

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

APRIL
2017

Hakama: The Art of Graduation — what better way to leave than with a bang? (and a splash of colors?)

Fan Clubs — to join or not to join? Better question: how to join?

Block 8 Photo Contest — think you've got the pics to win? Find out how to enter the Shikoku Photo Contest!

Battle with Mold — how to battle the dark menace

Ikura Circus — come one, come all! To this spectacular new workout!



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

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Is there any better time to be in Japan than April? Frequent readers of this section will note that I'm really excited for *hanami* season, as it tends to come up a lot in my writing. I've been anxiously checking the cherry blossom forecast, hoping and praying that it won't pass me by when I'm busy.

Many people on JET aren't teachers by formal training, myself included. We're just all helping out in any way we can as a part of that most difficult and sacred occupation. Once I leave JET, I doubt that I will step foot into a classroom again as an educator — it's just not something in my bones.

However, it's especially clear at this time of year that being able to teach in Japan for even a little bit is a privilege, and an experience we should all treasure. Giving little speeches, shaking hands with all my graduating students, meeting all the new students coming in, and receiving cute cards with carefully writing messages from my kindergarten students are all memories that will stay with me forever.

If you're not someone who has trained to be a teacher and who doesn't want to continue to be a teacher after JET, it can be easy to get lost in thinking that being a JET is just a job to pay the bills while living in Japan. This April, it could be easy to think, "Another batch of kids joining my class, another welcome ceremony. It won't be important at all to these kids in a year, so why should I care?" That might be true. But it's also true that for that day it's more than likely the most important thing your students have ever experienced. And you *get* to be a part of it. Sometimes more than once! How lucky is that?

Keep all that in the forefront of your mind this spring as you watch all the new students pour in, and remember all your former students moving on to the next small step in their lives. Enjoy this moment. Stop and smell the roses for a while. Or the cherry blossoms.

Timothy Saar
Head Editor
2nd Year Gifu ALT



Photo: Sarah Pragnell



NEWS AND EVENTS

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Kelsey Lechner

Are we sure spring's here yet?

EVENTS EDITOR

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Lauren Hill

Walks, baking, day trips and coatless weather - it's haru yasumi time!

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



LEX TOKYO LANGUAGE EXCHANGE PARTY

(LATE FEBRUARY; HARAJUKU, TOKYO) Andrew Rails (Tokyo)



Recently, I went to a language exchange party hosted by LEX Tokyo on February 24. The venue was Harajuku's SAD Café, and there were over 90 people in attendance. The most awesome and unique thing about this event would have to be the people and how friendly everyone was. This atmosphere made it easy to want to practice my beginner-level Japanese. The variety of games made for an entertaining night as we switched between low-key conversational activities and high-energy matching games that had us running around like crazy. This was easily one of the most inviting experiences I've had during my seven months here. If people are interested in joining a language exchange, I think this is a pretty solid group. They can be found on [Meetup](#) under the name "[Language Exchange LEX Tokyo](#)."

Hailing from the town of Manhattan, Kansas (USA), Andrew was accustomed to the relaxed atmosphere of a country lifestyle. Since being placed in Tokyo, however, he has quickly fallen in love with the energy of big city life. From wandering amidst the hustle and bustle of Shinjuku to hiking through the nature of Takaosan, Andrew has found that there is no end to the random adventures one might stumble upon when living in one of the greatest cities in the world.



Events Calendar:

April - Mid May

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

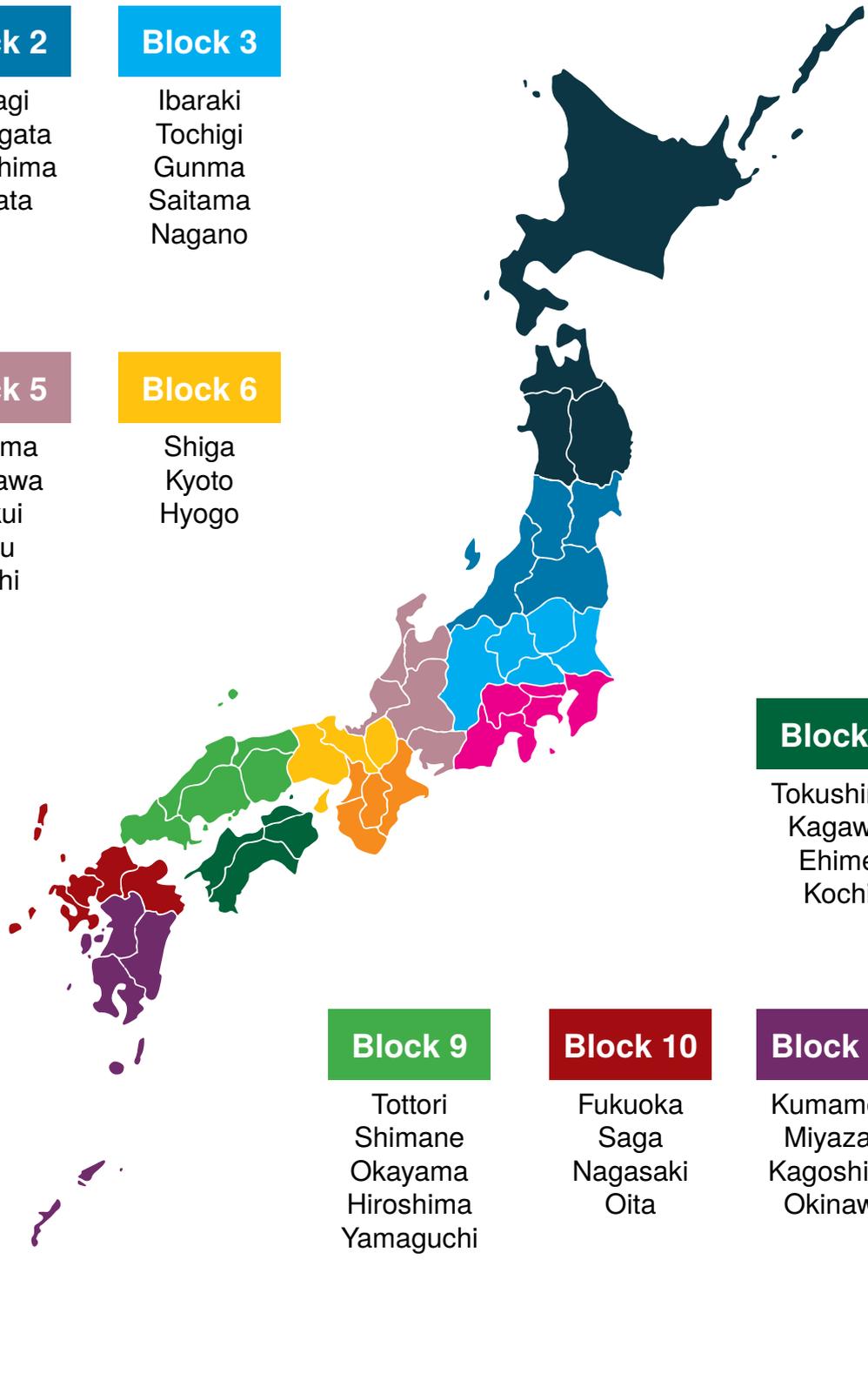
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa





Block 3

The 22nd Katakuri Cherry Blossom Festival

25 March – 02 April
Midori City, Gunma Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Watarase Hot Air Balloon Race 2017

07 April – 09 April
Fujioka Watarase Motor Park, Tochigi City, Tochigi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Ishida Lion Dance

09 April
Fujimiya Shrine area, Kawagoe City, Saitama Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Yatai Matsuri (Night Festival with Floats)

15 April – 16 April
Otawara Shrine, Otawara City, Tochigi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Naka City Double Cherry Blossom Festival

15 April – 03 May
Shizumine Furusato Park, Naka City, Ibaraki Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kasama Ceramic and Fire Festival

29 April – 05 May
Kasama Art Park, Kasama City, Ibaraki Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Saku Hot Air Balloon Festival

03 May – 05 May
Chikumagawa Sports Exchange Plaza, Saku City, Nagano Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Snake Festival

05 May
Mamada Hachimangu Shrine, Oyama City, Tochigi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Block 1

Matsumae Cherry Blossom Festival

Late April – Late May (See link for up to date information)
Matsumae Park, Matsumae Town, Hokkaido Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hirosaki Cherry Blossom Festival

22 April – 07 May
Hirosaki Park, Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture
Website

Noshiro Takoage Taikai (Kite Flying Competition)

23 April
Shimohama Pier, Noshiro City, Akita Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Fujiwara Spring Festival

01 May – 05 May
Hiraizumi Town, Nishiwai District, Iwate Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

National Baby Crying Sumo Tournament

03 May – 05 May
Mikuma Jinja Shrine, Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Block 2

Itoigawa Kenka Matsuri (Float Battle)

10 April – 11 April
Amatsu Shrine, Itoigawa City, Niigata Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Yahiko Yukake Matsuri (Hot Water Pouring Festival)

15 April
Yahiko Shrine, Yahiko Village, Nishikanbara District, Niigata Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Oiran Ladies Parade

16 April
Suwa Shrine, Tsubame City, Niigata Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Spring Performing Arts Festival

22 April – 23 April
Mano Park, Sado City, Sado Island, Niigata Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Yonezawa Uesuga Matsuri (Festival in Commemoration of Uesugi Kenshin)

29 April – 03 May
Various sites, Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Block 4

Exhibition: Yayoi Kusama: My Eternal Soul

22 February – 22 May
Tokyo National Art Centre, Roppongi District, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Shizuoka Festival

31 March – 02 April
Shizuoka Station area, Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Rice Planting Festival

01 April – 02 April
Katori Shrine, Katori City, Chiba Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Japan Flower and Garden Show 2017

01 April – 03 April
Pacifico Yokohama Exhibition Hall, Minato Mirai, Nishi Ward, Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Shingen-Ko Matsuri (Festival to commemorate Takeda Shingen)

07 April – 09 April
Kofu City, Yamanashi Prefecture
Website

Kamakura Festival

09 April – 16 April
Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Asakusa Yabusame (Horseback Archery)

15 April
Sumida Park, Sumida Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Atami Kaijo Hanabi Taikai (Fireworks Festival)

11 March, 15 April, 13 May & 10 June
Atami Port, Atami City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Spring Festival

29 April – 03 May
Meiji Jingu Shrine, Yoyogi Park, Shibuya Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Tokyo Rainbow Pride

29 April – 07 May
Yoyogi Park Events Plaza and Outdoor Stage, Shibuya Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Grand Sumo Tournament – May

01 May – 14 May
Ryogoku Sumo Hall, Sumida Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Makuhari Messe Flea Market

03 May – 05 May
Makuhari Messe Convention Centre, Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kite Flying Battle

03 May – 05 May
Iida Park, Minami Ward, Hanamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Tama Flower Festival

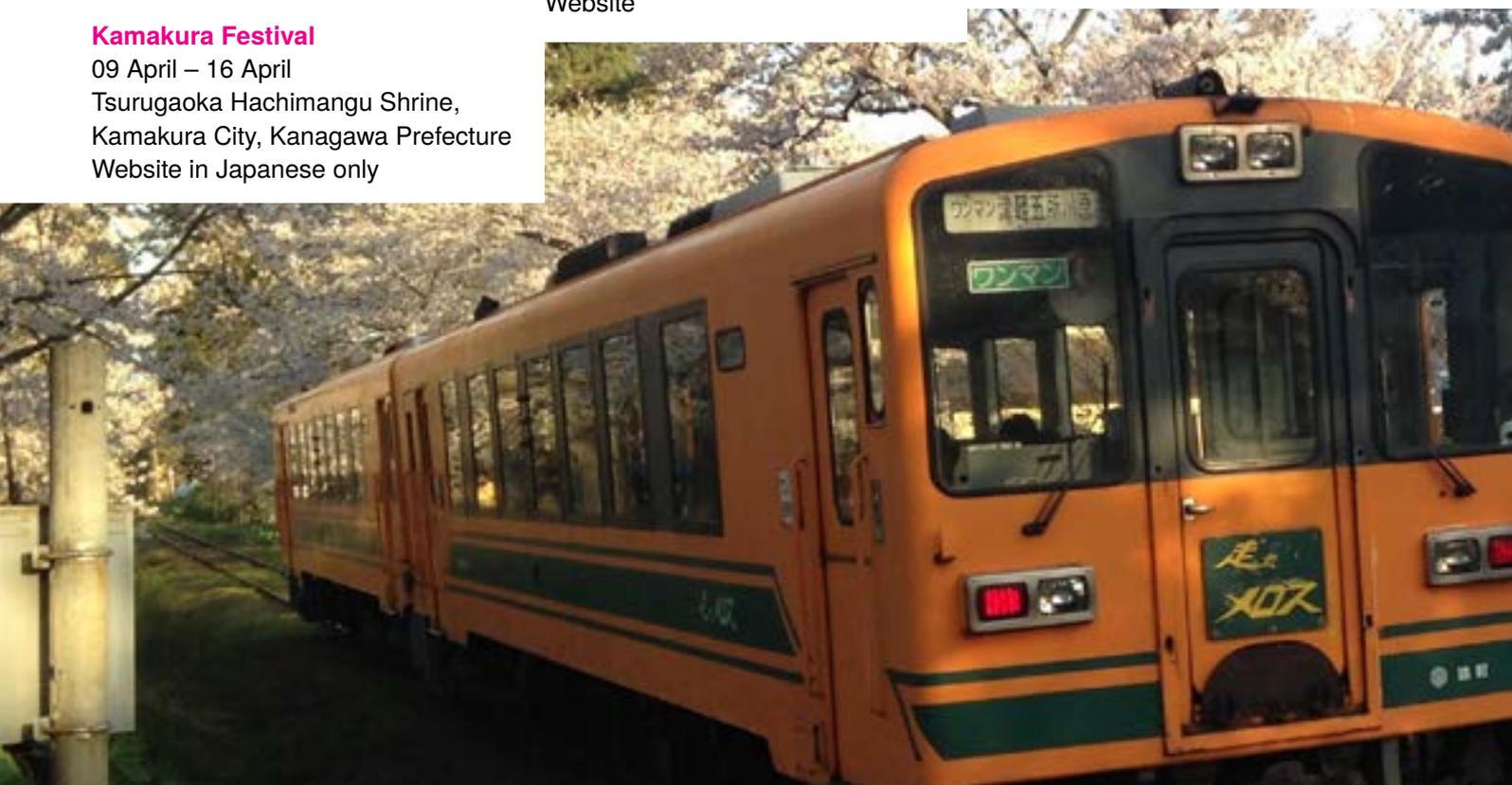
04 May
Tama Riverside, Kosuge Village, Kitatsuru District, Yamanashi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Yabusame (Horseback Archery) Performance

