utada’s own hiatus.

Beginning with the album’s artwork, Utada commemorates her mother by becoming her spitting image. The Japanese edition features a strategically blurred black-and-white photo of Utada with blunt bangs and long hair, which drastically contrasts with her past looks. The rest of the photos inside the album’s booklet are in color as she walks through forests and darkness, possibly emulating her mother’s journey to the next life, which is referenced in the songs on the album.

Utada’s Sequence

The album consists of 12 songs and, unlike any of the albums Utada has ever released, this one has no English titles. In past interviews she revealed that she would use English lyrics to express her thoughts less directly. “Fantôme” opens with the very upbeat “道” (“Road”), and the rest of the tracks constantly move between upbeat and mellow tunes. My top three favorite tracks are “忘却” (“Forgotten”), “ともだち” (“Friend”), and “俺の彼女” (“My Girl”).

For “Forgotten,” which is probably the most beautifully painful track to hear, Utada collaborates with underground rapper KOHH. I interpret it as a narrative, where KOHH comes from the perspective of someone in a coffin and Utada sings from the viewpoint of someone reciting a eulogy. In an interview before the album’s release, Utada revealed that “Friend” is from the perspective of a gay person who falls in love with their straight friend. Also on Twitter, she revealed to a fan that she might not be straight herself. The song itself is a nice pick-me-up for those who have ever felt that their unrequited love was just as inevitable as their desire to become more than just friends. Finally, in “My Girl,” we get to hear Utada become sassy, sultry, and vulnerable all in one track, a side she has never shown before. The message in this song along with “Friend” resemble her mother’s music in several ways, but with her own twist on the melody.

Overall, Utada’s new album stands out a lot and reflects her mother’s musical and artistic influence. Yet even so, her comeback with this orchestrated eulogy reminds us of the Utada we fell in love with: a woman who picks up from her strife and nurtures her pain with music to welcome a healing experience.

Farrah is a 3rd year ALT in Shizuoka. She enjoys cheesy puns and traveling the world. Follow her on Twitter <http://bit.ly/2euwMd1>

me

NOVEMBER RELEASES

Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)

In need of entertainment? Each month, *CONNECT* brings you the latest information on upcoming releases and events in Japan. Here is the most anticipated entertainment for November!

Movies

- 4 Nov** *Sausage Party*
- 12 Nov** *Kiniro Mosaic: Pretty Days*
- 23 Nov** *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*

Concerts, Shows, & Events

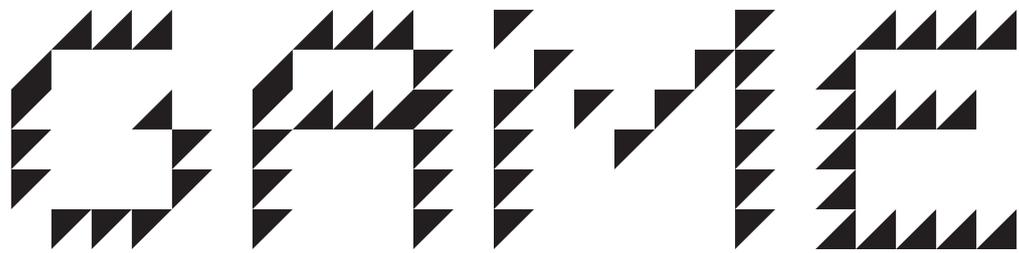
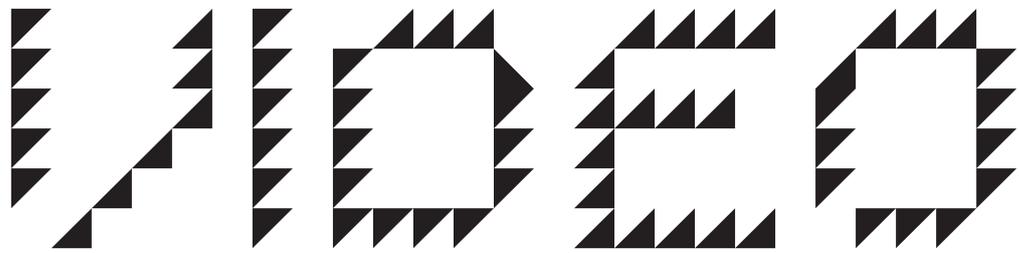
- 31 Oct - 28 Dec** UVERWORLD National Tour — Sapporo City, Hokkaido, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka, Hiroshima City, Hiroshima, and Tokyo
- 29 Nov - 27 Dec** BIGBANG National Tour — Nagoya City, Aichi, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka, and Osaka City, Osaka
- 3, 4, and 12 Nov** Perfume National Tour — Nagoya City, Aichi, and Fukuoka City, Fukuoka

Games

- 18 Nov** *Pokemon Sun/Moon* on Nintendo 3DS
- 29 Nov** *Final Fantasy XV* on Playstation 4 and Xbox One

Sources

<http://imdb.to/1DZWXgA>
<http://bit.ly/MxVjLD>
<http://bit.ly/2aVRGOE>



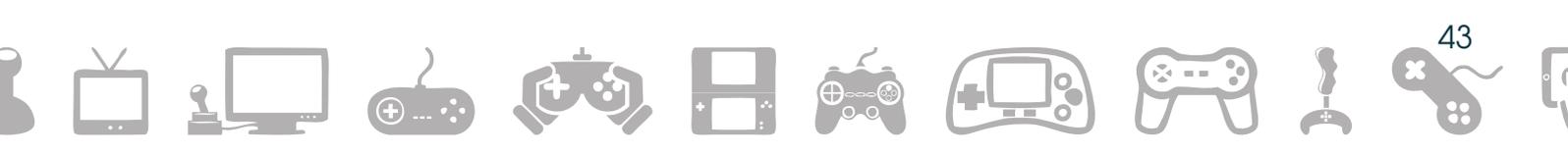
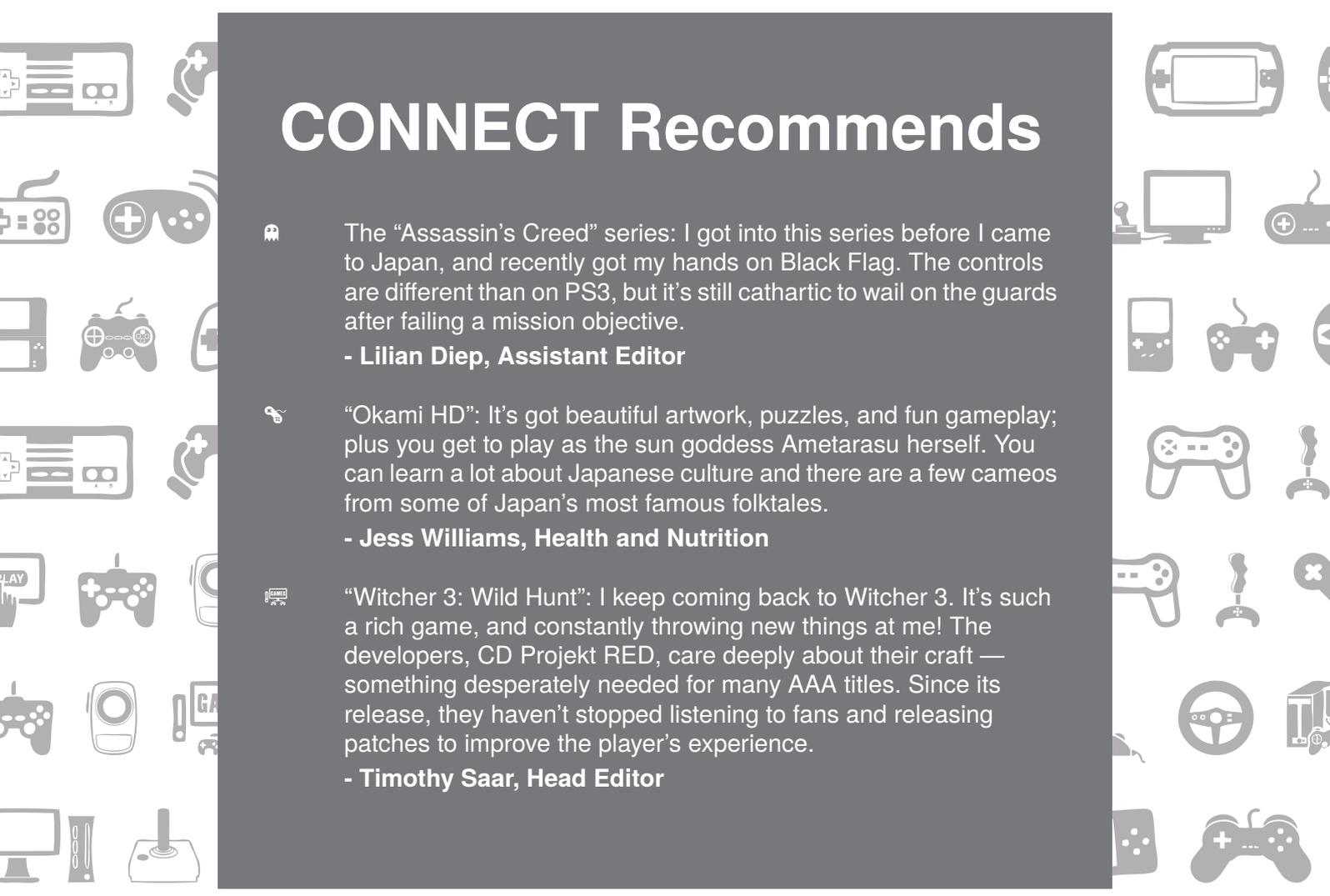
Recommendations

Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)



CONNECT Recommends

-  The “Assassin’s Creed” series: I got into this series before I came to Japan, and recently got my hands on Black Flag. The controls are different than on PS3, but it’s still cathartic to wail on the guards after failing a mission objective.
- **Lilian Diep, Assistant Editor**
-  “Okami HD”: It’s got beautiful artwork, puzzles, and fun gameplay; plus you get to play as the sun goddess Ametarasu herself. You can learn a lot about Japanese culture and there are a few cameos from some of Japan’s most famous folktales.
- **Jess Williams, Health and Nutrition**
-  “Witcher 3: Wild Hunt”: I keep coming back to Witcher 3. It’s such a rich game, and constantly throwing new things at me! The developers, CD Projekt RED, care deeply about their craft — something desperately needed for many AAA titles. Since its release, they haven’t stopped listening to fans and releasing patches to improve the player’s experience.
- **Timothy Saar, Head Editor**





Stay a While
AND PLAY



Tokyo Game Show (TGS) is an annual video game expo held in the Makuhari Messe Convention Center in Chiba Prefecture. The event has seen an increase in global exhibitors as it has gained legitimacy and notoriety abroad. A record 614 companies and groups attended this year's event, with over half of those coming from abroad, and the show also saw its highest attendance yet, with 271,244 visitors between 15 and 18 Sept.

With the motto of "Press Start to Play the Future," the event channeled a spirit of innovation and change. The Indie Gaming Section saw an increase from 98 exhibitors in 2015 to 119 this year. Paired with the Indie section was the annual "Sense of Wonder Night" celebration, which threw the spotlight on eight notable, inspirational indie titles. In addition, the brand-new virtual reality section boasted a whopping 110 exhibits dedicated to VR games and technology.

Many of Japan's top gaming companies made an effort to showcase the future through their own lenses. Square Enix, Sony, Sega, and Capcom had the largest booths this year, but even smaller booths like DMM Games and 2K Games were able to draw attention with flashy dioramas, official cosplayers, and towering posters.

But games and developers are just one part of the equation of what made TGS such an experience. A big part of the magic comes from the crowds of fans, cosplayers, and photographers, all darting from booth to booth to take in as much of the overall experience as possible. Unlike E3 — the world's largest annual gaming expo — TGS offers day tickets, which allow members of the general public to take part in what the industry has

to offer for only ¥1000 - ¥1200. It's a unique opportunity that makes TGS a more intimate experience for the average gamer.

As guests, press, and developers alike were ushered out of the hall at the end of the day, I think everyone had found something that stuck with them. Here are some of our memorable sights and experiences from TGS 2016.

Not So 'Virtual' After All Winsor Yang (Oita)

Push open the doors to the darkened exhibition halls of Tokyo Game Show, and a flood of sound rushes out to envelop you. The familiar arpeggios of the "Final Fantasy" series blend with eerie music emanating from Capcom's "Resident Evil" display. Mythical beasts roar over the clinking of virtual coins and the "pew-pew" sound of 8-bit lasers. Beneath it all, the chatter of the crowd flows around the booths like a powerful undercurrent. Top it off with colorful cosplays, flashing lights, and giant balloon floats, and the whole experience is quite overwhelming. Even without any virtual reality equipment, it's like diving into a different world. But once adjusted, you are inexorably pulled in and caught up in the whole thing. You are immersed in a world where gaming *is* the reality.

For many, virtual reality holds the key to the immersive gaming experience that developers have been chasing for years. The brand-new virtual reality section at TGS 2016 featured various platforms including "Whiteout," a skiing simulator by the Taiwan-based Futuretown, as well as Sony's new Playstation VR. Despite the long queue times and limited slots, people seemed excited to literally try their hands at the new technology.





But why stop at touch? A group of students from ITE College Central in Singapore are working on a project that appeals to the other senses. Their horror-mystery game, “Tainted,” is hooked up to an aroma diffuser and releases different scents based on in-game cues. If you catch a whiff of banana, the Pontianak ghost of Malay legend may very well be creeping up right behind you!

Perhaps this explains the recent buzz surrounding VR: it represents the next step forward for the industry. When VR lets you ride a roller coaster in your bedroom, gaming transforms from an activity to a physical medium and the possibilities are mind-boggling. As one developer aptly put it, “virtual reality has the potential to disrupt *any* industry that has a monopoly on experience.”

Despite all this talk, the core of video games is still people. Games need players. They need enthusiasts who will wait ten years for a game, or fans who will stand in line for hours to purchase merchandise. TGS is exactly where those people gather. It’s a chance to join a community, to support the developers we appreciate and respect, and maybe even to discover something completely new in the process. With TGS we can do this every year. So, if I can “Press Start to Play the Future,” I’ll be eagerly mashing that button until next year. Every year.

Winsor is a popular children’s ride (and second-year JET) in Oita Prefecture. When given a break from piggyback duties, he enjoys terrible puns and playing games not called “Tag.”

Two Sides of the Same Coin

Rebecca Guttentag (Oita)

While walking around TGS for my third year, I started thinking a lot about fish. As I got dragged into the raging current of the crowd surrounding the Square Enix booth, I couldn’t help but think that of all the fish in the TGS pond, this was certainly one of the biggest.

This should come as no surprise. Square Enix has been a top mogul of the Japanese gaming scene for decades, with popular series such as “Dragon Quest,” “Final Fantasy,” and “Tomb Raider” in its roster. However, this year they faced harsh criticism for delaying the release of “Final Fantasy XV.” This pushback from September to November gave the company an opportunity to showcase “Final Fantasy XV” among its already jam-packed lineup at this year’s TGS.

Full disclosure: I am a big Square Enix fan. When I found out that they would have demos for their biggest titles, including “Final Fantasy,” I was fully prepared to wait for hours to test each game. Like anyone who is a fan of anything knows, nostalgia is a powerful driving force, and that is a big motivator for companies. It’s why a large chunk of titles put on display by A-list game developers at this year’s TGS were sequels or new franchise installments. It pays for big name developers to build off of already established franchises because of their loyal fanbases.

So of course I stood in line for three hours to play “Final Fantasy XV,” but I’d be lying if I said that was the most exciting part of my TGS experience. In fact, I’d say that *most* of that excitement came from the smaller developers.

The indie section had more games available to try than any year before it. For these companies,

it's both a curse and a blessing to have to start from the bottom of the food chain. Unlike their bigger competitors, many don't have years of support to help bolster sales. Their draw *must* come from innovation, and innovation was the name of the game this year.

Some built off of familiar ideas with a twist, such as "Dobotone," a "Sense of Wonder Night" award-winning title from Argentinian developer VIDEOGAMO. In "Dobotone," four players compete across a series of short party games like "Mario Party," but the game's main quirk comes from the fifth player, a Game Master who can change the way the players experience the game by affecting speed, gravity, distortion, and more via a separate console.

Others brought quieter, more introspective experiences. "Unworded," by French developer Bento Studio, is a puzzle game where you create objects with letters to help a novelist navigate his own mind. Similarly, "OPUS: The Day We Found Earth" by Taiwanese developer SIGONO is a quiet adventure game about a robot exploring the universe in search of Earth. Each eschews action in favor of more intimate, creative endeavors.

Exploring both sides of the show was like seeing two sides of the same coin. Both styles of development use their inherent strengths to appeal to the different desires of their audiences: one continuing the stories of familiar worlds, another finding new ones and new

experiences.

It can be hard to pull yourself away from what's familiar and safe to take a chance with something new, but TGS 2016 proved that there are some fantastic independent developers to check out if we're willing to give them a shot. After all, there are plenty of fish in the sea.

Rebecca is a third year ALT in Beppu City and also a huge nerd. When she's not teaching or playing games at home, she's probably forgetting something important or procrastinating on something equally important.

A World of Pure Immersion

Lauren Drew (Oita)

As I meandered through the large crowds, trying to not get trapped in the frenzy of cosplayers, photographers, and fans, I found myself wondering exactly what it was about video games that brought each of us to Chiba. What is it that video games do for us? How can games help us grow? These questions were never far from my mind as I explored the crowded hall. I've always been interested in uncovering the meanings we assign to our virtual experiences. Somewhere in the middle of observing participants, speaking to developers, and enjoying several demos, I found an answer: immersion.

Fiction is a powerful force, but video games have





a particular characteristic that allows them to further immerse us in their world. Unlike other storytelling mediums, the player is given an active role in advancing the plot. Even in games that use a traditional, linear storyline, the player still struggles alongside the protagonists. They are able to share in the characters' feelings of triumph when tackling a difficult challenge, and experience the same frustration with an enemy who just refuses to quit. There has been an increase in popularity of games that break from this mold as well. Character customization allows players to interact directly with the game and, to a certain degree, affect the outcome of the story. The idea that our choices and actions have a direct impact on the game world creates a bridge between the "real" and "virtual" characters, allowing for a truly immersive experience.

The real highlight of my own experience at TGS is the intersection of where all the above meet: the new virtual reality section. In the past, VR has been dismissed as too expensive and too "niche" to compete with big name developers. However, this year we saw the release of the Sony PlayStation VR, a VR headset that works directly with the PS4. While

still expensive, Sony has secured VR a place in the mainstream that it didn't previously have.

Virtual reality brings gaming to a whole new level of immersion. I eagerly waited in line to test "Headbutt Factory," a PSVR game by Gemdrops that uses the player's head motion to launch a ball at breakable targets. With people watching me, I thought that I would feel self-conscious, but I didn't. When I pulled the visor over my eyes, it was as though I had truly been transported. The bright, cartoony graphics seemed no more out of place than the exhibition hall had moments before. I walked away impressed and filled with anticipation.

However, of even greater importance to me, is the potential I see for VR to go beyond standard conventions of gaming. For years, VR has been used in combination with cognitive therapy as a psychiatric treatment for anxiety disorders. We have even seen game developers work with psychologists to create programs to aid in reducing the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

There were several exhibits this year with broad applications. Among them was "BrainwaveVR,"

developed by Japan's Dentsu ScienceJam, which generates images and sounds based on the user's brainwaves with the intention of reducing stress levels. Another was France's "3DRUDDER," a foot-controlled device that can be used to navigate various motion-controlled applications ranging from Computer Aided Design to drone flying simulations.

With all of these new and expanding ventures in VR technology, I believe that greater accessibility will act as a catalyst, transforming and expanding the limits

of the gaming industry. With the increased promotion of VR at TGS 2016, the fantastical future of virtual reality no longer feels like wishful dreaming. It is truly the way of the future.

Lauren is a second year JET and a long-time gaming enthusiast living in Oita Prefecture. Outside of school, she is most likely to be found in a karaoke box, or in her car that she likes to pretend is a karaoke box.



Crowded Hall

Who What When Wear

Roxanne Ghezzi (Gifu) Garen Aronian (Gifu)



Who

Say hello to Garen Aronian! He's an elementary and junior high school ALT in Gifu Prefecture. Originally from Ottawa, Canada, Garen has been living in the beautiful city of Takayama for almost two years now and plans to stay for a third. In his free time, he enjoys traveling around Japan and studying Japanese whenever possible.

What

If I were to describe my style in two words, it would be "classy casual." I wear for both comfort and look. I'm not a big shopper, but when I do go shopping for clothes, I like to spend my money on ones that I know are made well and will last me a while. My outlook is to spend a little more on better quality clothing in order to get more use and save money in the end.

As Uniqlo is the only large retail store that's conveniently close to me, I'll often go there to shop for clothes. It's a great store to find lots of versatile clothing for a really affordable price.

When?

Usually, I dress up more for work and work-related events such as speech contests or meetings. However, I also travel and socialize with people a lot in more casual situations. Having versatile clothing to choose from is something that I really value. I own a lot of nice shirts that I can either wear out with friends or slap a tie on and a suit jacket over for a more formal occasion.

Wear?

I bought the dark grey pants from Uniqlo. They're comfortable to wear and the color can easily go with anything. The plaid black and grey button-up shirt was custom tailored to me by the Canadian clothing company Surmesur. Surmesur is a men's wear boutique that produces custom tailored and original clothing according to the specific measurements of their customers.