04 May – 06 May
Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha Shrine, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Shizuoka Hobby Show

11 May – 14 May
Twin Messe Shizuoka, Suruga Ward, Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only



Block 5

Echizen Suisen Land Illuminations

12 March – 28 May
Echizen Suisen Land, Echizen Town,
Nyu District, Fukui Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hikiyama Festival and Float Parade

04 April – 06 April
Atakasumiyoshi Shrine (Komatsu
City) & Juzo Shrine (Wajima City),
Ishikawa Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Tejikarao Fire Festival

08 April
Tejikarao Shrine, Kakamigahara City,
Gifu Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Mino Matsuri (Flower Parade)

08 April – 09 April
Hachiman Shrine, Mino City, Gifu
Prefecture
Website

Ieyasu Festival and Parade

09 April
City Centre, Okazaki City, Aichi
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Takayama Spring Festival

14 April – 15 April
Hie Shrine, Takayama City, Gifu
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Fukui Spring Festival

15 April
City centre area, Fukui City, Fukui
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kutami Matsuri (Doll Float Parade)

16 April
Yaotsu Town, Kamo District, Gifu
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Marumage Matsuri (Parade in Traditional Costume)

17 April
Main shopping street, Himi Town,
Himi City, Toyama Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Furukawa Matsuri (Drumming Festival)

19 April – 20 April
Furukawa Town, Hida City, Gifu
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Takaoka Mikuma Matsuri (Spring Festival)

30 April – 01 May
Takaoka Kano Shrine, Takaoka City,
Toyama Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Nagoya Antique Fair

01 May – 03 May
Fukiage Hall, Chikusa Ward, Nagoya
City, Aichi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kamezaki Shiohi Dashi Matsuri (Float Festival)

03 May – 04 May
Kamisaki Shrine, Kamezaki Town,
Handa City, Aichi Prefecture
Website

Chotto Onsai Matsuri (Little Village Festival)

03 May – 05 May
Taisho Era Village, Akechi Town, Ena
City, Gifu Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Yansanma (Flowered Horse Performances)

04 May
Kamo Shrine, Imizu City, Toyama
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Spring Float Battle Festival

15 May
Fushiki Shrine, Takaoka City, Toyama
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only





Block 6

Kyoto Illumiere 2016-2017

29 October – 09 April
Rurikei Hot Springs, Nantan City,
Kyoto Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kitano Odori (Traditional Spring Dance by Geiko and Maiko)

25 March – 07 April
Kamishichiken Kaburenjo Theatre,
Kamigyo Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto
Prefecture
Website

Sanno Spring Festival

12 April – 14 April
Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine, Otsu City,
Shiga Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hikiyama Festival

13 April – 16 April
Various sites, Nagahama City, Shiga
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Sake Spring 2017

15 April – 16 April
Kyoto International Conference
Centre, Sakyo Ward, Kyoto City,
Kyoto Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Running with Floats Festival

15 April – 16 April
Yabu Shrine, Yabu City, Hyogo
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Ohara Matsuri (Traditional Costume Festival)

28 April – 15 May
Various Sites, Ohara Town, Kyoto
City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kyokusui no Utage (Poem Writing in Traditional Clothing)

29 April
Jonangu Shrine, Fushimi Ward, Kyoto
City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Mibu Kyogen (Traditional Play Performances)

29 April – 05 May
Mibu-Dera Temple, Nakagyo Ward,
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kameoka Mitsuhide Matsuri (Festival in Commemoration of Akechi Mitsuhide)

03 May
Various Sites, Kameoka City, Kyoto
Prefecture
Website

Spring Festival

03 May – 04 May
Nushima Hachiman Shrine, Awaji
City, Awaji Island, Hyogo Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Iwashimizu Illuminations

03 May – 05 May
Iwashimizu Hachimangu Shrine,
Yawata City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Iba no Sakakudashi Matsuri (Float Dropping Festival)

04 May
Sanposan Shrine, Higashiomi City,
Shiga Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Shinoda Shrine Firework Display

04 May
Shinoda Shrine, Oumihachiman City,
Shiga Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Miyazu Festival

13 May – 15 May
Sannomiya Hiyoshi Shrine and
Wakinomiya Shrine, Miyazu City,
Kyoto Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Aoi Matsuri (Spring Festival)

15 May
Various sites, Kyoto City, Kyoto
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only



Block 7

Nabana no Sato Winter Illuminations 2016-2017

15 October – 07 May
Nabana no Sato, Kuwana City,
Nagashima Island, Mie Prefecture
Website

Exhibition: Life Beyond the Tsunami – Otsuchi People's Struggles for Recovery and Hopes for the Future

19 January – 11 April
National Museum of Ethnology, Suita
City, Osaka Prefecture
Website

Kashihara Spring Festival

07 April – 09 April
Kashihara Jingu Shrine, Kashihara
City, Nara Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Taishi Shotoe Festival of Lights

22 April – 23 April
Various Sites, Taishi City, Osaka
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Kagurasai (Spring Festival)

28 April – 30 April
Ise Grand Shrine, Ise City, Mie
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Nozaka Mairi (Festival Week)

01 May – 08 May
Nozaki Kannon Temple, Daito City,
Osaka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Tado Yabusame (Horseback Archery) Festival

04 May – 05 May
Tado Shrine, Kuwana City, Mie
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Makura Matsuri

04 May – 05 May
Hine Jinja Shrine, Izumisano City,
Osaka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Princess Rebirth Performance

14 May
Taima-Dera Temple, Katsuragi City,
Nara Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hanamorisai (Flower Festival)

16 April
Niutsuhime Shrine, Katsuragi Town,
Ito District, Wakayama Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Block 8

Exhibition: Tosa at the End of the Tokugawa Shogunate

29 January – 10 May
Kochi Prefectural Museum of History,
Nankoku City, Kochi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Big Hinamatsuri (Doll Festival)

19 February – 02 April
Doll Cultural Exchange Centre,
Katsuura Town, Katsuura District,
Tokushima Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Exhibition: Yuichi Yamamoto's Chainsaw Wood Carvings

18 March – 31 August
Kaiyodo Kappa Museum, Shimanto
Town, Takaoka District, Kochi
Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Matsuyama Spring Festival

01 April – 04 April
Matsuyama Castle, Matsuyama City,
Ehime Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Photos:
Illaura Rossiter
Illaura Rossiter
Giovannie Perez
Sarah Pagnell
Illaura Rossiter

Block 9

Cardboard Amusement Park 2017

18 March – 07 May
1st Floor Multipurpose Hall, Tottori Prefectural Yumeminato Tower, Sakaiminato City, Tottori Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Matsue Musha Gyoretsu (Samurai Parade)

01 April
JR Matsue Station area, Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Peach Blossom Ceremony

15 April
Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima Island, Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture
Website

Hagi Spring Pottery Market

01 May – 05 May
Citizens Gymnasium, Hagi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Shimonoseki Senteisai (Emperor, Empress, Warrior and Battle Festival)

02 May – 04 May
Various sites, Shimonoseki City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hagi Tea Ceremony

03 May
Various sites, Hagi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hiroshima Flower Festival

03 May – 05 May
Peace Memorial Park, Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Block 10

Yanagawa Doll Festival

11 February – 03 April
Various tourist facilities, stores, etc., Yanagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Omura Flower Festival

Late March – Mid April
Omura Park, Omura City, Nagasaki Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Arita Ceramic Fair

29 April – 05 May
Various sites, Arita Town, Nishimatsuura District, Saga Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hakata Dontaku (Citizens Festival)

03 May – 04 May
Various sites, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture
Website

Block 11

Okinawa Flower Carnival 2017

21 January – 07 May
Various participating sites (see link for full details), Okinawa Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Satsuma Hinamatsuri (Spring Doll Festival)

04 February – 20 April
Sengan-en Japanese Garden, Kagoshima City, Kagoshima Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Yuyama Onsen Cherry Blossom Festival

20 February – 01 April
Asenohara Water Park, Mizukami Village, Kuma District, Kumamoto Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Hayama Matsuri (Horse Riding Festival and Performances)

29 April
Hayama Jinja Shrine, Hayama Park, Mimata Town, Miyazaki Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Naha Hari Matsuri (Marine Festival)

03 May – 05 May
Naha Port, Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture
Website in Japanese only





In the News

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

February

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife Akie have come under fire after a series of scandals connected to Moritomo Gakuen, a private education institution in Osaka. In 2016, it was reported that Tsukamoto Kindergarten, a preschool run by Moritomo Gakuen, distributed fliers with hate speech targeting Koreans living in Japan and Chinese people, violating the 2016 Anti-Hate Speech Bill. Moritomo Gakuen has also been criticized for promoting ultranationalist curriculum, including making students memorize the 1890 Imperial Edict on Education, which was used during Japan's imperialist rule, demanding loyalty to the emperor and sacrifice for the country. In 2015, students were also made to take an oath blaming Korea and China for Japan's problems. First Lady Akie Abe was an honorary principal (a role she has now abdicated), and footage has been released of her saying to parents of Tsukamoto Kindergarten in 2015 that she and her husband both commend Moritomo Gakuen's education policy. Until recently,

a message of support from Akie Abe praising the school's moral education and nationalism was posted on Moritomo Gakuen's website. Prime Minister Abe and many members of his cabinet are also members of the ultra-conservative lobby group Nippon Kaigi, of which Moritomo Gakuen's president Yasunori Kagoike is the Osaka branch leader.

The scandal further developed after it was reported that Moritomo Gakuen bought government-owned land at just 14% of its appraisal value to build an elementary school. Kagoike denied any wrongdoing, blaming a "non-conservative media" for disrespecting "history and tradition."

<http://bit.ly/2IV7yYH>

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

March

The Cabinet approved major revisions to sex crimes statutes, the first since they were created in 1907. The revisions include expanding the definition of rape and replacing the word itself to be more inclusive of men, children,

and a broader definition of sexual violence. The ministry also aims to make sex-related crimes prosecutable even if a victim doesn't press charges, relieving a potentially heavy psychological burden from the victim, and increasing the minimum sentence for rapists from the current three years to five. Experts say that the law revisions are steps towards the global standards, but still fall short, as the definitions of several sexual crimes are still too narrow, including still requiring proof that there was a physical struggle against "violence and intimidation" on the part of the victim in response to an attack.

In addition, international media has shed more light on domestic violence prevention in Japan. According to the most recent survey by the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 1 in 4 Japanese women were abused by a partner in 2015. Since Japan created its first anti-domestic violence laws in 2001, consultations and calls for help have increased dramatically, totaling 63,141 consultations and 109,629 calls respectively in 2015. Experts have criticized the gaps in the laws, despite having been revised three

times, citing its narrow definition of "date rape" and lack of protection of unmarried people. There is also a lack of government programs to educate perpetrators to prevent domestic violence, which are currently being offered primarily by privately run organizations. Experts say that there is a dearth of awareness and understanding in Japan regarding the prevalence of and what constitutes domestic violence and sexual assault.