When I purchased my shirt, I selected the cloth and pattern that it would be made from. I also chose the collar color, sleeve type, neckline, and how many buttons my shirt would have. The sales associates measured my arm length, torso, and neck to produce a well-made shirt that was perfectly tailored to my body type. To purchase this kind of service from a standard tailor, you'd be looking at a price tag of around 400 Canadian dollars. However, this shirt only cost me about 130 Canadian dollars.

LIFESTYLE

HEALTH & NUTRITION EDITORS

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Pameline Kang

*Tis the season for cute fuzzy socks!
Tralalalala-lala-lala~*

Jessica Williams

*Finally it's time to break out all the cute
Autumn scarves and gloves I've been
hoarding!*

TRAVEL EDITORS

connect.travel@ajet.net

Dylan Brain

*So it seems I forgot to pack my winter
clothes...*

Lara Bigotti

*Get out and enjoy the turning of the leaves
with an autumn hike.*





TOUR DE NIPPON

Pia Peterson (Yamagata)

Sometimes it's hard to find the 'real' Japan. I mean we live here, clearly everything and everyone around us is real, with their own histories and opinions and chips in the lacquer that bely experience. But if you sometimes find yourself standing in line at the *conbini* or at a foreign grocery store like Costco buying fried chicken and peanut butter and wonder how after traveling thousands of miles everything seems so same-same, it might be time to pledge to get out of the bubble more.

There's nothing wrong with the comforts of home—that's not the point I'm trying to make at all. But Japan has a rich cultural history with its own comforts and comfort foods, and not all of them are as unappetizing as warm *natto*. One man trying to share Japan's charms with travelers and newcomers to the area is Lucas Badtke-Berkow, an American ex-pat and all-around cool dude. Lucas is the creator and CEO of the Knee-High Media group, which puts out the celebrated travel magazine PaperSky with a small, dedicated, and creative team.

For many travelers to Japan, your options to get around are rail, domestic flights with cheap airlines like Peach, or night bus. Despite the beautiful country views from the windows of the bullet train, a lot goes on in those towns and past the rice paddies that you miss from the windows. As a fairly regular bike-rider (I use that term because I don't want to give the impression that you need to be an Olympian to ride a bike – anyone with access to a mama cherry can ride a bike!), I feel like I've discovered so much in Japan that I wouldn't have seen, smelled, or stumbled into without a bicycle.

Lucas says, "Cycling is the best way to travel on earth. The only energy you use is your own. You are hit

directly by the surrounding air, smells and greetings of the people you pass. The speed of the bicycle is slow enough to 'truly' experience a place and fast enough to enjoy the concept of travel moving from one culture to another."

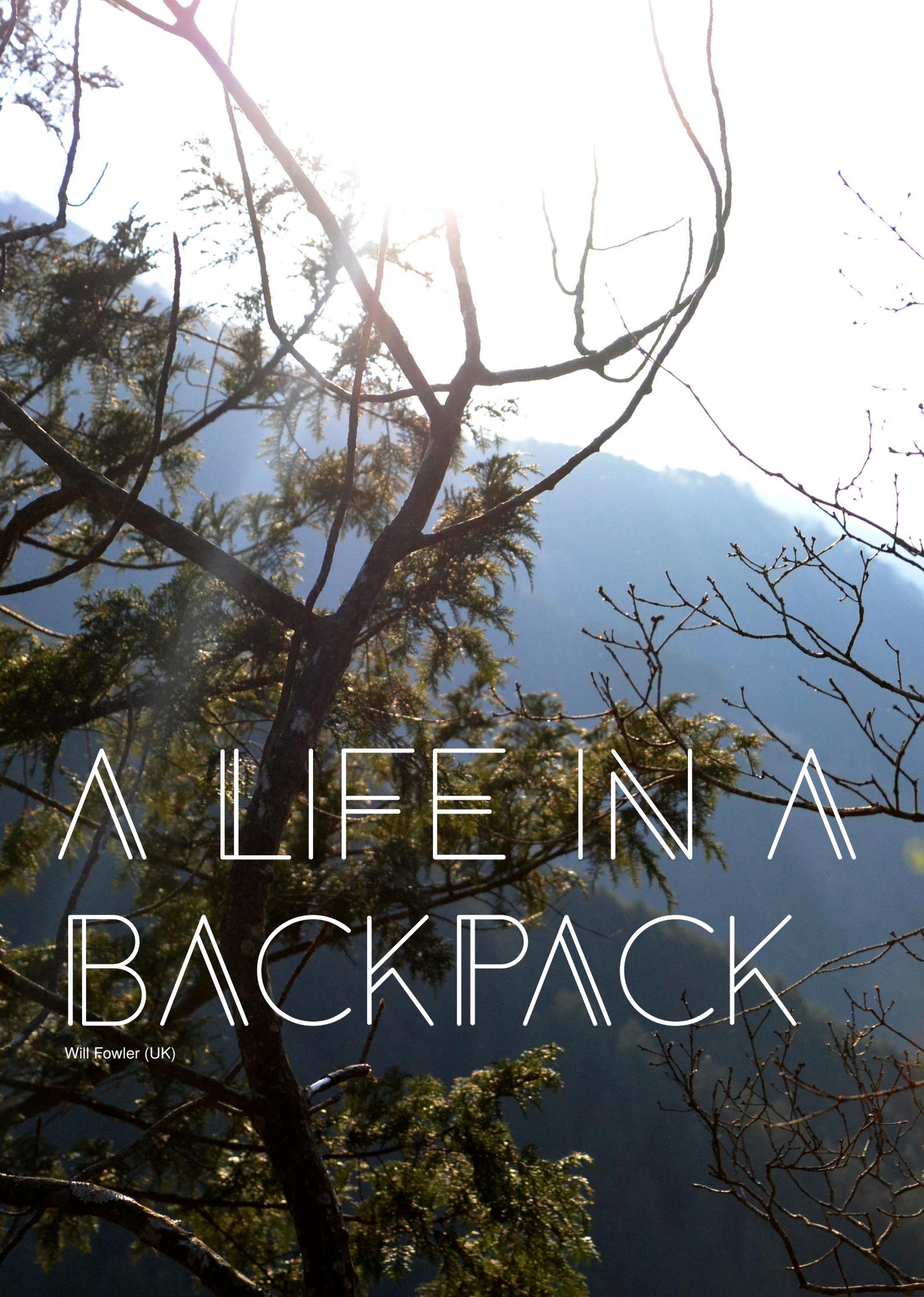
Tour de Nippon helps connect people with bicycles with these Japanese rural communities that are so often passed by at 130 miles per hour. This past year, they've held rides in Nagoya, Nara and Tenri, and on the Noto peninsula; previously they've biked the likes of Tokyo, Kagoshima, and Aomori. The rides last about two days, and are led by a local expert who often specializes in a certain aspect of Japanese culture, such as mountain life and hiking, food, or literary history. Cyclists ride together for safety, and eat and learn together with meals cooked by local chefs and workshops led by some of Japan's hidden treasures.

Whether you've got family visiting or just want to get out of the city and breathe in that blue-green air, it's a great opportunity to give something back to Japan's rural communities while learning about and seeing a part of Japan that's integral to the culture, yet so often overlooked.

For those of you who want to travel, the company also produces bicycle maps for Tokyo, Hiroshima, Kyoto, Hyogo and more cities focusing on food, craft, and a good time on two wheels.

The next ride will be a Kyo-Tango ride in March 2017.

Pia Peterson was a JET in Yamagata prefecture; she's now running circles around NYC and comparative testing all the ramen.



A LIFE IN A
BACKPACK

Will Fowler (UK)

As I sit here for what must be the fiftieth time in my little room surrounded by what can only be described as mountain of junk, I wonder how I can do the impossible: fit my life's belongings into the 30kg (plus hand luggage) that I can take with me on an airplane. Sure, I could pay the outrageous fees and take more stuff with me, but then I'm that weirdo in a backpacker's inn who shows up with two backpacks, a wheelie suitcase, three pairs of skis, and a laptop bag.

While it does seem like an impossible task to survive on what you can carry alone, it can and must be done when looking at travelling. I have traveled in pretty much every style, with the possible exception of the Prince of Sheba. I have backpacked around Asia, lived out of a truck for several months in Africa, done ski seasons in every part of the world, been cycling, climbing, hiking, whatever. So, you may have assumed by now that I would have the whole packing thing down to an art form, yet I still always end up over packing and regretting it. However, I am getting better and better at it every time, and I think I'm getting pretty close. I am going to break down what I believe every intrepid traveler should have with them, and why that is all that they should have.

Once again, I am going to restate that you should travel as light as possible. It is easy to justify taking that extra shirt, or pair of shoes, and those skinny jeans that you just love so much. This is a trap! Do not fall into it, no matter how much you don't want to become that smelly hippy person that only travels with what seems to be three outfits, you may have to. There is a reason that backpackers don't carry a lot and

don't seem to own anything, because it is the only real way that you are able to travel around. Now obviously I am not talking about when you have a base of operations and are just going away for a week or maybe two. I am talking about your one month to several-years-long style trips. The real soul-searching world of exploring trips that we all dream of. And if you do choose to become that weird smelly person, that is on you; there is definitely space for hygiene in a backpacker's life.

So, let us begin with the basics. To begin travelling you need a bag, and this is a very important place to begin. The brand name or whether it has a cute little pattern on it doesn't matter. What *does* matter is that it is a good and strong bag. This bag will carry your life in it, so you don't want a cheap, flimsy one that will fall apart after a few weeks of moving around. A good bag with lots of pockets that hold 55-90 liters would be my suggestion, size based on length of trip and your own physical limitations. Not being a giant, I think about 70 liters is perfect for me. If possible, get one that has an built-in rain cover as well. This will definitely come in handy as many of the world's most popular backpacking destinations seem to come with built-in monsoon seasons. One that has a separate compartment for your dirty laundry/sleeping bag is great, too, and ideally one that you can strap things to the outside of, like sleeping mats or national flags — whatever floats your boat. In addition to this behemoth of a back, a smaller day pack is a necessity, probably no bigger than 30 to 40 liters, so that you can leave the main bag in the hostel while you go out exploring on a day to day basis.

Now when you are travelling there are a few things that you can simply not do without, and no I'm not talking about your lucky underwear or favourite sneakers. I am talking of the true essentials, the ones that money can't help you out with.

- Passport
- Bank Cards
- Cash
- List of medications, allergies, medical history
- Travel Itinerary
- Visa documents
- Passport photos
- Photocopies of all the above

These are the things that must be kept safe at all times, if you lose other things then you can always buy more, no matter how much of an inconvenience it is. Have somewhere that you can stash these things and keep hold of them, although maybe have your money in various forms and in various places about you and your bags. Never carry too much cash, cards can be very useful.