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

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

<http://bit.ly/2IP2ghx>

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

8 March

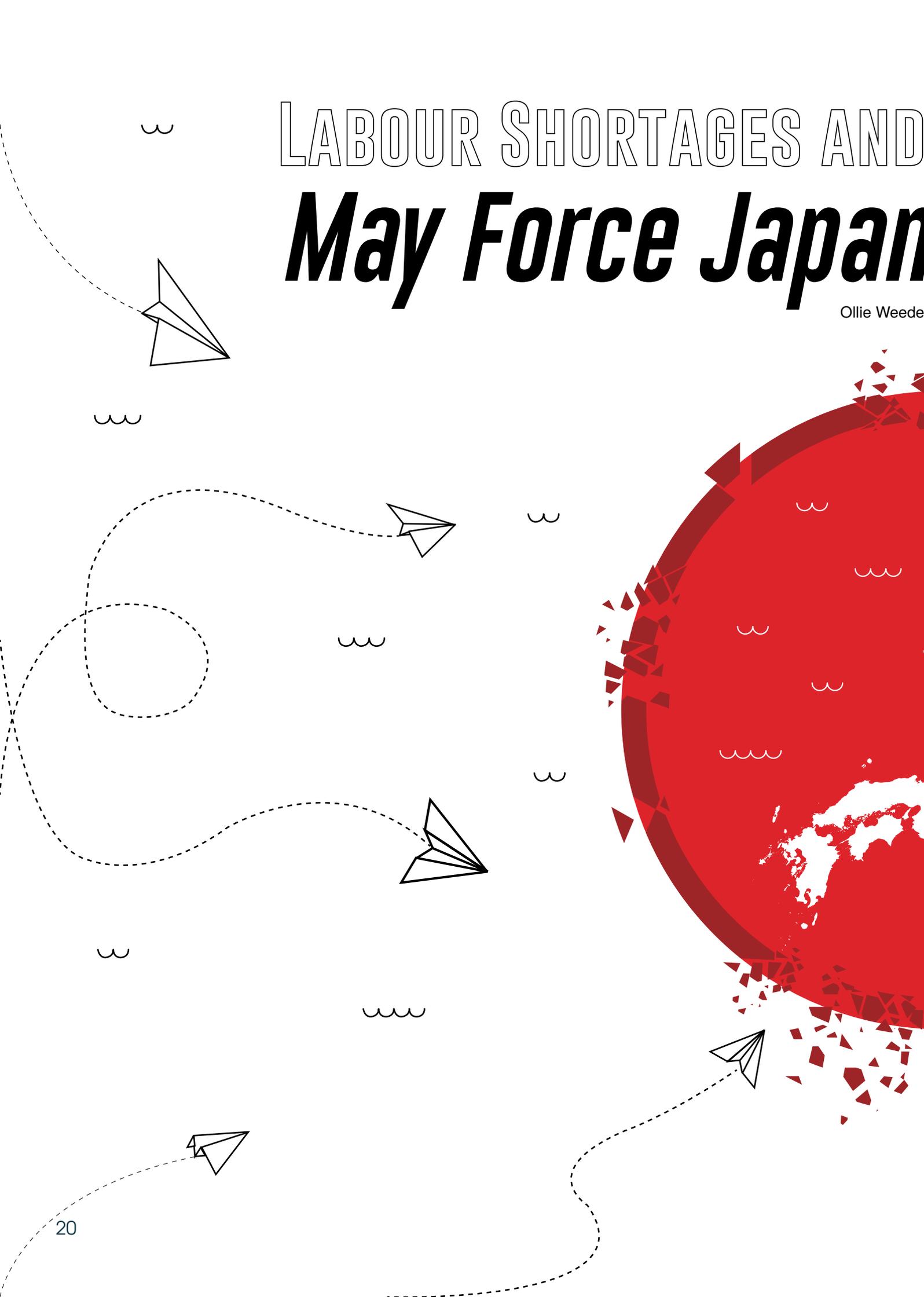
It was reported that in 2016 Japan ranked 163rd out of 193 countries regarding representation of women in national parliaments, the lowest of the G7 nations, falling from 156th out of 191 countries in 2015. Nevertheless, in 2016 a record 28 women were elected to the House of Councilors in the July election, the Democratic Party elected Renho Murata as its president, and Tokyo elected its first female governor, Yuriko Koike.

<http://bit.ly/2mlv9Oq>

LABOUR SHORTAGES AND

May Force Japan

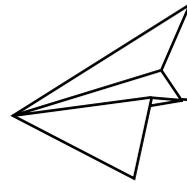
Ollie Weede



DECLINING BIRTH RATES

to Open Borders

n (Okinawa)



In response to labour shortages in certain swathes of the job market, the number of foreign workers in Japan has surpassed 1 million for the first time. This was in part thanks to aggressive employment by regional companies and small businesses alike.

Sources close to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe debuted a policy last November to bring in more foreign workers when one of his advisors suggested that a multi-stream migration policy may soon be utilized to combat a shortage of talent in certain sectors of the Japanese economy⁽¹⁾. Masahiko Shibayama, a special advisor to the Prime

Minister, confirmed during an interview in Singapore that Japan's Liberal Democratic government was considering a proposal which would seek to eventually double the number of foreign workers in Japan⁽²⁾.

In a separate interview, Yasutoshi Nishimura, former vice economy minister and another current advisor to the prime minister said that, in an effort to begin addressing this issue, the government plans to pass a bill later this year which builds upon the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) whereby migrant workers can secure a visa for a limited amount of time⁽³⁾. Special considerations are being given to sectors suffering labour shortages whilst it is also proposed that participants in the scheme be allowed to stay

up to five years, as opposed to the current three. However, the program has been under fire from experts for years, as the interns often face abuse; in 2015, there were 3,695 cases of reported labor law infringements within the program, the top three being long working hours (31.6%), dangerous work

(29.1%), and withholding of wages (20.9%)⁽⁴⁾. It has even been repeatedly called out as a form of human trafficking by the US State Department⁽⁵⁾. At present, around 190,000 foreign workers operate under the scheme.

Immigration has often been cited as the most obvious solution to Japan's long-term challenge of avoiding a demographic crisis by way of an ageing population coupled with a declining birth rate. Abe has stated that he will not allow the population to fall below 100 million from the current 127 million. However, according to the Committee for Japan's Future (an investigatory task force commissioned by the government) Japan's labour force is feared to decline to a mere

55 million by 2060⁽⁶⁾. Furthermore, the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research has projected that an elderly population currently reaching close to 40% will place severe future tax burdens on the workforce, drastically reducing the government's tax base which conservative critics fear will harm Japan's ability to invest in its own defense amid growing tensions with China⁽⁷⁾.

While the education sector has largely avoided any major shortages due to the benefit of targeted migration schemes that actively

seek foreign workers, other parts of the economy are not so fortunate. Areas such as construction, transportation, and the services sector are suffering the most. These types of jobs are categorized as being labor-intensive (blue collar in nature) and remain largely unattractive to university graduates who seek more lucrative careers. They are mostly low

paid and subject to irregular and often unsociable hours, making full time white-collar employment attractive by comparison. Whilst unemployment standing at 3%⁽⁸⁾ would most often be a welcome sight, it has also left businesses struggling to fill vacancies with so many people already being employed.

In order to address this, the Liberal Democratic Party's Special Committee on Labour Force Policy⁽⁹⁾ has recommended increasing the number of foreign workers while managing to avoid any specific mention of immigration numbers, instead opting to broadly define categories into distinct streams. The first is skilled foreign professionals, who will be encouraged to apply for permanent residency through simplified migration schemes, with the second being non skilled workers, who are put through trainee schemes in the services sector while simultaneously studying at Japanese universities and colleges. These categories are clearly designed so as not to risk jobs being taken away from middle class Japanese workers, with strictly temporary arrangements being made for non-skilled workers.

Discussions have already taken place regarding technology workers

being employed from India and

Vietnam, as well as a new visa category being introduced for those working in the tourism industry, the rapid growth of which Japan has benefitted from in recent years. Shibayama concurred that tourism in Japan has helped to change long held attitudes toward foreigners, stating, "We are receiving a very, very large amount of foreign tourists, and I think that Japanese people are

less skeptical about introducing a lot of foreigners in Japan, so the situation will be changing step by step”⁽¹⁰⁾.

The government does however remain divided over the resettlement of refugees fleeing from the ongoing conflict in Iraq and Syria. Senior UN officials first called upon Japan to accept just a modest increase in the number of migrants taken in in late 2015⁽¹¹⁾. Abe’s government received some unwelcome international attention after only 11 asylum seeker requests were accepted out of an estimated 5,000 applications. Shigeru Ishiba, the minister in charge of regional economic growth has called for Tokyo to do more, citing the acceptance of Japanese migrants in South America during the last century as proof that successful integration is possible. “Given that Japan’s population is in decline, the government should promote policies that accept immigrants into Japan,” he said. “It is wrong thinking that foreigners must not come to Japan. It is necessary for the government to implement policies that do not cause any discomfort for us or for immigrants in terms of language, customs and other areas.”

After sustained international pressure, the

government has finally announced as of February 2017 that 300 Syrian refugees will be invited to the country as exchange students from this year to 2021, with the first 20 set to arrive this summer. Whilst this marks an improvement, the number falls far short of other nations who have taken in tens of thousands since the conflict in the Middle East began. It is however the first refugee admission program the country has run since

2010, when Japan took in 123 asylum seekers from Myanmar⁽¹²⁾.

Amongst the older generation, critics of the proposals argue that empowering women in the workplace as a solution should come before that of immigration. In 2014, Japan’s total fertility rate stood at 1.42 children per woman, one of the lowest in the developed world. Low domestic product growth was partly blamed on this, failing to reach above a mere 0.8% in 2015⁽¹³⁾. Workplace diversity has therefore become a counter argument to migration in solving Japan’s demographic problem.

In September 2013, Abe pledged to create a society in which “all women can shine,” acknowledging that women had been long underused and underappreciated in the workforce. He promised to increase female labour participation, increase representation in boardrooms and seek to improve gender equality. Fast forward three years, however, and little progress has been made. The only advancement of note has been the 2015 Act for the Empowerment of Women in the Workforce, which sought to incentivize women to stay in the workforce after having their first child and to encourage businesses to promote women into positions of power.

The resurgence of anti-immigration rhetoric taking place in the United States, United Kingdom, and other European countries is feared to further delay the liberalization of Japan’s staunch foreign policy. Inaction however can only lead to a shrinking economy and deeper cuts to the public sector. In the words of Otsu’s recently elected mayor Naomi Koshi (Japan’s youngest ever female mayor), “In Japan, diversity is not only a

human rights issue, but a question of economic survival”⁽¹⁴⁾.

Young people in Japan are also statistically more likely to favour increasing migrant worker numbers whilst the older generation continue to express concern surrounding the preservation of Japan’s cultural heritage⁽¹⁵⁾. Immigration certainly remains a divisive issue in Japanese society, but one which has been avoided for too long. The passage of the government’s bill through Parliament has served as testament to the administration’s progress on the promises that were made both regarding foreign workers rights in Japan and the empowerment of Japanese women

in the workplace.

With an election on the horizon and a chance for Abe to become Japan’s longest-serving prime minister, the failure of these policies is something the government can ill afford.

Ollie is a first-year ALT lucky enough to be based all the way down in the beautiful islands of Okinawa. He’s most likely to be found either on the football field, playing the drums, or practicing karate on a Wednesday night. He enjoys politics, pancakes, and the Killers!

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Professional Networking:
**Being the One
Who Knocks**

The following article was submitted by a contributor who wishes to remain anonymous, and is not written by AJET staff.



Many JETs experience anxiety over their post-contract decisions, employment or even figuring out their general direction. Whether you have your sights set on another job in Japan, you're planning to return to higher education, or if you don't know quite what you're going to do, building up a network of contacts is essential. Though many JETs may not know where to start, we actually have many resources hidden right under our noses.

First of all, the internet is great for scouting out opportunities. Websites such as LinkedIn can help you craft your professional profile, while Japan-specific job-search sites like GaijinPot and Jobs in Japan can help with your particular requirements and surroundings. The JET Alumni Association and JETwit website also have regularly updated job postings, so be sure to give them a visit!

Still, sending a business e-mail just can't compare to having a real, face-to-face conversation. We might take it for granted, but all JETs are connected with a supervisor and other JETs in their own areas. Just by asking around in your immediate social circle, you might be able to find nearby English schools or people with similar professional interests. Many JETs also live alongside private-sector English teachers, and meeting them for a cup of coffee could pave the way to new opportunities.

Even if your interests lie outside English education, try to put yourself in social situations where you're likely to meet other professionals. Cultural exchange events at your local community center may connect you with people from all over the world. If that's not an option, then even within JET, each block regularly coordinates regional meet-ups and hosts skills development conferences, too. Ask your block representative how you can participate in local JET events, and use that chance to find people with similar goals for the future.

Although these contacts may not lead directly to a job offer, they'll definitely help you to build up professional references. It's important to establish strong ties with fellow JETs and Japanese coworkers so you can rely on them to write glowing letters of recommendation, giving future employers a frame of reference for your skill set and personality.

When it comes to networking on JET, the biggest opportunity at your disposal is attending the After JET Conference and career fair. There are usually two big, almost concurrent career fairs in January-February every year – one in Osaka and the other in Tokyo. If you are looking to put a good word in with a company or program, then these events will give you plenty of chances to connect with business representatives.

After attending a JET meetup or a career fair, follow up is crucial. Writing a quick thank-you email to a business (or sending a LinkedIn request to a new acquaintance) sends a friendly, professional message; they're sure to recognize the active effort that you make to stay connected with them. If you don't manage to make it to any networking events, or even if you do attend, but you weren't able to find your dream job, then don't sweat it. Keep tabs on the sites mentioned above, and who knows – you might dig up a diamond in the rough. Even after returning to your home country, the members of your local JET Alumni Association will be more than willing to help you re-adjust and plan your next steps.

To sum up, the first step is figuring out your post-JET aspirations. That's the biggest hurdle to jump. Next, focus on building up connections to help you along that path. Most importantly, remember to actively reach out to the people and companies who interest you. When you're passionate and enthusiastic about something, it really leaves a lasting impression.

Sometimes you have to be the one who knocks, but it's easy to get your foot in the door from there.

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Photo: Sarah Pragnell



月桂冠

月桂冠

大生ビール 大生ビール 大生ビール

日本の酒

日本の酒

神皇

神皇



Hakama

The Art of Graduation

Farrah Hasnain (Shizuoka)

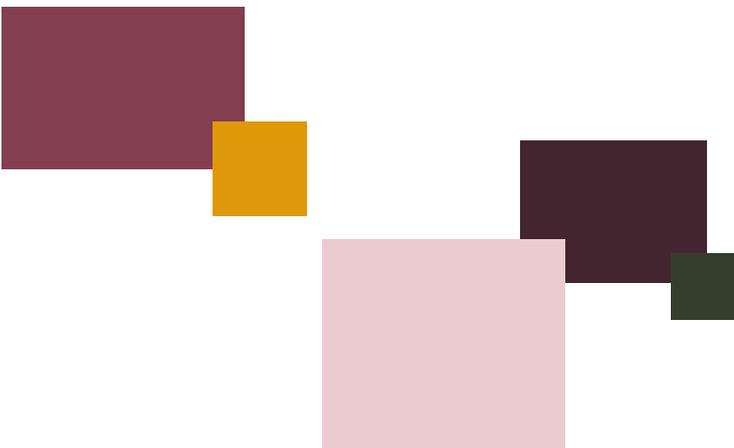


In your home country, do graduating students wear something special? What about the teachers? In Japan, women who graduate from university wear *hakama*. In Japanese elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, female Japanese teachers also have the opportunity to wear *hakama* in honor of their students graduating.