Next on the list of things you will always need but is easy to overdo is your toiletries. One small toilet bag should be sufficient;

- Toothbrush and paste
- Personal grooming kit (razor, hairbrush)
- Medications¹
- First aid kit – very basic (painkillers, plasters, alcohol wipes)
- Knife
- Nail clippers
- Sun cream – very important
- Shampoo/conditioner*
- Birth control
- Cosmetics*

1 How much you need here will depend on length of trip and destination. In places like Southeast Asia, you can probably buy what you need for less than you could back home so don't take too much with you. Plus, it looks

suspicious to go through customs with an entire pharmacy in your bag, so if you have any strong medication with you then a prescription may be worth carrying with you.

2 Better to have it and not need it than the other way around
* AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE. Nobody will care how glammed up you are while travelling, so take as little as you can. Plus, this stuff is expensive, easy to lose, and takes up space, particularly your fancy moisturisers. Take a little bit if you absolutely must, but you really don't need a lot. I have a small bottle of face moisturizer for dry skin, and that is sufficient.

So now that we have discussed the things that will save your life, let us talk about the things that will get you by in the day to day, like clothing. As a general rule I don't take anything that I would be upset if I lost it. On the contrary I take things that I expect to leave when I return. That said I do choose things that show off a bit of my personality, whether it be a Star Wars t-shirt or one with a funny pun on it. It is easy to be lost in the sea of backpackers so choosing things that make you stand out as yourself is important, and I will devote the last list to that entirely.

- 5 t-shirts
- 1 nice shirt for smarter occasions
- 1 raincoat
- 1 hoodie / jumper / sweater
- 4 pairs of socks
- 4 pairs underwear
- 1 pair of trousers
- 1 pair of shorts
- 1 pair of good shoes
- 1 microtowel
- 2 beanies
- 2 pairs sunglasses
- 1 universal power adaptor
- Cup
- Spoon
- Bug spray
- Earplugs
- A pen
- Bath plug+

Now while this may not seem like a lot, that bag will get real heavy real quick, so don't jump into throwing in your whole wardrobe now.

+ This may seem an odd one, but a lot of hostels have baths or sinks but remove the plugs, and sometimes it can be real nice to take one with you. I found a collapsible cup from a dollar store to be perfect for this as the suction it formed around the plug hole worked perfectly.

Onto the gadgets

- E-book – The most important item. You will have lots of periods of waiting or sitting for long stretches. While many, including myself, prefer paper books, they simply weigh too much.
- Mobile phone (obviously)
- Music player
- Camera
- Ear buds x 2
- USB Stick

With modern technology you may be able to fit many or all of these items into one, but I personally wouldn't suggest it, as most modern phones have a battery life span that is somewhere between that of a housefly and the amount of time it would take Usain Bolt to run 100m. If you are travelling in a group, then just one person can have a decent camera, allowing the other to have space for the chargers and maybe some portable speakers.

So there we have all the things that you will need to travel competently. However, I am going to include one final list that I call my sanity preservers or personality keepers. I always leave a little section of my bag clear for those bits that will allow me to keep myself me while I travel. Now, I am a cross between a geek and a gym junkie, so my list reflects that.

- Playing Cards and box of mini dice
- Micro Board Games x 3
- Ocarina
- Running Gear – shoes, tank top, trousers
- Climbing shoes

- Resistance bands
- Headphone splitter
- Laptop

This is the section of your baggage where you can really let your personality shine through and take those things that you just can't live without. It allows you to fill in any gaps you found in the lists above that just weren't enough for you. An extra hat, dress, top, poi, hiking gear, juggling balls, etc. As well as my fitness things in there, I have various items (cards, games, musical instrument) that are social items and make it easier for you to make friends and pass time along the way. The headphone splitter makes listening to music on a bus a social thing or you can watch a movie, etc. The laptop is definitely an optional item here, guys. They can be very helpful but also very bulky. I will leave that one in your hands.

So, there you have it: what I carry with me so that I can fit my life on my back. It may not sound like a lot but trust me it all adds up, so try to resist that urge to take more. That extra kilogram or two that you carry can make getting around just that bit harder and less pleasant. You can always buy something if you need it, and it's nice to have a bit of space in your bag to pick up a memento or two. And on that note, I will put away my laptop and get back to trying to cram all my stuff into a bag.

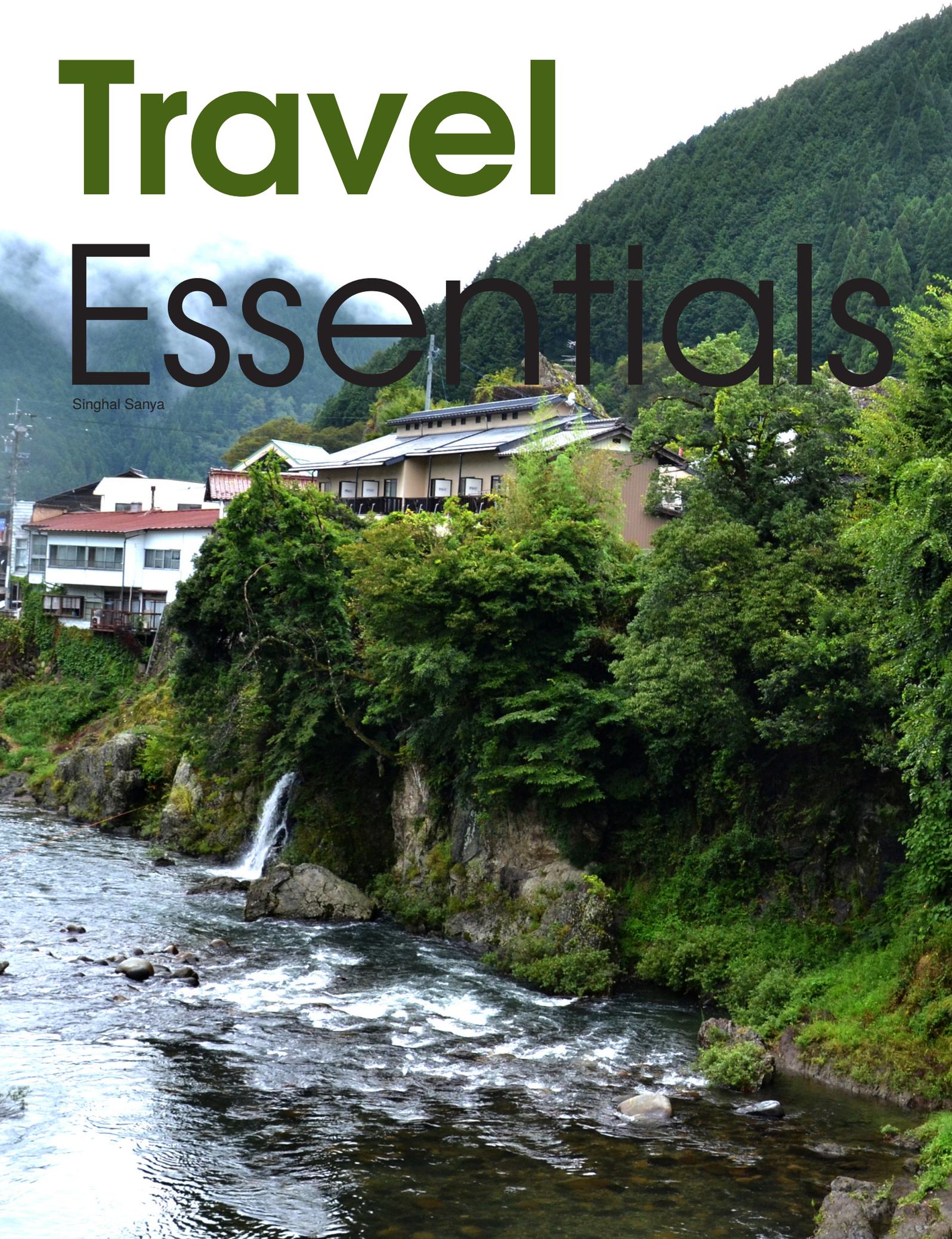
Good luck and bon voyage!

Will is a 28-year-old (soon to be 29) professional ski and snowboard instructor from the UK working in both the northern hemisphere (Japan) and southern (NZ). In between seasons he likes to take his bag and go explore somewhere for a month or three, usually somewhere hot. He has had the travel bug his entire life and is constantly going off on little adventures around the world. It is one of the main reasons that he loves his job; it allows him the freedom to travel for four months of the year.

Travel

Essentials

Singhal Sanya



I recently returned from a three-week mini-vacation in Spain, during which I used just a hiking backpack and a mini purse. Prior to packing or traveling, I suggest learning the weather of your location. Spain's weather tends to be on the warmer side, so airy (cotton material) clothing and shorts were a must. I would also get an idea about the safety of the country you are traveling to. As a solo female traveler this was extremely important to me. I wasn't really sure what I was getting myself into, but luckily, Spain turned out to be extremely safe for female travelers. I was walking home with another girlfriend at three or four in the morning and we had no issues.

Back to the backpack, light was very ideal and definitely doable. This is coming from someone who seriously takes those giant suitcases when going somewhere for the weekend. I bought a 58L bag because it was on sale at REI, an outdoor store, and luckily it had room for everything I needed and more. With everything I packed, I could've survived out of this bag for probably a couple more months.

Something I believe was essential to my travel life was staying organized with mini mesh packing cubes. Honestly, stay as organized as possible! I had multiple cubes and knew where all my items were. Separate cubes for different types of clothing, electronics, passport/essential documents,, makeup, etc. Especially with my top up bag, these little bags were a blessing in disguise.

There are tons of lists out there for what major travelers think you should take with you and most of them are pretty accurate. I usually followed anything and everything that "Nomadic Matt" had to offer. He has a great link about what you should pack while traveling. I followed the things he suggested (the man knows his stuff).

(Nomadic Matt:
<http://www.nomadicmatt.com/>

As a girl, however, and someone who cares more about hygiene and skin care, I had a few more essential items than the usual backpacker. I think by the time I was done packing and traveling I realized my basic rule of thumb was: Anything that is deflatable and foldable is pretty much essential. Besides my clothing, camera, and minimal makeup, here are a few other things that I definitely need:

- Face wipes – These things were so wonderful. It's nice to be able to clean your face whether it be at night before bed or after a long day on the beach soaking in the sun and salty water. I ended up running out by the end of my trip and realized how important they were to me.
- Sunscreen – Seriously, get a strong 50+ SPF. I took the Shiseido (less than 3 oz – did pretty well) one and applied it two or three times throughout the day.
- SHOES – this was so ideal for my time there. I took one pair of Tevas for everyday walking

and another pair of basic black booties, and trust me, I wore the crap out of them. I'm glad I didn't actually take more shoes, because it saved tons of room and weight. I was able to use my Tevas in the shower since they were waterproof and walk and hike and everything. It was perfect. (Tevas: <http://jp.teva.com/>)

- Deflatable neck pillow
- Deflatable water bottle
- Foldable mini purse – you can use this at night when going out. Make sure it has a zipper so it's harder for pickpockets to snatch anything out of the bag. Keep your money, cards and phone in there. Better yet, buy a small thing you can keep in your bra instead. It's perfect, and you don't have to carry anything! If anyone tries to pickpocket you there, you'll feel it.
- Nice exfoliating face scrub! This was my saving grace. I bought a small bottle of Acura face scrub from Ulta. I ran out by the end of the trip. Next time, I would take more of these! It took the dead skin right off and made my skin feel smooth and even.
- Small baby powder – You can use this as dry shampoo, on any rashes and it can triple as your deodorant. Great multi-purpose powder. On top of that, a little goes a looong way.

- Keep extra plastic bags for your dirty clothes. They smell bad and you don't want them mixing with your clean clothes *at all*.
- A small perfume. I bought the mini Marc Jacobs one and it was perfect for the days I didn't want to shower or go out at night (basically every night). It was nice to smell nice. A mini confidence boost, if you will
Buy a roller, they last longer!
- Sunglasses with Croakies, the strap that keeps it around your neck. The Croakies were probably my favorite discovery on this trip. It great that your sunglasses won't fall and break, or ruin your hair! (Croakies: <https://croakies.com/>)

How you travel makes a huge difference for your experience. Last time I traveled, I had a lot more alone time so a book and headphones were essential for me. This time I never touched my book or headphones! I stayed in hostels, which was the best decision I made, and bought anything I *really* needed along the way. Last time I lugged around two huge suitcases and they definitely ruined my trip to some extent. Seriously, don't over pack! It's frustrating. I suggest taking dresses or multiple colored shorts. They're convenient and cute, and you'll feel like you're wearing a different outfit every day by mixing and matching.

Sanya Singhal lives and works in San Francisco, California. She loves traveling every chance she gets and makes it a point to do one big trip every year. She enjoys staying active through tennis and dance. She one day hopes to travel to each corner of the world!





Health Spotlight

Facemasks

Pameline Kang (Ishikawa)

Facemasks 101

Ah, autumn. The perfect season for pumpkin spice lattes, koyo (autumn foliage), and...the start of the influenza season. You might have seen an increase in the number of people in Japan wearing facemasks, or even people coughing and sniffing in public areas.

According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (FDA) , facemasks help block large-particle droplets, splashes, sprays, or splatter that may contain germs from reaching your mouth and nose. They can also help reduce the spread an exposure of your respiratory secretions to others around you [1]. However, the FDA stresses that facemasks are not able to completely block or filter very small contaminants and germs in the air that may be transmitted via coughing and sneezing as they are fitted loosely against your face [1].

For a guide to properly wearing and taking off a used facemask, <http://bit.ly/2egtkAe>

Obsession with Face

Besides being an infection-control strategy, facemasks are also seen as a fashion accessory in Japan — known as date masuku. “Date,” pronounced “dah-teh,” means “just for show.”

According to The Japan Times, a number of healthy users wear a facemask as they believe that it makes them more attractive “by emphasizing the eyes, creating an illusion of better skin color or just lending an air of mystery” [2].

Adding to that, Japanese morning news program ZIP! conducted a survey on the streets of Tokyo to find out the reasons why people who aren't sick or have allergies wear masks [3]. The results (beginning with the most popular answer) are as follows:

1. To hide their bare, makeup-free face
2. To keep their face warm
3. To make their face look small
4. It is comforting to them
5. To prevent their throat from drying out while sleeping

Types of Facemasks

With so many face masks in the market (yes, even scented and cute patterned ones), what should you get? Here is a quick guide to selecting the appropriate facemask at the Japanese pharmacy:

Disposable Masks

(使い捨て tsukaisute)



Pleats (puritsu) type

プリーツタイプ

- Made of non-woven cloth (fushokufu)
- Commonly used
- Cheap



3D (rittai) type

立体タイプ

- Made of non-woven cloth (fushokufu)
- Stands away from the face
- Great for people who want to prevent their makeup from smudging
- Easier to breathe

Washable Masks

(洗えるマスク araeru)



- Economical
- Typically made of gauze
- Reusable after a thorough wash

Common phrases used on the packaging

快適 *kaiteki*

comfortable

風邪 *kaze*

common cold, influenza

花粉 *kafun*

pollen

PM2.5

Particulate matter (PM) of less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter.

BFE・PFE

BFE: Bacterial Filtration Efficiency percentage of particles filtered out at a pore size of 1.0 - 5.0 microns (μ).

PFE - Submicron Particle Filtration Efficiency percentage of particles filtered out at a pore size of 0.1 - 1.0 microns (μ).

Links:

1. <http://bit.ly/29vkvno>
2. <http://bit.ly/2elUnLs>
3. <http://bit.ly/2eygnAg>

小さめ *chisame*

Smaller size, for people with smaller faces

子供用 *kodomoyou*

For children's use

My Journey with P.T.S.D.

Celeste N. Larson

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can happen to anyone, but often is mistaken as something only soldiers get in combat. This is untrue; PTSD can happen to anyone, and it happened to me.

In 2012, I became an adventurer, learning things in Shiga prefecture. The possibilities, once translated, were out there for me to discover, and after a two-year application period, I was hungry for all life had to offer in Japan.

The first year flew by and I started a second year under my belt. I said goodbye to old friends, welcomed the new arrivals and restarted the English curriculum with a new energy and expertise devoted to the job. Long looking forward to an actual vacation, I agreed to travel with friends to attend a Sri Lankan wedding.

"I don't even know where that is on a map. (After Googling) Of course I'll go!"

Patting myself on the back, I told myself how brave I must be to go, even learning of the spicy diet I would subject my poor tongue to! There was a wink and a nod to myself for bringing only the fun AJET work with me through customs. No baggage fee came to mind for the responsibility I'd carried through my travels.

A stowaway as cunning as a tanuki crashed our vacation, and it all fell apart on the night of Dec. 31, 2013 when I suffered my first flashback:

Vacuumed into a memory I had long moved past. The darkness of the room was illuminated by fluorescent lights and before me was a door; the guest room nowhere to be seen. Without even touching it, the wood grain pattern lingered on my palm, then began to sting. Something sharp burned.

A feeling of confusion crept over me as the sensation repeated until eventually my fingers traced the memory of the outer rim of the flat metal surface where instinctively a doorknob should go. Again, my hands felt the smack of the wood and the pattern of the grain. Thinking hard for a second, I then whispered, "I can see it."

The sense of smallness transformed me into a slender, younger girl, unable to see through a window at the top of the door. Not even on her tippy toes. What could be seen was thick glass with metal wires inside, making a cross pattern, like a prison would have.

The smack and the sting grew stronger in sensation and looking, I realized I was doing it to myself. I kicked at the door and threw myself back against the wall, then sat down and looked at the walls covered in graffiti from former visitors bored with their time and an attitude weighing heavily on



Wizardly equipped to be fabulous and ready to face my PTSD head on as best I can one day at a time.



Jack (R, Labradoodle.) thought his friend Bubba (L, Golden Retriever) might need some help with his stick.He's going to make a good service dog one day!" (Image from Brigadoon's Facebook page.)

“This is **not** the life
I have to lead.”



their mind. There the walls held the scars where those inside had tried to break free, a hole in the wall made me lunge up and strike at the door once more. "Let me out! Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!"

A rush crept up my spine, and I shouted even louder and hit harder at the door. When my fingers could take no more I sank back down and felt the fibers of the carpet and the hardness of the floor soothe my hands from the burning feeling of each violent smack, trying to calm my breath.

Curling up into a ball I wept and screamed a most horrible noise I'd never heard a child make before. "Let me out. Please. Please, let me out. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Let me out, please. I'm sorry..."

My body began to shake and tremble. I could feel my hands on my head gripping at my curls, pulling until it hurt. How I could pull at curls, when I had such straight hair? The fluorescent light went dark and my body went big and in my tiny terrified voice I listened as I kept begging and holding my curls. "Let me out. Please let me out!"

- An excerpt from my journal

"Celeste, listen! Can you hear me? Celeste! You're not in there. Celeste, please. Can you hear me?" Only after the lights come on to a concerned face do I emerge afraid, confused and jumbled by the experience. The remaining days on vacation I spend trying to hide from the constant reminder and confusion.

"What was that enigma?" I thought to myself.

Upon my return to Japan and at the urging of my friends, I speak with my PA and contact TELL to set up weekly Skype therapy sessions. From the eyes of a professional, it was a clear diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In my second year, PTSD symptoms surfaced. I had insomnia-inducing nightmares, and I became more fearful of my environment and distant from my community. I had gone a week without actually speaking. I found myself missing work and in my evenings after managing to work. I had flashbacks almost daily, taking me back to my trauma.

I didn't want to worry anyone when they saw what was wrong with me, because truth be told, I was worried about myself, and despite being an understatement, the thought terrified me. An invisible injury residing in my head I couldn't seem to heal and struggled to maintain. "It's nothing I can't handle" was my third-year motto.

When I recontracted for a fourth year, I felt confident that I could continue managing my PTSD and still continue the JET Program. I would only be one year away from "unicorn" status and how magical would that be? Confident in my healing, I made the mistake of staying.

I believe my PTSD put up with the idea for three months before it became too severe for me to stay; the risk of becoming a "human accident" was too high. Realizing this, I spoke with my PA and BOE to inform them of the recent development and prepared to return home to seek additional treatment.

Fast forward through the tears and goodbyes and all of 'Breaking Bad' and Spring 2015, I'm back in America on the path to healing. I rallied and found a therapist, started doing yoga, got health insurance that covers treatment for my PTSD, and started reading everything I can find to learn about how to improve my PTSD and wellbeing. I stay in most days, unable to work and often avoiding outings that require a lot of me, or I find myself cancelling appointments because I am unable to get out of bed or manage the stress of going out in public.

With the help of Brigadoon Service Dogs, struggles I've been managing alone can be supported properly with a service dog in ways people are not equipped to do 24/7.

A service dog can be trained to wake me from nightmares, assist me up off the ground, help with balance issues, remind me to take medication, navigate crowds when I am having an anxiety attack and help to keep me safe.

Brigadoon Service Dogs believes that a service dog with the proper training can enrich the lives of people like me and aims to help reclaim that adventurer still inside of people afraid of the world.

One paw at a time, a Brigadoon PTSD Service dog will help the difficulties become victories as a trauma survivor moves forward in life.

Celeste was an elementary school ALT with JET from 2012-2015, a member of AJET in 2014 and has presented at the 2013 Tokyo Orientation's Lesson Planning Seminar. Currently in Washington, she hopes to teach yoga in the future. If you'd like to support her, please visit www.gofundme.com/woofwoof4wizard

Donation Details「寄付の詳細」

Brigadoon Service Dogs is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity accredited by Assistance Dogs International, all donations are tax deductible. Donations are accepted on our GoFundMe page: www.gofundme.com/woofwoof4wizard (Change the country for non-US donations.) Any donation amount helps.