History

The *hakama* was originally for Japanese *samurai* and for martial arts, including *aikido*, *kendo*, and *kyudo*⁽¹⁾. Priests and priestesses also wore *hakama*. In the 14th century, *hakama* was worn exclusively by men, but when the *samurai* class was abolished in the Meiji Era, women began to wear *hakama*. During the Meiji Era, the Ministry of Education allowed women and girls to wear *hakama* in place of *kimono*, since it was more difficult to move around in the latter. They were even worn during PE class!

At first, purple and dark red *hakama* were worn as school uniforms for women. In the early 1920s, Japanese schools transitioned into Western clothing such as *sailor fuku* and *gakuran* for their uniforms. Most girls who attended school at the time were from the wealthy, elite class. Japanese women did not wear special *hakama* for graduation ceremonies until the 1980s, and it has since gradually become a symbol of women's liberation and modernity in Japan.



My Experience With Hakama

I am currently a third-year ALT at a senior high school (who recontracted...I love this country!). I have taught the same students since they were freshmen, so I was interested in wearing a *hakama*. I have heard of ALTs in other prefectures wearing *hakama* to their ceremonies, so I was eager to ask my coworkers if I could wear one. It took me months to gather the information that I have written here, mainly because there are not too many online resources about ALTs wearing *hakama* for senior high schools in particular. There was also the concern of cultural integrity; if I wore a *hakama*, would it be seen as a costume for the token foreign teacher, or a legitimate reflection of myself as a mentor? To me, the *hakama* signified my milestone of watching my students grow for three years. I have overcome many challenges and learned a lot from my time as an ALT, so I felt that it would reflect my dedication to the school and the students who I have taught since I first arrived.

As a third-year, I have seen a handful of my female coworkers wear *hakama* during graduation ceremonies. I have only seen them wear plain ones, so I assumed that I would also have to wear a solid-colored one. I casually brought this up to a JTE I am very close with, and she was eager to help me out. It took me a while to figure out what to wear. At first, I asked the third-year homeroom teachers about what colors they would wear so that we wouldn't clash. After that, I was Googling left and right for the perfect *hakama*.

When I showed my head teacher the designs I picked out for a *hakama* I was thinking of renting, she was disappointed — she said that the designs were too plain! She knew that I am the youngest faculty member in the staffroom at 24 years old, so she insisted that I could wear more intricate designs to reflect my youth. Soon, word got around that I was hunting for *hakama*, and female teachers from other homerooms also helped me figure out where to rent my *hakama*. I was really glad that I showed the designs to them first. My first designs were too plain, then they were too extravagant (later I found out that one of the *hakama* I considered wearing was designed for a marriage interview! I had a good laugh). The last few designs I showed were just right. It took about a week for me to decide on what *hakama* I would

1980s - Now

Pop culture was the main influence of modern-day graduation *hakama*. In 1975, a popular manga series called *Haikara-san ga Tooru* ("Miss High-Collar Passes By"/はいからさんが通る) was released⁽¹⁾. The story takes place in the 1920s during the Taisho Era. The protagonist, a 17-year-old girl named Benio, is raised solely by her father, a high-ranking official in the Japanese army. Because of this, Benio is an unconventional representation of Japanese femininity; she studies *kendo*, drinks *sake*, refuses to have an arranged marriage, and wears Western clothing. She decides to wear a *hakama* at her graduation ceremony, and it becomes her signature look. The series was later adapted into an anime and a live-action movie. It is believed that the popularity of this series was the main influence on the trend of wearing *hakama* to graduation ceremonies.

Modern Uses of the Hakama

Outside of martial arts, men wear *hakama* during traditional Japanese weddings, and women wear them during their own university graduation ceremonies. While female teachers also have the option of wearing them during graduation ceremonies, this is typically reserved for the homeroom teachers of the graduating class. The protocol on which teachers can wear *hakama* and how extravagant they can be varies from school to school, and even from prefecture to prefecture!

rent for graduation day. I ordered my rental online, and the shop called me a few times to confirm my measurements and gave me more color options when they had extra materials in-stock. They were very efficient and kind.

The hair styling and *kimono*-fitting was much more simple for me. Luckily, I am also good friends with a *kimono* consultant and hairstylist, so I was able to directly book her and have her come over to my apartment to help me get ready on graduation day. I trusted her advice and saved a lot of money in the process. Before the big day, we looked through several pictures of the hairstyles I wanted. I decided to keep my hair down and add curls.

On the day of, I woke up an hour earlier than usual, and my friend came over to my apartment. It took about an hour to get ready, but it flew right by. We took a few selfies together in the process. After I was ready to go, she drove me to school. My students, PTA, and coworkers showered me with compliments once I arrived. It was a great cultural lesson to finish off the third year.

AITs: So you want to wear a hakama?

If you want to wear one to your school's graduation ceremony, ask your head teacher and the head of the senior homeroom teachers for permission first. Culturally, wearing a *hakama* signifies the role of the homeroom teachers watching over their graduating students. Some faculty members welcome other teachers to wear *kimono* or *hakama* to celebrate with them. Others may feel that the *hakama* is strictly for the senior homeroom teachers. Either way, if you have the opportunity to watch your students graduate in Japan, it doesn't hurt to ask!

When

You should ask for permission and start looking for *hakama* the month before the ceremony at the latest. Rental *hakama* and reservations for hair salons tend to run out especially quickly during graduation season, so it's best to ask as soon as you know that you would like to wear one. There may be many steps involved, depending on where you are getting your *hakama*.

Renting

Most people rent their *hakama*, because it is cheaper. Rentals can still get quite pricey, ranging from ¥20,000-¥50,000+ total. You also need to rent *kitsuke* (the undergarments that are worn to keep it in place) and footwear. It is much cheaper to go to a used *kimono* shop, so if you have the Japanese skills or a really helpful Japanese friend/acquaintance, you could opt for that. Otherwise, you always have the online option, where you can select from a wide variety of designs and see if they're in-stock. If you order online, you can usually receive your *hakama* up to two days before your ceremony, though if you rent in-person, you have a chance to receive a proper fitting before renting it.

To complete the look, you should get your hair styled at a salon (or model after "hair arrangement" tutorials found online and in various Japanese fashion magazines). Hair arrangements can cost up to ¥10,000. It's important to note that although graduating university students tend to wear intricate designs and many hair accessories to their ceremonies, teachers keep it to a minimum.



Designs & Their Meanings

The design of a *hakama* highly reflects the wearer in a variety of ways. Plainer designs are generally reserved for older women. Women below the age of 30 typically wear more intricate and floral designs. Unmarried women also have longer sleeves, or *furisode*.

Fitting

Foreign women may have more of a challenge when it comes to renting *hakama*. Like *kimono* and *yukata*, *hakama* tend to be sold in smaller sizes/lengths to fit the typical Japanese woman. If you are tall and/or wear bigger sizes in Japan, make sure that you check the measurements before choosing your *hakama*. In Japanese, you can search for トールサイズ and 大きいサイズ attire to suit your needs. There are plenty of cute designs out there, but it might take more time to find them in your size.

The Big Day

On the actual day, you should wake up much earlier than usual. Depending on the services that are available, you would either head to the *kimono* shop or have a certified *kimono* consultant come over to your place and help you put on the *hakama*. Then, you would get your hair styled. This usually takes up to 1.5-2 hours. I suggest going to school by car or taxi to avoid any unfortunate wardrobe malfunctions!

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Photos: Farrah Hasnain

The hair arrangement & kimono styling was provided by Fuji Birth. They can be found on [Facebook](#)

Find Farrah on Twitter: [@farrahdesu](#)





The Don-ka-Don Connection

Maggie Thorpe (Ehime)



One day at a *yakiniku* restaurant, I was celebrating the end of the town marathon. People shuffled in and out of booths, laughing and eating the freshly-grilled pieces of meat. At one point, a stone-faced older man came in and sat down across from me.

“Why aren’t you part of Dodo Taiko?” he asked.

Surprised that he knew I was not part of my town’s taiko group, I gave my usual reply that the group did not have enough adult members and seemed to be focused on children’s classes. I told him I was a part of

a taiko group in the neighboring town. The old man nodded, but I wondered if he was going to scold me for not being part of the local group. Instead, he said that he was one of the original members of Dodo Taiko, but because of a shoulder injury, he could no longer play and that he missed it.

Having recently restarted playing taiko after a hiatus, I enthusiastically nodded my head and began talking about the pure joy of hitting the drum and the feeling of a spiritual connection when it reverberates through your body. When I said that, the old man smiled and we talked about our passion for playing taiko. He was no longer the stone-faced older man. Despite our differences in age, nationality, and gender, we connected through the love of taiko.

Many JETs join a local club as a form of grassroots international outreach. A popular one is taiko. These loud drums are one of the main staples of the Japanese *matsuri* season with each region having a special taiko style. For example, in Ehime during the *Aki Matsuri*, local men and boys dress up as mating deer, banging on small taiko and empty gasoline cans. Taiko has been played in a variety of ways: from religious ceremonies to marking out territory to group performances (*kumi-daiko*).

Whenever I am asked what I do in my free time, I say, “Taiko.” When asked where I learned taiko, I say, “America.” This is where the preconceived notion that taiko is only in Japan is broken.

I know many JETs first learn taiko in Japan, but I started learning taiko during graduate school in Seattle. I had just returned from studying abroad and with a still-recovering knee injury, I wanted to keep active in some way. I began learning from three Japanese-American

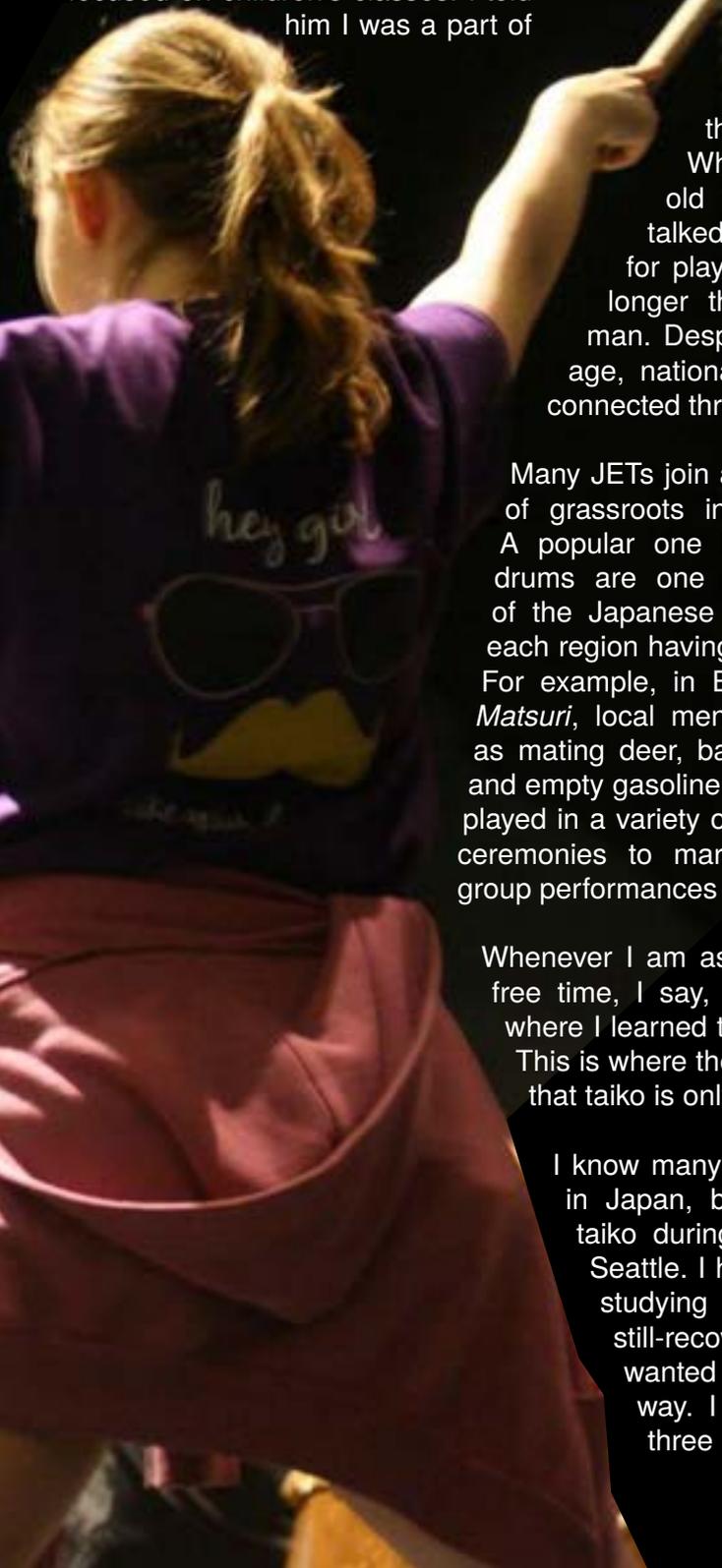
sisters. They had been practicing taiko for seven years and they wanted to start a collegiate taiko club. The Pacific Northwest taiko scene mostly catered to youth and adult community groups and the only other collegiate group, at the time, was in Oregon.