For those in Japan looking to help, we've created a translation, courtesy of Kazuko Hirai!

去年私はアメリカに帰りました。毎日病院に通うのはすごくたいへんです。「どうしよう？」その時 私は訓練された犬が私を助けてくれることを学びました。どうぞ私を助けてくれる犬が介助を続けることができるように募金活動に協力をお願いしますありがとうございます、セレステ ラーソン がんばって私の募金目標が達成できるように助けてください。メッセージに英語で がんばれ Celeste Larson おなかいします。

Note/Facts:

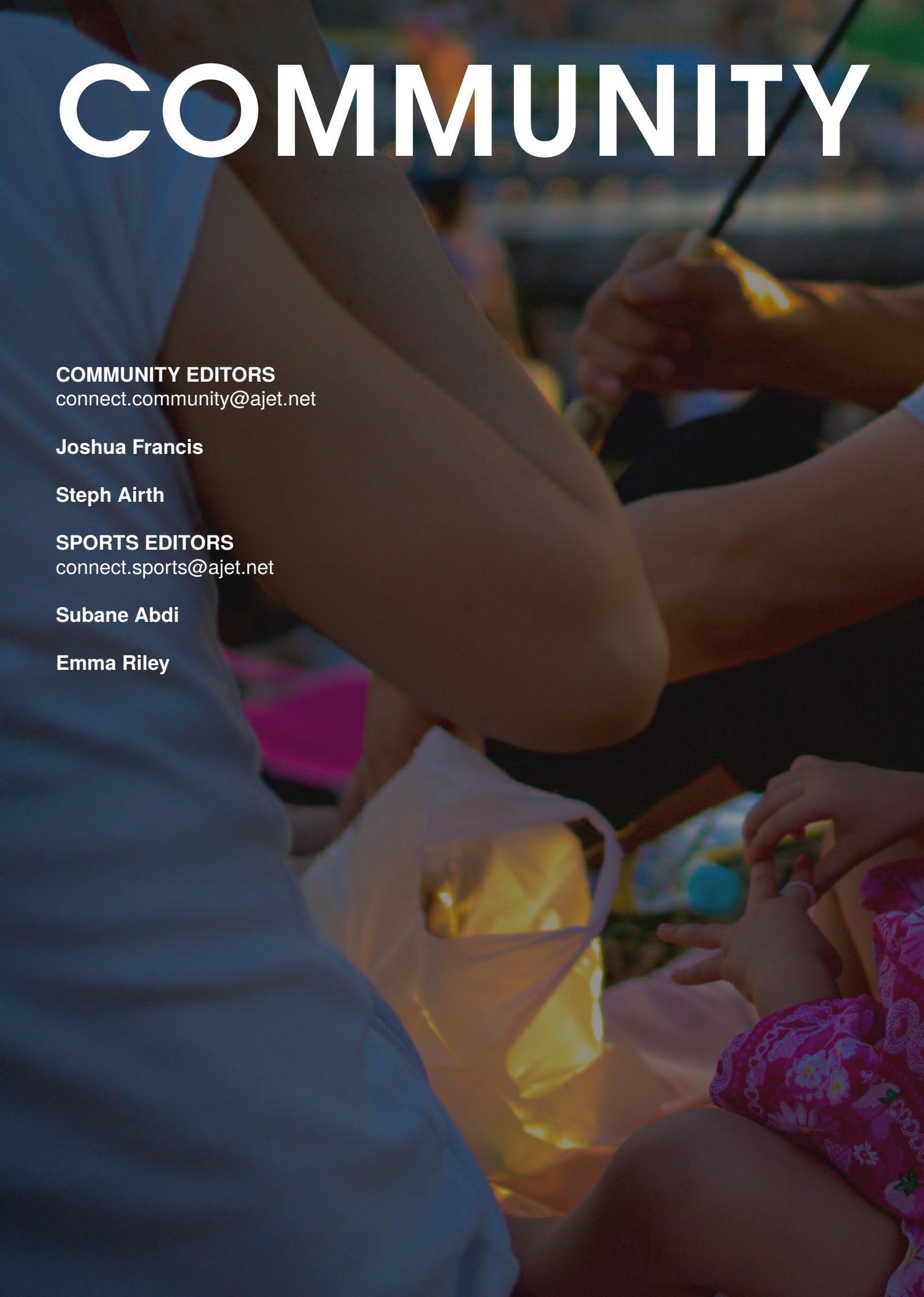
1. Health insurance in Japan does not cover mental illness.
2. TELL Skype: 12,000 /a week (salary determined)
3. In-person sessions via private therapist in the area: 10,000 /a week (including travel)
4. JET Mental Health Counselling Assistance Programme

With the aim of enhancing mental health support for JET participants, CLAIR offers the JET Mental Health Counselling Assistance Programme. This programme provides a partial subsidy (50%, up to ¥20,000 per year) for counselling costs incurred through consultation with mental health professionals in Japan not covered by health insurance. The coverage period is from 1 Apr. 2016 to 31 Mar. 2017. For further information, please ask your contacting organisation.

5. JET Online Counselling Service

JET participants are also able to receive professional counselling for free through Web Mail and Skype, as part of the JET Online Counselling Service established by CLAIR. Please ask your contracting organisation for more information.

COMMUNITY

A group of people, including children, are holding hands in a circle at night. In the center of the circle is a glowing, white, lantern-like object that illuminates the scene. The background is dark, suggesting an outdoor setting at dusk or night. The overall mood is warm and communal.

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Nowhere to Hide

Viwe Siwisa (Echizen)

More often than not, I take my presence on this earth for granted. My life is mostly composed of a series of monotonous tasks, interrupted by fleeting, yet satisfying moments, of exhilaration. In short, I have never imagined that someone might receive an extremely welcome moment of excitement simply from meeting me. But then again, I never dreamed that I would relocate to Japan and begin a sweet life of adventure in relative anonymity. People of my shade of brown are few and far between here. I could be likened to the illusive Sasquatch in these parts...a creature of mythical origins, one spoken of in literature and film, but whose actuality has yet to be proven. These are my experiences in my quaint little patch of countryside, Awara.

A quick trip to the convenience store turns into a game of peek-a-boo. My spectators believe they have the art of discreet staring down to a science, until they realise they have been caught out. Then it is a series of attempted getaways, quick glances away, or awkward, rosy-cheeked smiles. The Japanese are painfully polite, even the children try not to stare. No gaping mouths, no pointing, NOTHING! When I am feeling up to it I flash a toothy smile, followed by an "ohayo gozaimasu" or a "konnichiwa", to which they happily respond. Other times, I just pretend not to notice.

On one particular evening, I was heading out to dinner with two fellow expats, who happened to be of Asian descent, making their existence and presence unquestionable. If anything, they are complete non-events here, despite not actually being Japanese. I, on the other hand, am a complete spectacle. Well, to be fair, more a curiosity. The evening started off feeling as though it would just be a girls' night out, with no dicey encounter. That was until our soon to be friend Ando-san appeared.





box

We were nonchalantly sitting in the cramped, barely air-conditioned food stall, with our über cool chef, savouring some *sake* and *okonomiyaki* when this encounter took form. A blush-faced, silver-haired old man stumbled into the joint, his eyes keenly fixed on me. I could see that this was a man with intention. My Japanese is poor, the pits if I am totally honest. So trying to decipher a conversation fully in Japanese, with not even a smattering of English, feels like a trek through a snowstorm with no hope of survival...or what I imagine that to feel like. Ando-san, as he quickly introduced himself, plonked down right next to Angela (not her real name). I am sure he would have been happier sitting next to me, but it was the perfect arrangement seeing as Angela's Japanese is light years ahead of mine.

Ando-san was immediately apologetic about his advanced state of inebriation. He had driven the entire 45-odd-km from Echizen to enjoy some dinner and *sake* in our humble little town, and had told himself he would make it count. We would later find out that Ando-san did this frequently. That was his favourite drinking hole. However, due to Japan's strict laws on drinking and driving, it was not uncommon for him to have his fair share of intoxicants, and then spend the night in the parking lot outside the establishment, before driving home the following morning. By which time, with (hopefully) no traces of the previous night's exploits on his breath.

The thrill plastered on Ando-san's face was amusing. He was in complete disbelief of what he was seeing. Are there any black folk

in Echizen? Sure. Had Ando-san seen them? By his own admission, no. This would mean that I was the first person of African descent Ando-san had ever physically seen in his entire 75 years roaming Earth's green pastures. It is a mind-boggling thought.

With Angela interpreting, Ando-san explained his reasons for having come into the restaurant. That night he had eaten and drank at another food stall, but on his way out he caught sight of me and decided to come in and say hello. He expressed how this was the first time he had ever seen a black person and how extremely grateful he was that he had chanced upon me. He gushed about how lovely he thought I was and how perfect he thought my teeth were. On mentioning that I was from South Africa, his excitement took on another level of euphoria. Africa is after all the birthplace of black people, so he was meeting an authentically African-African. This was like the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow to him. Never in his life had he ever imagined he might ever meet a black African person, especially not in quaint little Awara.

With immense joy came overwhelming generosity. Ando-san insisted that he had to pay for our dinner because he was so overcome with gratitude from meeting me. (Oh, of course, it was equally as lovely meeting Angela and Jessica [also not her real name], but it was especially lovely to have met me.) I insisted that he would by no means pay for our dinner (typical me). I was appreciative of the offer, but kindly declined. Ando-san asked several times, each time growing more and more despondent. Eventually,

our curious chef enlightened us to the facts, as seen through a Japanese lens. It would seem that by denying Ando-san the pleasure of treating us, I was bruising his self-esteem. Now, we all know how the Japanese are about pride and honour.