At first, I considered playing taiko as a sport that intermixed music and culture, but as I played more and more and the members grew closer together, I realized it was the epitome of community. Graduate school was stressful and my place of refuge became taiko. I would anxiously sit in my seminars, tapping out the beat to *Hachijo*, ready to race off to practice when class was over.

Whacking the drums was empowering. In the beginning, it was like a sisterhood because the group was mostly female. If a member became frustrated, the group would encircle her with words of encouragement and love. And when anyone succeeded with a difficult solo, we would loudly tap our *bachi* (drumsticks) together and cheer. We were not afraid of being who we were and had many good times both during and after practice. We’d relax with bubble tea and eat popcorn chicken during post-practice hangouts. We relied on and appreciated each other.

I started to discover an even deeper meaning behind taiko when attending gatherings. For example, in February, every Seattle taiko group performs for the Minidoka Day of Remembrance Concert which is to help fundraise for the annual pilgrimage to a Japanese-American internment camp. Despite being concentrated in one city, each group had a slightly different approach, but taiko is fundamentally a way to express solidarity within the Japanese-American community.

During my first year, I attended the World Taiko Gathering in Los



Angeles where groups from all over the world assembled for workshops and concerts. On the last day of the conference, there was a meeting to discuss what it means to play taiko. One of the debates was about the universality of taiko, particularly about some groups not having a tie with the local Japanese community. As someone who is not Japanese but has lived in Japan and speaks the language, I felt slightly puzzled. Some people treated taiko as an instrument and felt it should be freely used in other music genres. Some people treated taiko as not only an instrument, but a means of connecting to a culture. There were groups who used taiko as a way to support domestic abuse victims and there were groups who used taiko to strengthen the Japanese-Buddhist church community. While I feel that playing taiko gives a sense of comradeship and a way to express oneself, all tied into the universal language of music, I am forever grateful to the Japanese-American community for preserving this part of Japanese culture — a connection that should never be erased.

When I was faced with the task of practicing taiko in Japan, I didn't realize I would be met with Japanese who were surprised that taiko was played outside of Japan. It was like being faced with the concept of *nihonjinron* (a largely disproved theory that the Japanese are unique and that, for example, foreigners can never understand the Japanese language). I even remember chatting with a school teacher making sure to use the word "*wadaiko*" in speaking about North America (so as not to confuse with other types of drums as the word "taiko" can generally refer to). The teacher would take away the *wa* (和) and still be confused when I insisted, "No, people play *wadaiko* in countries outside of Japan, not

just drums." Even after showing photos of taiko groups in places like Brazil, France, and Australia.

My goal in joining a taiko group during my time with the JET Programme was not only to be a part of my new community, but to also learn different approaches so that I could bring back these lessons to my original taiko group in Seattle. After attending my first practice and hearing the amazing sounds from the group, I was excited to challenge myself.

I was determined to improve but came across some roadblocks along the way. The first was that the group mainly played on *beta* (flat) stands when I was used to playing on *naname* (slant) stands. No matter! This simply meant I will be a bit rusty with *naname* when I return to Seattle.

The second was the differences in learning the songs. Taiko is learned through *kuchi shoga*, which is a spoken rhythmic system. For example, "Don don don kara ka ka" — the first line of "*Matsuri*" — would be three big hits followed by four hits on the rim of the taiko. The new group I was a part of would be haphazard in expressing their hits or they would have actual sheets of music. I remember trying to play through a song and a member would ramble off "Dadadadadada" versus "Dadadadadadda" and I didn't know what was different.

One issue that was personally frustrating was a sense of gender separation. For the first month, I began to notice that females would be in charge of smaller taikos, while the males would be in charge of the larger taikos. I was once told by a member that a man hits the *odaiko* (big drum) better than a woman could. My heart broke because playing *odaiko* is such a liberating feeling. I already knew of several American female

players who were in charge of playing the *odaiko* in their groups — one of whom brought tears to my eyes during a concert. I knew of cultural differences, but I did not realize how much it would upset me.

In addition, I had new-person nerves as well as loneliness with my new group. Sometimes, I would attend practice and sit on the side tapping out the beat as if I was invisible. I did not mind tapping out beats, but it was so defeating to spend two to three hours barely breaking a sweat along with the 90-minute round-trip drive. The stress from my new life in Japan also damaged my health. One week I would be perfectly healthy, and the next week, I would be sick. During this period, I was mad at myself. I would join taiko practice for two weeks, and then have to be absent for a month due to my health.

When I visited my taiko group in Seattle for summer vacation, I was nervous. I apologized to my old group for not being able to teach anything new, except for simple things like grip or drills. I was embarrassed for being rusty. But my old taiko group members laughed and insisted that they were not disappointed in me. Playing with my old taiko group rekindled that love for taiko as well as erased any pessimism and guilt.

I decided to make my goals smaller. Instead of learning every part for one song, I would focus on one melody. Instead of becoming pro at *shime*, I would learn the basics of *katsugi-okedo* — a drum that no one in my old group knew how to play. Once I decided on these goals and communicated them to my group, I felt less stress. Over time, I found myself tapping out to songs unconsciously at work or wanting to race off to practice, the

same way I felt in graduate school.

Once I stopped nit-picking the differences, I started to feel more at home with my new group. I learned new grips, drills, and songs. But the biggest thing I learned was that all taiko players — despite how intimidating they appear on stage — are fun and light-hearted. For example, I learned that the way of memorizing one song was by saying “*Jakoten, jakoten, jakoten, mikan*” (all famous foods in Ehime). I would chat more with the members during warm-ups or communicate the goals or problems I had. Whenever I was anxious, I would focus on taiko and that feeling of *shiwase*.

I witnessed the struggles and perseverance of my fellow members and found inspiration. I would watch the senior members practice amazing rhythms only to mess up in front of others, but we would laugh together and keep trying. When I previously put so much pressure on myself to perform well in front of them, I found that when I relaxed and treated my new group members as equals in this taiko journey, my playing improved.

Eventually, I had a breakthrough during one practice. I noticed a female member instead of a male member playing the *odaiko*. I managed to

learn a new song on the *katsugio-okedo* instead of sitting on the side. After receiving a pair of *katsugio-okedo bachi*, a member pointed out that I had a specific area for putting my *bachi* away with my name written on it in my favorite color. It was in this moment that I realized I had perhaps judged the group a little too early. This group was similar in so many ways to my old group. I did have a place in this group.

Lastly, I learned about the cultural history and meaning to the songs for my group. One song has the beats to the children’s game “Hanaichimonme.” Another is inspired by the local fishing market. Another is about a ship’s journey from Ehime to San Francisco in the early 1900s. I began to appreciate my region even more as I would recognize more of the local stories and culture in my daily life. The storytelling aspect of taiko makes it that much more memorable and special as a player.

There is a saying that taiko is natural because when one is in the womb, you hear the sound of your mother’s heartbeat. Taiko is universal, but one must not forget the cultural history behind it: behind the people who worked hard making the drum to the people who play the same rhythm for hours at a *matsuri* to the people who figured out ways to continue and

share their cultural heritage far away from home. I feel my journey in taiko will never be over and my love and admiration of it and its community will continue to grow.

If you are interested in learning taiko, ask someone in your community (fellow JET, teacher, supervisor) about ways to get involved. There are many styles of taiko and some groups may be more active during the *matsuri* months, but it is best to start as soon as you can! Make sure to wear exercise clothes, bring water, earplugs, and plenty of Band-Aids! And have fun!

If you are someone who is interested in continuing taiko back in your home country, there are many resources and ways to reach out. There are approximately 1,000 groups in the United States and Canada alone! You could also go into uncharted territory of starting your own by making handmade taiko (through wine barrels or tires)! Through the power of the Internet, there are many ways to connect with taiko players around the world!

[Facebook Taiko Community](#) (note: need approval/invitation)

[kaDON](#) (online taiko and *fue* lessons, English)

[Taiko Source](#) (song database, articles, reference materials, taiko group map, and more!)

[How to make taiko practice drums](#)

[How to build taiko drums](#)

Maggie Thorpe is a second-year CIR in Ikata, Ehime where she plays taiko for Yawatahama Miyabi-gumi and keeps close ties with her previous group, Taiko Kai at the University of Washington. In her free time, she enjoys watching bad movies, reading terrible manga, and boasting about Ehime mikans.

Photos: Maggie Thorpe



Who What When Wear

Erica Grainger and Punima Baba (Fukushima)

Who

Meet Punima Baba! Originally from Allahabad, India, but now living in Iwaki City, Fukushima, he's been in Japan for over 30 years and he's the grandfather-like figure to all the Iwaki JETs. His world-famous curry restaurant is legendary amongst the Fukushima community. He enjoys spiritual meditation and yoga in his spare time. With a spark in his eyes and a fire in his belly, how can one resist Baba?

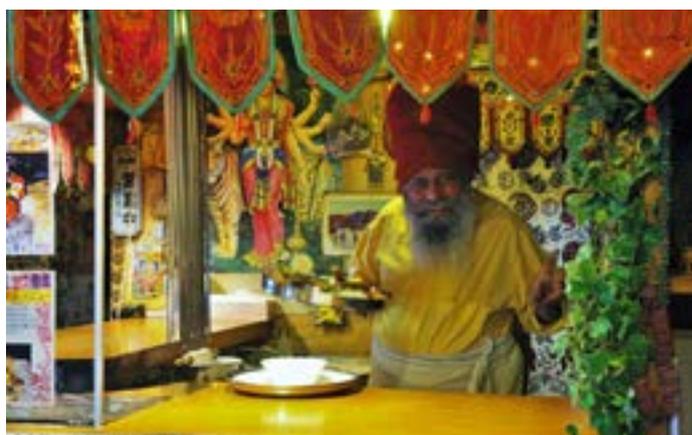
What

His fashion style is very traditionally Indian and depends on the occasion. He favors comfortable loose clothing, whilst his hair is worn in very long dreadlocks, but kept hidden under his eye-catching fiery red turban.

When

Generally he wears similar clothing every day with a huge smile. You can find him at his restaurant, cooking up a hearty hot and spicy curry, or relaxing with a homemade chai tea.

Wear



He's wearing his daily yellow shirt, cream apron and pants, with his fiery red turban.



In this second picture, Baba wears his annual red Santa suit, a festive occasion that he enjoys.



This third picture shows Baba with some of the Iwaki JETs wearing traditional Indian turbans and clothing.

Photos: PunimaBaba

PASSION FOR 20TH CENTURY FASHION!

by Erica Grainger (Fukushima)



When: 17/9-23/11 2016

Where: Shidome Museum, Rouault Gallery, Tokyo

Link: <http://bit.ly/2ndBJaT>

Take a step back in time and enter the 20th Century, when fur, velvet, and structured silhouettes were in fashion. I have always been curious about the changing nature of fashion and this exhibition was the perfect opportunity to learn and see with my own eyes what people used to wear. Highly esteemed European designers, such as Chanel, Poiret, and Yves Saint-Laurent, were featured, as well Japan's own Hanae Mori, a true icon known for her butterfly trademark. It was a dazzling collection, and, incredibly, everything was still in mint condition, despite some artefacts being over 100 years old! This exhibition was from Iwami Art Museum in Shimane, which contains one of the largest fashion collections in Japan! A truly unforgettable and highly fashionable experience. I urge any fashionista to visit Iwami if you missed this exhibition.



CONNECT's

TOP
TEN
TIPS

Beauty and
Self-Maintenance

Erica Grainger & Roxanne Ghezzi

CONNECT has you covered this month with tips and quips on beauty and self-maintenance.



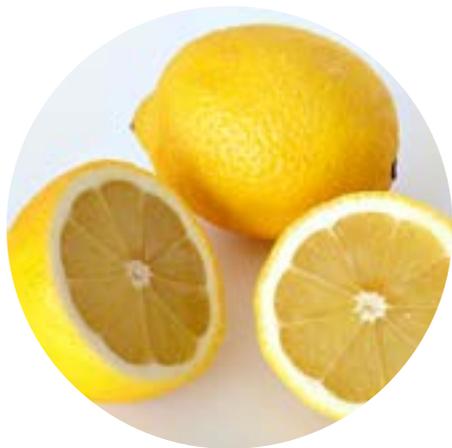
1 “Self-care is an investment, not a pure indulgence. If something is on your mind, treat yourself to a trip solo or with your friends!” – Farrah Hasnain, (Shizuoka, Social Media)



2 “When it’s cold, everyday is beanie day. Beanies + my trusty too-big-for-me jacket are essentially how I’m able to survive winter.” – Ashley Hirasuna (Ishikawa, Head of Visual Media & Design)

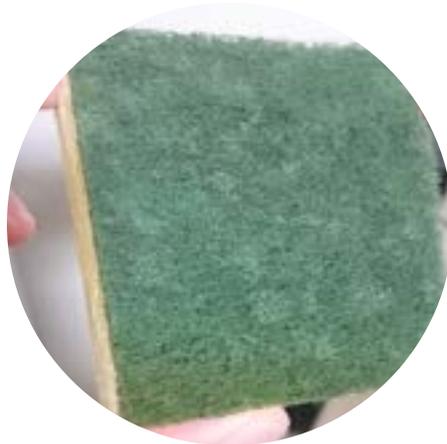
3 “The less makeup you wear, the better your skin will be. You’ll thank me in the future!”
– Sabrina’s grandmother, Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka, Entertainment Editor)

4 “Soft skin keeps your heart soft; exfoliate unnecessary roughness from your life.”
– Annamarie Carlson (Shizuoka, Culture Editor)



5 “Begin the day with a tall glass of water and splash of lemon.” – Korri Schneider (Miyagi, Copy Editor)

6 “My external beauty essential – a wax pencil to hold my eyebrows in place, and powder to fill in any gaps. I think eyebrows are the most important part of any face. I use Anastasia’s Brow Duo powder palette. It’s long lasting and contains a light and dark shade of your color. It keeps my eyebrows perfect all day. For internal health, which of course leads to external beauty, I drink lots of water, eat lots of veggies and incorporate chia seeds into my daily diet.” - Lara Bigotti (Shimane, Travel Editor)



7 “Dish sponges shouldn’t be used for longer than a month due to the amount of bacteria the fibers harbor. I like to cut my sponges in half so I get a tiny sponge to work with, clean my sink at the end of the month and toss.” – Lilian Diep (Toyama, Assistant Editor)

8 “Drink lots of water! How much water are you drinking now? It’s not enough! Drink more! Drinking plenty of water improves your energy levels, skin, body odor, and breath. It also fights off migraines and stress. Water is the ultimate energy drink and my beauty product of choice.” – Tim Saar (Gifu, Head Editor)

Beauty & Fashion Editors



9 “A smile is the best fashion accessory.” – Erica Grainger (Fukushima, Beauty and Fashion Editor)



10 “My mom stressed the importance of cleansing every night before bed and following a good diverse skincare routine. Most importantly don’t forget to give your face a break sometime.” – Roxanne Ghezzi (Gifu, Beauty and Fashion Editor)



SO YOU WANT TO JOIN A FAN CLUB?

Verity Townsend (Hyogo)

Anyone who has tried to get tickets to live shows in Japan knows how difficult it can be! Between the multiple lotteries, high-speed ticket sales, and die-hard fans, seeing your favorite band or stage show live can be incredibly tricky. Your best chance is to take advantage of the fan club lotteries, which gets you the first shot at tickets. But fan clubs in Japan are quite different from the ones we know from home. Let's look at two of the most competitive fan clubs for the popular Takarazuka theater and rock bands, and decide if you can handle it!



TAKARAZUKA FAN CLUBS

The all-female Takarazuka Theatre has an official *Tomo-no-kai* general fan club but in addition to this, each actress has her own individual fan club. These often have detailed rules and can provide you with an in-depth view of the theatre. I will shed some light on how to take part in an individual actress's fan club.

HOW DO I JOIN?

Approach the staff of the actress who you are interested in during a quiet moment before a show. They can usually be found in the lobby or near the entrance holding a card with the actresses' name (in kanji). You'll be given a leaflet detailing the membership benefits and cost. This varies greatly — the higher the actress's ranking the higher the subscription fees, usually anywhere between 3,000-10,000 yen. The first year's membership also includes a joining fee of about 1,000 yen.

MEMBER ACTIVITIES

Irimachi (入待ち) and *demachi* (出待ち), together known as *iride* (入り出) are where you wait for the actress to enter and exit the theatre. Anyone can attend *demachi* for a performance, but only fan club members get to stand right next to where the stars walk out. As a fan club member, you also attend when your actress has *okeiko* (お稽古) rehearsals. The *okeiko iride* tend to be more informal — you can give your actress a letter and maybe talk to her and ask questions. For *demachi* during show runs, each

fan club has their own *wear* (ウェア), usually a scarf or cardigan that they must put on only when waiting for the actress. Members of every club are required to crouch down in unison each time an actress leaves, both as a sign of respect and to allow a better view for non-members.

Most actresses have an *ochakai* (お茶会) tea party for each show run. They usually cost about 6,000 yen, with a slight discount for club members. Guests sit at a round table enjoying cake and tea while the actress talks about the latest performance and answers fan questions. There are usually activities like quizzes, dance contests, and photo taking opportunities — all allowing the assembled fans to interact with the actress. Each table has their photo taken with the actress and everyone gets to shake her hand and say a few words (or be starstruck!). There is also a lottery where winners are given exclusive signed goods by the actress. Fan club rules state that no pictures of these events, the content of the actress's conversation and *ochakai* gifts should be posted on social media.

Higher-ranking actresses may also have dinner shows — where they sing a selection of songs while walking through the tables — providing a more intimate performance than at the theatre.

OTHER BENEFITS

If you are in a fan club you can pre-order tickets to your actress's show months before they go on sale. There are also special performances — *kumisouken* (組総見), or troupe viewing, and *kaisouken* (会総見), or club viewing. Tickets to these shows come with a small present, and friends are welcome.

There are also exclusive, fan club-only secret events. Some of these can be bizarre but fun; examples include birthday parties, a basic Pilates lesson, or a storybook reading.

Buying tickets, attending events, and going to *iride* also get you club points. With enough points, you can get a “two-shot” — a special photo of you and the actress.

IS IT FOR ME?

Being in a Takarazuka actress's fan club requires a lot of enthusiasm for the individual performer, and a liking for her offstage self as well as her onstage persona. You also need a lot of money and spare time. A good understanding of Japanese is also helpful. I recommend you first approach the club leader and ask if you can come to the next *ochakai*. Then you can get a feel for the actress's personality and whether you would enjoy being part of the club.

Photos:
Verity Townsend
Wikicommons
Verity Townsend



MUSICIAN FAN CLUBS

BUCK-TICK's 'Fishtank,' 'a knot' for Dir en Grey, EXILE's 'EX Family,' the school-themed 'Inen 2kumi' for Ikimonogakari, or Koda Kumi's aptly named 'Koda Gumi'—musician fan clubs can have some interesting names. But what is the deal with being a member? Being a longtime member of Japanese rock group BUCK-TICK's fanclub myself, I asked some friends in other clubs for their experiences, too.

HOW DO I JOIN?

The easiest way is to go to the artist's website and look for ファンクラブ (*fanclub*) and 入会方法 (*nyukai hoho*). Like with Takarazuka, there is usually a joining fee for the first year, plus the annual membership fee. There should be an online form where you can enter your details and then pay, and it will then take about a month or so for you to receive your membership card and start enjoying the fan club benefits. If you decide to renew your membership after one year, you may also get a small present.

MEMBER ACTIVITIES

Artists with large enough fan clubs sometimes do fan club-only concerts. The atmosphere at these events can be more relaxed and friendly than at a standard live. Musicians that have been around a while sometimes use this as an opportunity to throw some obscure album tracks and B-sides into the set list. There may also be a lottery where you can win signed goods.

Lesser known artists may do meet-and-greet events where you can get your merchandise signed in person and exchange a few words. These sometimes take place in record stores and can include a short live performance.

OTHER BENEFITS

Many musician fan clubs have a quarterly magazine or newsletter. These feature in-depth interviews, photos and fan submissions. For fan clubs with cheaper joining fees, this takes the form of an email magazine. You can also expect to receive a birthday postcard, a New Year's card and sometimes a Christmas card as well.

Also, some clubs have goods that are only available to members. For example, DVDs of BUCK-TICK's fan club-only lives are made to order and marked with the member's number and name.

Like Takarazuka, you can also apply for concert tickets way in advance of the general sale. For some very popular artists, concerts have been known to sell out on fan club sales alone. There may also be the opportunity to apply for audience seats when the band is on a TV show.

IS IT FOR ME?

Musician fan clubs vary greatly in both benefits and subscription fees, so it is best to give these a good read over and decide.

Verity Townsend: Former Connect Culture Editor (2014-15) with a passion for theatre, kimono and live music. She writes about 60s-70s cult movies.

Spring Manga Recommendations

Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)

CONNECT Recommends

Detective Conan by Gosho Aoyama (Mystery):

"I enjoy this series purely for its originality and constantly gripping narrative. Even after 20 years, the mysteries are always fresh and innovative. Might appear to be for children, but guaranteed to be a whirlwind experience of intrigue and drama for adults, too." —Subane Adbi, Sports

Fruits Basket by Natsuki Takaya (Romantic Comedy):

"This was the very first manga I ever read. It was cute, dealt with the animal zodiacs, and was basically my gateway manga into Japan. If you want an easy, romantic, and funny read, I'd go with Fruits Basket!" —Lilian Diep, Assistant Head Editor

Hataraki Man by Moyoko Anno (Drama):

"I've been re-reading Hataraki Man, a seinen manga series about a single female workaholic who's a magazine editor. I read it in English when it came out 10 years ago but I find it so relatable now. It's such an authentic portrayal of women working in Japan now, in my opinion." —Farrah Hasnain, Social Media

Sailor Moon by Naoko Takeuchi (Magical Girl):

"Starring Usagi Tsukino, an irresistibly adorable schoolgirl on a mission to discover the 'Legendary Silver Crystal.' Exorbitantly colorful and magical, I have a deep nostalgia for this manga. Who didn't want super powers when they were young? Possibly some of us never grow up, and Sailor Moon will always have a special place in the sky and in my heart!" —Erica Grainger, Fashion

Yotsuba&! by Kiyohiko Azuma (Comedy):

A simple and heartwarming manga that follows the daily life of the four year old girl Yotsuba, her friends and family. It's great in English but it really shines in Japanese. Complex subjects are explained in simple terms that a Japanese learner can grasp without running to the dictionary. Also the art style is beautiful and really shows off Japanese life in the *inaka*. It's one of my faves. —Jessica Williams, Heath and Nutrition

Readers Recommend:

Assassination Classroom by Yuusei Matsui (Sci-Fi Comedy):

"As a teacher who was leaving Japan soon, it hit me super hard. Great series beginning to end." — StevenMT (@distantshores on Twitter)

Princess Jellyfish by Akiko Higashimura (Comedy):

"It's a coming-of-age story for older people. Anyone who was awkward, nerdy, and felt "othered" as a kid will find themselves adoring the lead Tsukimi, a girl who's still awkward and lives with other *otaku* women. It's a really powerful story of coming into your own and realizing your own power. I often go back to this series when I feel like I'm too awkward for Japan, or too unfeminine because it reminds me that we make our own story when we're ready." —Mercedez Clewis, Fukushima

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna

APRIL 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 April!

Movies

- 1 Apr.** *The LEGO Batman Movie* (Animated Comedy): Starring Will Arnett, Michael Cera, and Rosario Dawson
- 7 Apr.** *Lion* (Biography, Drama): Starring Dev Patel, Nicole Kidman, and Rooney Mara
- 7 Apr.** *Ghost in the Shell* (Sci-Fi): Starring Scarlett Johansson, Juliette Binoche, and Rila Fukushima
- 8 Apr.** *Neko Astume No Ie* (Drama): Directed by Masatoshi Kurakata, starring Atsushi Ito and Shiori Kutsuna
- 21 Apr.** *Beauty and the Beast* (Disney Musical Romance): Directed by Bill Condon, starring Emma Watson, Dan Stevens, and Luke Evans
- 29 Apr.** *Blade of the Immortal* (Action): Directed by Takashi Miike, starring Takuya Kimura and Hana Sugisaki

Music

- 12 Apr.** *Love Honey*, Ai Otsuka (J-Pop)
- 26 Apr.** *UNDERWORLD*, VAMPS (Visual Kei, J-Rock)
- 25, 27-30 Apr.** Paul McCartney Live —Tokyo (Classic Rock)

Live Theater and Events

- 2 Apr.** "Berserk" Visual Spectacle Event "Eating 2017 ~ Banquet of the Sacrifices"—Tokyo (Live-Action Anime Event)
- 3-30 Apr.** *Singing in the Rain*—Tokyo (Musical Theater)
- 6-15 Apr.** *Inuyasha*—Tokyo (Anime Musical Theater)
- 20 Apr.-10 May** *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*—Tokyo, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka, Osaka City, Osaka, and Nagoya City, Aichi (Musical Theater)
- 29 Apr.-20 May** *Prince Ice World 2017*—Yokohama City, Kanagawa (Figure Skating Showcase)

Games

- 7 Apr.** *Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows of Valentia* on Nintendo 3DS (Roleplaying Game)
- 20 Apr.** *Phantasy Star Online 2 Episode 3: Deluxe Package* on Playstation Vita and Playstation 4 (MMORPG)
- 28 Apr.** *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* on Nintendo Switch (Character Racing Game)

Sources

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

Photo: Illaura Rossiter

LIFESTYLE

HEALTH & NUTRITION EDITORS

connect.health@ajet.net

Pameline Kang

Spring is the first kiss of summer.

Jessica Williams

Spring time! And that means Starbucks Sakura latte!

TRAVEL EDITORS

connect.travel@ajet.net

Lara Bigotti

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? — Mary Oliver

Dawn Wyruchowski

In the season of new beginnings, I'm excited to be joining Connect! よろしく!

Photo: Sarah Pragnell



Health Spotlight

Battle with Mold

Pameline Kang (Ishikawa)

Winter is officially over! Spring is here, and that means it is the time of the year to pack up that kotatsu and clean the house upside-down. What happens when you notice a damp, blackish spot that seems to be a little fuzzy — oh no, could it be mold?

For those living in Japan, you know how frustrating it can be to keep the mold away during the winter and summer seasons. Moisture in the house and stagnant air can encourage the growth of mold and mildew.

To find out how common mold growth is in Japan, *CONNECT* took to social media to find the scariest mold experiences from fellow JETs. Here are some terrifying mold discovery stories:

Illaura Rossiter (Shizuoka Prefecture)

So, I live in a 50-year-old building, and my first winter here I was sleeping in my north room and I noticed I was getting sick a lot more than normal. After being sick for what felt like forever, I decided to do a deep clean of the house and upon moving my western-style bed away from the wall to do a scrub of it, I found that not only was black fuzzy mold growing along the base of the wall and in the tatami under the bed, but also all throughout the bottom and side of my mattress. Needless to say, I chucked it immediately, but had to spend days and a ton of vinegar working with the tatami to get most of the mold out and had to abandon the room for the winter with the tatami pulled up and fan going in it to dry the room out. I still have issues with it in that room if I try to keep it warm in winter. I also have to bleach my bathroom every couple of weeks because of the level of mold my north wall seems to grow.