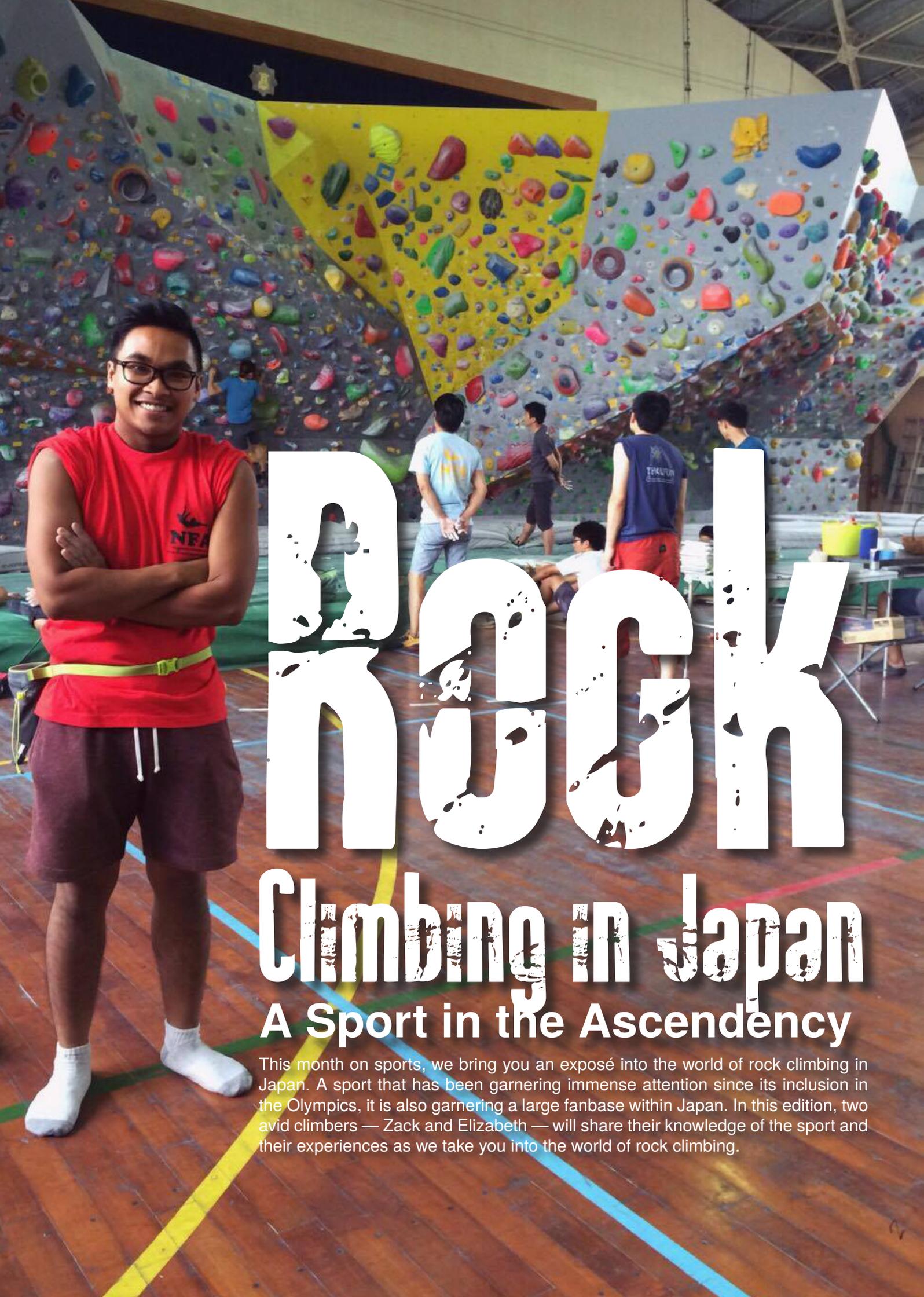
I guess I had to look outside of myself and accept that this was not a creepy old man trying to woo a group of young women, but rather an old man who was genuinely ecstatic that he had met us. His exuberance meant that he wanted to treat us to food, drink and merriment, and that he would not take no for an answer. "No" meant that I was bruising his Japanese-ness, his sense of dignity and integrity. He had expressed his gratitude in having met me, and was showing it the only way he knew how. I had no choice but to give in. Who was I to reject a completely harmless offer? Who was I to strip a kind man of his honour?

And so it was, that on the evening of August 15th 2016, I would gift a sweet spirited old man with my presence. It surely is not as self-centred as it sounds? After all, it is not as though I consider myself particularly unique. My kind are a dime a dozen back home. But there I was, a rarity, in Ando-san's eyes, something to be marvelled at and an experience he thought he might never have. How can I consider myself an insignificant speck of dust in the greater scheme of things, after I witnessed how much delight my presence brought to a complete stranger? I guess I cannot after such an encounter. Coming from the "black factory," I take for granted just how much of a curiosity I may be to the



foreign gaze. I forget that my presence is not the status quo to a lot of people. Being in Japan has, perhaps, helped me realize that the world is not nearly as globalized as we tend to believe it is. Many places in the world are still used to being surrounded by one type of people, their own. I catch glimpses of children's eyes covertly stealing glances of me. I have had inquisitive toddlers gleefully scuttle away at the sight of me, only to return excitedly, wave, and jet off again. I have even seen adults casually taking pictures in my general vicinity, supposedly capturing an image of the alluring bird perched in the tree behind me. I have been greeted with toothless smiles and the uncertain gazes of the senior citizens of Awara on many occasions. Would it sound slightly paranoid if I mentioned that I have even seen dogs give me beady stares whilst I have been in Japan?

As much as I stick out in this country, the beauty of it all is how comfortable I feel. Sure, I am not like the rest, but that has never made me feel out of place or threatened. In fact, I feel a certain warmth from the very same people who appear hesitant of my being in their land. It is such an uncanny feeling, unlike anything I have ever felt, anywhere else before. The same people, who seem wary, are the exact same ones who are quick to help when I appear at odds with explicitly Japanese scenarios. I look forward to many more encounters with the likes of Ando-san. It cheers me up to know that in some parts of the world, the unknown does not breed fear, but rather curiosity and the desire to understand.



ROCK

Climbing in Japan

A Sport in the Ascendancy

This month on sports, we bring you an exposé into the world of rock climbing in Japan. A sport that has been garnering immense attention since its inclusion in the Olympics, it is also garnering a large fanbase within Japan. In this edition, two avid climbers — Zack and Elizabeth — will share their knowledge of the sport and their experiences as we take you into the world of rock climbing.

Rock Climbing in Japan Zack's Perspective

As a native to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, I was afraid Japan wouldn't be able to satisfy my climbing urge. All climbers know what it feels like to hear the words from his or her belayer, "don't look down," as you scale the mountainside. Even now, just thinking about climbing gets my blood pumping. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Japan has recently come to embrace the sport. They have several gyms from Tokyo to the Kansai area so even beginners can get their climb on!

Culture and Mentality of Rock Climbing

For everyone who's new to the sport, there are several things you have to understand. First, it's all about conquering the mountain. It's you versus the rock — it's man versus nature. Second, the culture of rock climbing is centered on self-improvement and mutual cooperation. As a newbie to the sport, you'll go home with what feels like bruises on your back, forearms, and fingers from muscle exhaustion. But don't worry — you're not alone. Everyone will be

encouraging you at your local gym as you grow stronger and make bigger strides.

Dimensions or Rock Climbing

Rock climbing covers a broad spectrum of disciplines: sports climbing, lead climbing, and bouldering. Lead climbing is when you ascend the wall with the assistance of a belayer, someone who essentially will hold the rope in case you fall. Sport climbing is the ascension of a wall that already has bolted protection at the top, which means that your falls will generally be only five feet of rope compared to 10 feet in lead climbing. This approach allows for more acrobatic and powerful climbs. Lastly is bouldering, which requires the athlete to climb a wall no more than 20 meters high without a harness or a rope. This style requires both strength and grace as well as a precise footing and incredible upper body strength.

Difficulty: You Can Only Go Up!

For a beginner, you might want to start at 5.11. This means that the route is slightly overhung and may require sustained muscle strength. The range of difficulty goes all the way to 5.15, which is essentially something only Spider-Man could do. The range or difficulty is

based on many factors such as endurance, stamina, the weather, the slope and texture. It should also be noted that the difficulty is determined by the hardest move on the climb.

The sport uses a lot of upper body strength, especially in your forearms, back, and fingers. Many of my advanced climbing friends would practice finger pull ups, which are exactly what they sound like — lifting your entire body mass using just your fingertips. This is a great way for advanced climbers to build strength and really break down the muscle required to make climbing more difficult routes more manageable.

Olympics 2020

In August 2016, The International Olympic Committee announced that bouldering will be featured at the 2020 Olympics. The sport, although familiar throughout Western countries, has sparked curiosity in Japan for both its obscurity and spirit. This will be a great chance for the misunderstood sport to finally gain the recognition it deserves.

Zack Messenger is a first year ALT living in Shiga, Japan. He likes to spend his time reading books, petting stray cats, and climbing rocks.

Rock Climbing:

An Easily Translatable Sport

“5.10 this year, 5.11 next year, 5.12 after, 5.13 by 2019, and 5.14 for Tokyo 2020 (1)”, my fellow climbing novice and ALT says, explaining our training program towards the Olympics.

We are craning our necks to watch some members of Omura High School’s rock climbing club lead climb their schools’ 60 meter wall, expertly clipping their ropes to the wall as they ascend. We are waiting for a turn on the one top rope, to climb the rope that is hanging from the top, a style of climbing that requires less experience and skill, and is currently the climbing I can do at the school’s wall. And the 5.10’s we are climbing are definitely not where the rock climbers who are making real preparations to participate in the Olympics’ first rock climbing event are practicing.

But when I came to Japan three months ago without speaking the language, I was hoping I could find climbing to be universal. I had climbed for a little over a year back home and wanted to keep improving, and thankfully in my new Japanese home in Nagasaki Prefecture, it wasn’t hard to find. There were the two very obvious parallel 60m walls that stood outside of one of my town’s main high schools. The community center opens up its wall once a week for both sports climbing (climbing on ropes)

and bouldering (10 to 12m short routes climbed with a cushy pad beneath). A short drive away, next to a rice field in some guy’s barn, is a tiny bouldering gym that never closes. And I found the NFA — the Nagasaki Free Climbing Association — a very active group whose main bouldering wall is in an abandoned high school’s gym. So I have found chances to climb in odd locations aplenty, and so far, climbing in Japan has been both familiar, but also, as most things are for me here, foreign and challenging.

I was hoping climbing could be a universal language and it turns out it kind of is. All the sport-climbing routes are rated in the same way. 5.10 being the easiest with deviations from A-D, increasing in difficulty as the number goes up. And mostly the English words are used for things, such as the name of the sport itself, within rock climbing: lead climbing, top rope, and bouldering. Almost all the equipment has the same name: rope, belay device, chalk, harness. And even some of the other terms are the same. For example, a move where you bring your heel to the top of a hold to lift yourself, a heel hook, is the same. When you climb a route in the first go it is called, “on sight”. And just as you would hear in the US while someone is climbing, choruses of “Nice!” echo, and here I’ve learned the encouraging, “*gamba!*!”.





I've found rock climbing is an easy sport to get into and that Japan is the place to do it! Rock climbing has been on the rise in Japan especially bouldering gyms, where the need for equipment is minimal. (2) In most gyms, you can even rent a chalk bag and a pair of shoes. If you can learn the colors to talk about different routes and how to say left and right, that's almost all you need to be able to communicate with local climbers! Climbing uses parts of your hands and muscles that you might not have used before, so the most difficult part of beginning to climb is being patient as your hands get calluses from gripping holds and becoming used to having sore forearms.