Elliott Mark (Fukuoka Prefecture)

I inherited an apartment infested to the brim with mold mites due to curtains that had been bought three foot too long and allowed to soak up condensation. Not entirely sure they were originally black but they were when I got there. Every time I think I've gotten ridden of them, they come back. It's impossible. My power bill is regularly over 1-man due to constantly running my dehumidifier and ac all day all year to try and keep the mold at bay. Most recently, it turned up in my pantry and cost me a large amount of food.

Ivy Cheng (Yamanashi Prefecture)

When I first got to Japan, my place was a disgusting mess. After cleaning it, I was still having asthma attacks, which I've never had in the States. Turns out the bookshelves next to me were covered in mold on the back. It was horrible. I almost died just trying to clean them.

Know Your Mold Allergy Symptoms

Allergic reactions to mold due to the inhalation of mold spores can cause mild to severe allergic reactions, in worst case scenarios, a trip to the hospital. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, mold allergy symptoms and signs include:

- wheezing
- rash
- watery, red and itchy eyes
- runny nose
- coughing ⁽¹⁾

How to Clean and Get Rid of the Mold

If you find mold in your house, you have to act fast. Be very careful when dealing with mold. Before you start cleaning your house from mold, limit your exposure to mold spores with the following tips:

- Wear a facemask, or an N95 respirator
- Wear long kitchen gloves that extend up the arm past your wrist
- Wear goggles to protect your eyes

There are many mold killers available on the market. Here are some examples of how you can get rid of mold:

Mold Killer Spray

Mold killer sprays can be commonly found in the cleaning section of supermarkets and drug stores. Notable brands include Kabi Killer (カビキラー *kabi kiraa*) or Kabi Fighter (カビハイター *kabi haita*). It is recommended that you spray the product on moldy areas and leave it for 20-30 minutes before wiping it clean. Also keep the room well ventilated as these sprays contain bleach.

Vinegar

Vinegar, known as 酢 (す *su*) in Japanese, can kill up to 82% of mold species. Unlike bleach-based mold killers, vinegar is a natural acid, is non-toxic, and is safe to use. To use vinegar to kill mold, pour vinegar into a spray bottle without diluting it. You can also use a cloth to apply the vinegar, instead of using a spray bottle. Apply the vinegar to the moldy surface. You might need to scrub the mold away to remove it totally. Leave the vinegar to sit for about half an hour. Then rinse and wipe the surface with water.

Hydrogen peroxide

Hydrogen peroxide works like bleach, but does not contain the harmful, toxic fumes. Hydrogen peroxide is known as oxydol(オキシドール — *okishidoru*) in Japan, and can be found in drug stores. Use this product as per instructions on the bottle, or apply it like vinegar to kill the mold.

Sources:

(1) <http://www.aafa.org/page/mold-allergy.aspx>

Photo:

Leia Atkinson

Make Healthy Japanese Food With *Shirataki*

Jessica Williams (Yamaguchi) Pameline Kang (Ishikawa)

Don't you just dread the high amount of calories in a plate of *yakisoba*? Never fear. We at *CONNECT* can teach you how to substitute high-carb rice and noodles with *shirataki* noodles in popular Japanese food.

Shirataki noodles are made from konjac yam and are low in calories and carbohydrates (two calories per serving). They are a popular addition in *sukiyaki* hotpots and can be substituted in a variety of recipes that call for wheat-based noodles or pasta. Even better news, *shirataki* noodles are also vegan-friendly and gluten-free!

Commonly found in the cold section of the supermarket, most likely in the *oden* section, *shirataki* is affordable at about 100 yen per packet.

Here are some popular recipes adapted from your favourite Japanese food, substituted with *shirataki* noodles.

(A word of caution for the newly-initiated to *shirataki* noodles, raw konjac yam emits a naturally-occurring fishy odour. Do open the windows, plug your nose, and rinse the smell away with tap water).

Shirataki Yakisoba (Calories: 230)

INGREDIENTS

1. packet of *shirataki* noodles
2. 30g carrot (julienned)
3. 50g cabbage (julienned)
4. 1 tbsp sesame oil
5. 1/5 tsp salt and pepper
6. 1 tsp *dashi* stock granules
7. 50ml water
8. 2 tbsp Japanese Worcestershire sauce
9. 1 pinch of *bonito* flakes
10. Red pickled ginger

METHOD

1. Rinse and drain the *shirataki* noodles, then use kitchen scissors to cut noodles into thirds. Dry-fry the noodles in a frying pan until the water evaporates.
2. Add *dashi* stock granules and water, and cook again over medium heat until the moisture evaporates.
3. Add sesame oil, julienned carrots, and cabbage one at a time, cooking for about 30 seconds between each addition.
4. Season with salt and pepper, add the Japanese Worcestershire sauce, and cook over medium heat.
5. Transfer to a plate and garnish with *bonito* flakes and red pickled ginger.

No-Rice Shirataki Gyuudon (Calories: 360)

INGREDIENTS

1. 1 packet *shirataki* noodles
2. 30 - 50g thinly sliced beef
3. 1/2 Onion
4. 200ml Water
5. 1 tbsp Vegetable oil
6. 1/2 green onion
7. Red pickled ginger

SEASONING

- 10ml *mentsuyu* (4x concentrate)
1 tbsp *sake*
1 tbsp soy sauce
Dash of salt and pepper

METHOD

1. Wash and rinse the *shirataki* noodles, and cut in thirds. Boil the noodles for a few minutes.
2. Cut the onion into wedge-like slices.
3. Put oil into a pot and cook onions over medium heat until they become transparent around the edges.
4. Add water and seasoning ingredients. When the liquid begins to boil, add in the meat. Stir to separate the meat so it floats freely in the broth, and cook through.
5. When the meat is fully cooked, add the *shirataki* noodles. Lower heat from medium to low heat. Continue to simmer for about 10 minutes. Remove the scum from the surface as it develops.
6. After 10 minutes, taste the dish and adjust the seasoning with soy sauce to your liking. Turn off the heat and allow the pot to sit as it is for 30 minutes. This will allow the *shirataki* noodles to soak up the flavour of the broth.
7. Serve and garnish with pickled ginger and green onions.

Miso Shirataki Ramen (Calories: 600)

INGREDIENTS

1. 50g mixed ground beef and pork
2. 1 handful of beansprouts
3. 1 packet *shirataki* noodles
4. 1 tbsp sesame oil
5. 1/2 tsp ginger (paste/minced)
6. 1/2 tsp garlic (paste/minced)
7. 1/2 pot of Water
8. 2 tbsp cooking *sake*
9. 2 tsp *ra-yu* (chili oil)
10. 3 tbsp miso paste
11. 1 tbsp *doubanjiang*

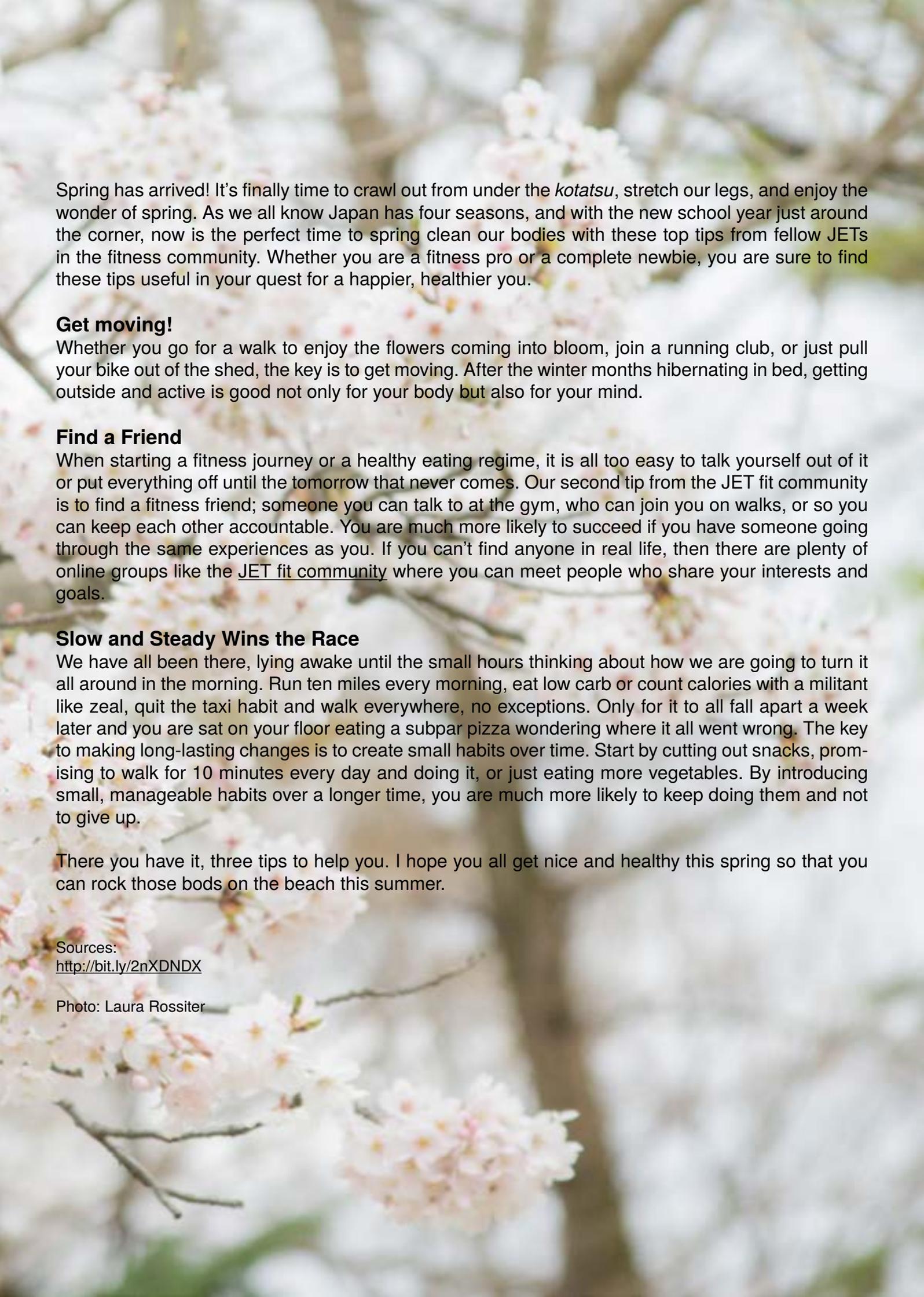
METHOD

1. Wash and rinse *shirataki* noodles, then set aside to drain. Cut the *shirataki* noodles.
2. On a medium heat, add sesame oil and stir-fry the ginger and garlic, then add in the meat. When the meat is cooked mid-way through, add the beansprouts and continue to stir-fry until well done.
3. Add miso paste, *doubanjiang*, and cooking *sake* into the pot of water and bring them to a simmer. Add the *shirataki* noodles and stir-fried ingredients.
4. When the soup starts to simmer, it's done. Serve with a dash of *ra-yu* for a spicy kick.



*get fit and
healthy
this april*

Jessica Williams (Yamaguchi)



Spring has arrived! It's finally time to crawl out from under the *kotatsu*, stretch our legs, and enjoy the wonder of spring. As we all know Japan has four seasons, and with the new school year just around the corner, now is the perfect time to spring clean our bodies with these top tips from fellow JETs in the fitness community. Whether you are a fitness pro or a complete newbie, you are sure to find these tips useful in your quest for a happier, healthier you.

Get moving!

Whether you go for a walk to enjoy the flowers coming into bloom, join a running club, or just pull your bike out of the shed, the key is to get moving. After the winter months hibernating in bed, getting outside and active is good not only for your body but also for your mind.

Find a Friend

When starting a fitness journey or a healthy eating regime, it is all too easy to talk yourself out of it or put everything off until the tomorrow that never comes. Our second tip from the JET fit community is to find a fitness friend; someone you can talk to at the gym, who can join you on walks, or so you can keep each other accountable. You are much more likely to succeed if you have someone going through the same experiences as you. If you can't find anyone in real life, then there are plenty of online groups like the [JET fit community](#) where you can meet people who share your interests and goals.

Slow and Steady Wins the Race

We have all been there, lying awake until the small hours thinking about how we are going to turn it all around in the morning. Run ten miles every morning, eat low carb or count calories with a militant like zeal, quit the taxi habit and walk everywhere, no exceptions. Only for it to all fall apart a week later and you are sat on your floor eating a subpar pizza wondering where it all went wrong. The key to making long-lasting changes is to create small habits over time. Start by cutting out snacks, promising to walk for 10 minutes every day and doing it, or just eating more vegetables. By introducing small, manageable habits over a longer time, you are much more likely to keep doing them and not to give up.

There you have it, three tips to help you. I hope you all get nice and healthy this spring so that you can rock those bods on the beach this summer.

Sources:

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

Photo: Laura Rossiter

Overview

AJET Block 8 is hosting a Shikoku-based photography contest! Let's get out there and enjoy Shikoku this Spring!

1. Entry is open to all current and former JETs; however, photos must be taken on Shikoku.
2. The contest will run from March 17 until 11:59 p.m. on May 12, 2017.
3. There are five categories in total: Best Photo (Camera), Best Photo (Mobile), Best Nature Photo, Best Man-Made Environment Photo, and Best People/Culture Photo.
4. You may submit up to three photos.

Entry

1. Before submitting please read the Terms, Rules, Guidelines, and Judging sections below.
2. Follow the instructions on the submissions page.