So find a gym near you. Maybe it's in a barn or an abandoned sake factory. You can leave your Japanese phrasebook behind and just enjoy the wall and the shared sport! Start with bouldering, maybe a 5.10 this year, and who knows maybe I'll even see you on the wall at Tokyo 2020!

Elizabeth Kurata is a first year in Omura, Nagasaki. In addition to the mountains of Japan she also aims to explore as many ramen shops as possible. Her first word in Japanese was inu.

Sources

<http://bit.ly/2aw9c8B>

<http://bit.ly/2dT3sYU>

STONEWALL Japan

Stonewall Japan provides an affirming, open, safe zone for LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies in Japan, while enhancing lives through collection and dissemination of information, maintenance of online platforms for communication, and provision of opportunities for fellowship, mutual learning, and peer support. We recognize the need to maintain and nurture a sense of community for all of our members throughout Japan. We encourage solidarity, insight, pride and respect, and self-discovery through development of an international community at the regional and national levels. Stonewall Japan envisions an international community where compassion and respect, social justice, and equality are extended to all individuals.





Walls of stone and other hurdles

Rowan Carmichael (Ehime)

I have been lucky enough to travel to Japan four times including this one, the first time being an exchange in my second year of senior high school. It was also the year that I came out to my family and close friends as being gay. Since then, I have lived about as out as someone reasonably can without running up to people and just shouting “I am gay” at them. This year marks my tenth anniversary of being out and proud. Bizarrely, while Japan gave me the confidence I needed to come out back then, living here again has made me more closeted than at any point within those years.

When I got my JET placement in Ehime, Shikoku, I was a little concerned to be honest. While I have lived in rural places for most of my life, my understanding was that Japan was not so accepting of LGBTQIA+ people. Not in a terribly aggressive manner, but simply in a people-do not-talk-about-it kind of way.

My arrival in Japan overall was much the same as everyone else's: a blaze of meeting person after person (whose names you will never remember), hoping desperately that the sweat patches on my nice shirt are not needlessly accentuating an awkward roll of fat. Lots of hand shaking, lots of self-introductions, and so many questions. I am sure many of you know these: “How tall are you?” (188cm); “How much do you weigh?” (140kg); “What food do you like?” (*okonomiyaki*); “Are you from America?” (NO!); and of course, “Do you have a girlfriend?”

How should I answer that? Do I make a scene by coming out, something people do not really do here? Do I subtly correct them and say, “I do not have a partner.”? Do I let them continue to have incorrect assumptions about me by answering, “No I do not”? And then of course, there are of course the awkward follow-up questions such as “Do you like Japanese girls?” and “What is your type?”, where giving truthful answers can be difficult. Having a boyfriend would also change how giving these answers would feel. Do I deny his existence entirely, or say a half-truth and suggest I do in fact have a girlfriend? Additionally, Japanese law does not protect against the discrimination of LGBTQIA+ people, meaning that there are potential, if unlikely, risks associated. These feelings can add up and create barriers where there ultimately should not be any.

Of course, everyone hates these questions. But, as a gay person the true answers feel more problematic.

This is especially true when they happen in class where answering “Do you have a girlfriend?” with “No, actually I have a boyfriend.” would potentially monopolize the class, if not cause a fuss outside of class too.

Not being out feels like an additional wall with people sometimes. I am much more aware that I cannot just give responses without thought. I already do not have a lot of common interests with most people as well. My taste in anime and video games is unusual at best, my most mainstream hobby, photography, has been put to the side, musical theatre does not crop up often, and of course, my writing is in terrible and unfriendly English! Having my core romantic ideals and goals being so different from that of others peoples' enhances my alienness in a way only the old “Alien Card” could. But, before I can come out equally, I want to make sure I would be more than just “gay.”

At this point, you must be asking yourselves, why on earth is it important for people to know that I like sleeping with men, especially if they are not the people I want to sleep with? After the first few times, coming out actually means little about just wanting to be free to say it and ultimately comes down to cutting off wildly incorrect assumptions about yourself early. Imagine if instead of thinking you were an ALT/CIR, everyone thought you were a maths teacher. A few people might go, “Hey, you're mathy. Help me with this” and assume you are good with maths. If that were to happen then you would politely tell them that you are not a math teacher and go on your merry way. At first it will be frustrating, but in this instance, there is not much social concern with maths teachers as LGBTQIA+ people. I do not have the luxury of correcting without potentially going down much deeper rabbit holes.

JET was a fresh start in terms of coming out, and for the first time in a long time, I had to really think about how and with whom I would do it. Since, of course, my local JETs would be an important support group, I laboured over how to do this, although it was somewhat conveniently ruined by an ALT I had known from before JET making an offhand, intoxicated remark during karaoke. (Although singing all Disney and musical theatre numbers was probably a sufficient giveaway?) And of course, everyone was perfectly fine with it.

Coming out to locals, though, has been a much slower task. In a small town, rumours fly fast, so I felt like I needed to be careful with who I came out to. The

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first person I came out to here was a lovely girl who I became friends with after we went out to dinner. She commented that her friend was trans on the way home, and I took the opportunity to come out to her, because clearly she was at least somewhat open about it. And it has been a great comfort knowing that in this country I have someone I can go to and talk about this stuff and get a Japanese perspective. In many ways, this was a lot like my first coming out 10 years ago, but unlike that first time where I was relieved to tell anyone, though, I was relieved to know that at the very least I could come out here to people from this town. It was a big first step.

In my second year, I did come out to a lot of people during a speech contest, though. I used my initial

coming out story from when I was on exchange. It is somewhat ironic that while I've been unsure about being out in Japan as an adult, as a teen Japan's invisible LGBTQIA+ population helped me. Then, Japan helped me escape the generally poor image gay people had, and the omnipresence of the word gay as a negative word. Whereas now, that very invisibility that led me to accept myself has pushed me the furthest into the closet I have been since that point.

It does, however, make sense that in preparing for the contest I would use this original coming out story to come out to people once again. Sometimes, staff or people in local community events would see me practicing the speech and would ask me about it. I



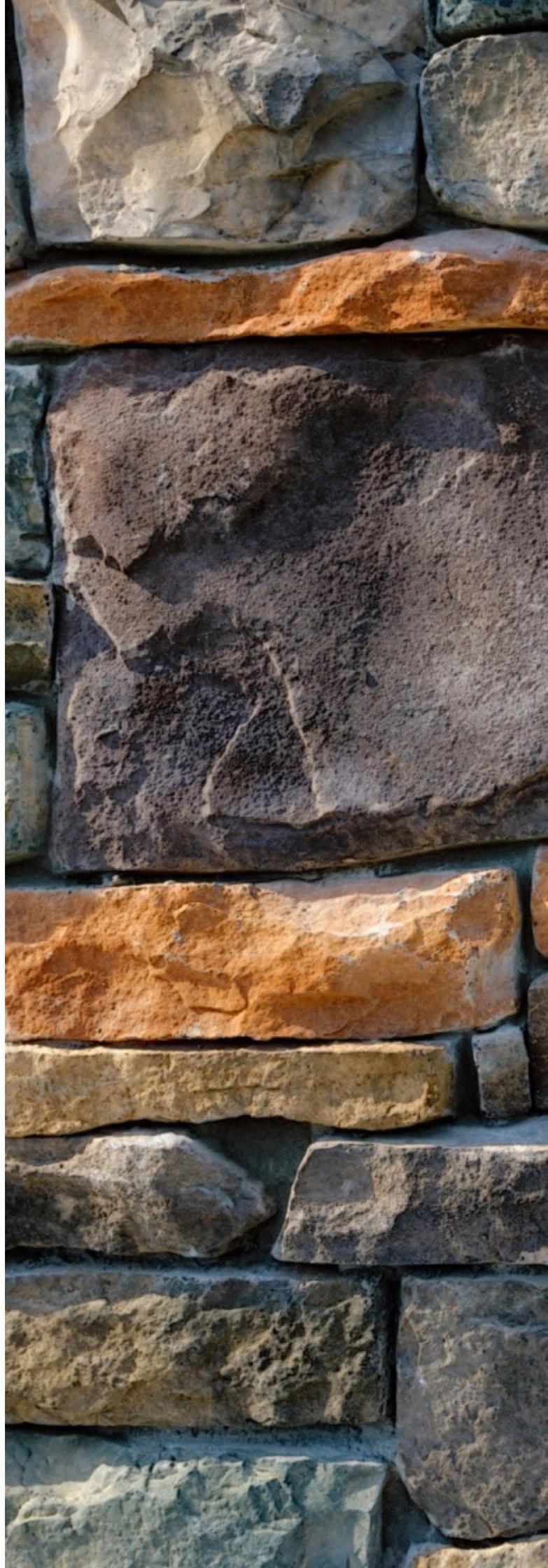
usually would let them read it while I did something somewhere else. I almost always got it back with a comment like “nice speech,” and it was never brought up again.

Not that it had no impact! One English teacher I came out to like this now corrects students from things like “Do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend?” to “Do you have a partner?”, which, while a small step, is the start of something.

Of course, the men I have gone out with, I am “out” to, I guess. Although, within the Japanese gay male community, at least, coming out is something of a rarity, even in major Japanese cities. Most gay bars hide themselves by being “members only” which means “being a member is being gay,” and some even forbid photos to protect the people who attend. This is a remarkably different experience than what I am used to in my home country’s LGBTQIA+ community. This lack of out-ness within the gay community only contributes to a very invisible population, to the point that some say there are no gays in Japan. It can very easily feel like you are the only gay in the village — or even island!

And that is where Stonewall comes in. After not really doing much with them in my first two years, they really ramped up their efforts in Shikoku this year, nearly completing a full tour of the island’s major cities. Stonewall scratches an itch that even the Japanese gay community does not always: being out comfortably. When I am alone at a gay bar or event, I always feel like I am being fetishized for my weight or foreign allure. Stonewall events, however, are often very low key, and frankly, more like hanging out with a new group of friends than an official event. While we often end up in gay bars after the planned activity for the day, these events just allow me to be a lot more relaxed with being out in a group of people. It is not a dramatic political move; these are not cruising events by any means. And while I am out with foreigners in my town, it is nice to exchange war stories with people who might not be in the same boat necessarily, but one similar. As they too are having had that experience of coming out.

Being out in Japan the way I was back home might not be viable for several years to come. Stonewall, however, provides me the chance to live just a day or two every month as I used to back home. These days are refreshing in a way I did not realise I missed until I started going. Even though I like to think being gay is not that huge a part of my life, Stonewall events make me realise how nice it is to be with people who are the same in a way I do not get to see so often. Stonewall offers me a day where I do not have to deal with walls at all, whether stone or social.





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Contact the Head Editor of *CONNECT*, Timothy Saar, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

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

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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.

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HAIKU

Each month *CONNECT* will feature *haiku* from our readers. A *haiku* is 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.

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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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