SHIKOKU BLOCK 8
**JET PHOTOGRAPHY
 COMPETITION 2017**



Judging

1. Judging will be done using Google forms via the AJET website. Email addresses will be collected for transparency purposes.
2. The photographs with the highest number of votes in each category will be declared the winner.
3. In the event of a tied vote, voting may be extended at the discretion of the Block 8 representative. If the tie persists, the winners will be declared equal first place.
4. In the event that less than three photographs or three votes are submitted in a category then the Block 8 reserves the right to cancel/merge categories for voting purposes.
5. In the event of abuse of the voting system, individual votes may be excluded from the voting.
6. In the event of any other issue arising not described above, the Block 8 representative reserves final decisionmaking rights.

Terms

By submitting your photos, you understand that they will be uploaded online to the Block 8 Facebook group for the duration of the competition voting period. Photos will be removed once voting has finished. Please read Section 2 of [Facebook's Sharing Your Content and Information policy](#).

PHOTO OWNERSHIP: Photos will be credited and copyright will be retained by the owner. By submitting photos, you are agreeing to let them be displayed in *CONNECT* magazine, on AJET.net, and on AJET-related social media. Photos will not be used in advertising and will not be sold.

*Note: Winning photos may not be included in the magazine as to what is published in

Submission Rules

1. **PHOTO QUALITY:** Photos should be high resolution (ideally 1280x720, 3000x2000) and submitted in JPEG format. Requirements can still be met if submitted in other formats as long as they meet the resolution requirements during the competition timeframe (all requirements are valid).
2. Entry is open to all current and former JETs.
3. You may submit a maximum of three photos per category.
4. If the photo includes a person, please follow the guidelines for publishing photos of people.





BLOCK 8 PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

Categories

Prizes

1. The overall winners of the Main Categories (Best Photo, Best Mobile Device Photo) will have their photos featured in *CONNECT* along with a spotlight feature interview (interview format TBA).*
2. The winners of each of the sub-categories will have their photos featured in *CONNECT**.
3. All winners will receive a printed certificate.



Photos that do not meet *CONNECT*'s photo quality requirements will not be featured in the magazine. *CONNECT*'s editors make the final decision on what is published in their magazine. See below for photo quality details.

Sub-Categories

1. Best Nature Photo (one winner): Photos of Shikoku's natural landscape or nature.
2. Best Man Made Environment Photo (one winner): Photos of Shikoku's man made environment (buildings, etc.).
3. Best People/Culture Photo (one winner): Photos of the people or culture of Shikoku (please read the rules below concerning privacy).

Main Categories

1. Best Photo (Camera) (one winner): Photos taken with a DSLR or other digital/analogue camera.
2. Best Photo (Mobile Device) (one winner): Photos taken with a mobile device (phone, tablet etc.).

Photos should be submitted as .JPG files and be as high a resolution as possible (300dpi or higher). Read [here](#) for an explanation. Photos that do not meet these requirements will not be entered, but may be excluded from publication. Only photos taken during the contest period (as above) and on Shikoku (Ehime, Kagawa, Kochi, and Tokushima prefectures)

are eligible for entry by current and former JET Programme participants.

A maximum of three photos.

In photos showing close-ups of people's faces, they must provide permission for the photo to be published. Please be aware of Japanese privacy laws for photos taken in public places.

Voting

1. Voting will commence after entry has closed and run for five days afterwards.
2. Voting is open to all current and former JETs, or those who are members of the Block 8 Facebook group.
3. Each person may vote once in each category. You may not vote on behalf of another person.

Yamagoya Mountain Huts

Level Up From Day Hiking!

Sydney Owen (Gunma)

As the weather finally starts to warm up again, one of the best options for nature appreciation is stepping outside and hitting the trail. For those who enjoy hiking, living in Japan is a wonderful opportunity. With its mountainous terrain, numerous nature preserves, and maintained trails, the great Japanese outdoors has beautiful challenges for hikers of any level. New hikers usually start with day hikes, but sometimes a destination might be too far to reach within a day, or one might start craving an extended outdoor experience. For those who are feeling more adventurous, many popular hiking areas in Japan have *yamagoya*, which roughly translates as “mountain hut.”

These establishments often serve food and drink; some even have vending machines! Primarily, however, they serve as lodging where hikers can stay in order to complete multi-day treks. Last year on two occasions I had the opportunity to do a multiple day trip in Japan’s Northern Alps. I stayed at Yarisawa Lodge and Otensho Hut during my attempts to summit Mount Yurigatake, though unfortunately both

attempts were aborted midway due to incoming typhoons.

Each lodging varies in size and amenities, but you can expect warm, dry futon bedding and hot meals — welcome luxuries on the trail! These experiences were my introduction to staying the night in a mountain hut, rather than just stopping in to have a cup of coffee or food and using the the bathroom before continuing on. They were also my first introduction to backpacking, so it was nice being able to go without having to purchase an expensive backpacking tent or sleeping bag. Beyond needing less gear, staying in *yamagoya* also provides the security of a solid roof, a place to refill water, and a reliable place to inquire about weather and trail conditions.

Anyone can reserve space in a *yamagoya* ahead of time, though I did not. Some Japanese language skills would probably be necessary to make a reservation. The average price for one night is about 6,000 yen. Requesting breakfast and dinner bumps it up to about 8,000 yen. Food options are usually things like curry, udon, or rice and miso soup. Some lodges also



have the option to purchase a bento lunch box. Typically some snack foods, bottled water, and beer are also for sale. However, if you have food allergies like me, it is best to pack your own food and cooking gear, as *yamagoya* fare does not take food restrictions into consideration. In Japan, I've noticed the popularity of portable stoves or kettles for boiling water to make tea or instant soup.

Both Yarisawa Lodge and Otensho Hut had electricity and portable water, but don't expect to be able to charge electronics. Instead, you should bring batteries or a solar charger for any devices you plan on taking. There was also running water for toilets and handwashing. Yarisawa Hut even had a drying room for wet clothes, and a small *onsen* where you could rinse off the sweat and dirt of a long day of hiking and take a relaxing soak. However, it should be noted that there is a strict prohibition on all soap and toothpaste in order to protect the environment, so leave these at home and be sure to brush with toothpaste one final time before hitting the trail! If this bothers you, I recommend bringing hand sanitizer and face or hand wipes, which can be packed out.

As for sleeping arrangements, when you pay you are assigned a room. Each room was already equipped with the number of futons that fit in it already folded and lined up against the wall. Just choose one that isn't taken, unfold it before sleeping, and then fold it up again in the morning. Rooms were separated

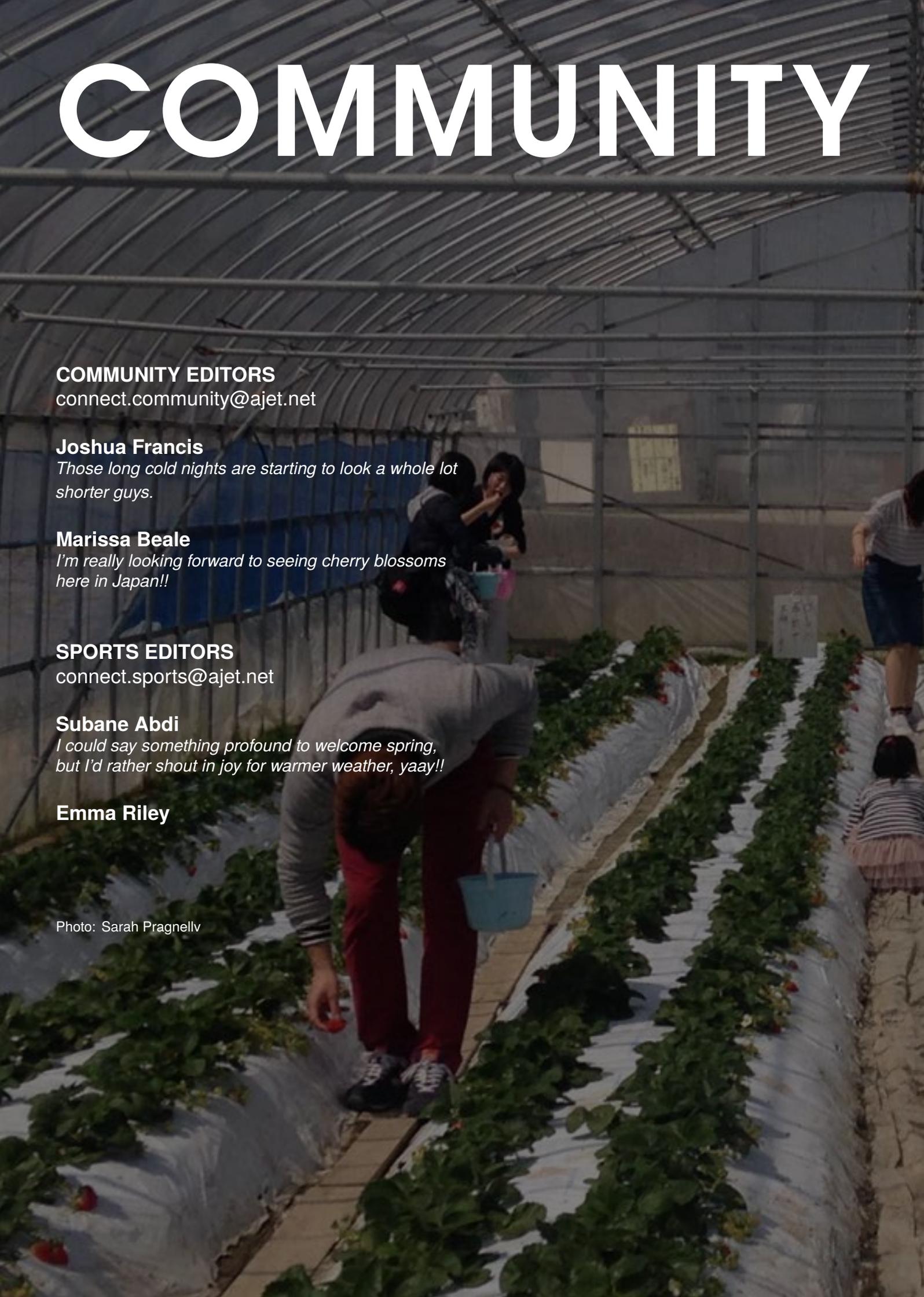
by men and women. You sleep shoulder to shoulder with your roommates, unless you get lucky enough to have a room that isn't full. At first I was a bit nervous about this as my Japanese is limited but, as I've found time and time again, people I meet in the mountains are friendly and willing to strike up conversation.

Expect early mornings and early evenings. The lights go out at eight. I recommend having a headlamp on you for any moving around you want to do once it's dark. Also, many people start early, hiking in the dark to reach nearby peaks by sunrise so as to catch a beautiful morning view. Even for those who choose a more leisurely pace, opting to start once it's daylight, breakfast was over and the lodge was mostly empty by 6:30am when I made my departure.

Though rustic, each hut was cozy and welcoming, and provided a great place to rest and relax after a long day on the trail. Their safety and convenience make *yamagoya* the perfect choice for anyone wanting to give backpacking a try. They're also a great option to consider for experienced backpackers who chose to leave gear at home or simply want a lighter-weight, lower-intensity trip. Personally, I loved being freed from the necessity of carrying the extra weight of a backpacking tent, sleeping bag, and pad, as well as the security of having a sturdy roof over my head. Especially as typhoon rains bore down.



COMMUNITY



COMMUNITY EDITORS

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Joshua Francis

Those long cold nights are starting to look a whole lot shorter guys.

Marissa Beale

I'm really looking forward to seeing cherry blossoms here in Japan!!

SPORTS EDITORS

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Subane Abdi

I could say something profound to welcome spring, but I'd rather shout in joy for warmer weather, yaay!!

Emma Riley

Photo: Sarah Pragnellv





BASEBALL IN JAPAN

the joy of spectating

Karl Warsop (Hiroshima)

As spring nears and the temperature warms, many of Japan's fervent baseball fans get ready to don their team's apparels and cheer with all their soul, for their favourite teams. This month, the sports section brings you an insight into the world of baseball spectatorship and the devotion baseball fans give to the game, through the observations of Karl Warsop.



I was never much of a baseball fan before coming to Japan, despite growing up in America. It wasn't until I went to one exciting game in Hiroshima that it began to pique my interest, and it wasn't until I started taking part in the cheers of the fans that I got hooked.

During Golden Week, one year, I was in downtown Hiroshima with nothing better to do, so I laid down 1500 yen to get into the old Hiroshima Municipal Baseball Stadium. The long holiday meant the place was packed, and I spent the entire game standing. I didn't really have much interest in the game itself at first, and so my attention strayed to the crowd. The game was going pretty badly for the home team. The Hiroshima Carp's were losing seven to one in the bottom of the seventh inning.

But every time the Carps came to bat the fans dutifully prepared to cheer their players on together. Each inning a different member of a volunteer group that conducts cheers would get up on a step-stool in the right-field stands. With his white-gloved hands, a whistle, and his voice carrying across the stands he would signal to the crowd what to chant, or signal to a drummer and a group of trumpeters what song to play. The standard practice seemed to be that after two pitches, the cheer conductor will give the signal for the batter's theme. Young players, pitchers, and newly traded players get generic cheers, but players that have proven themselves enough to be regulars on the roster each had their own personal theme.

The drum pounded out the rhythm and the trumpets provided the melody as the hometown fans cheered for the player at bat. I've been told this would be a strange sight to see at a baseball game in the States, where making noise to distract the other teams' players is the norm. Not so in Japan, where the crowd unites to make as much noise as possible to cheer when their own players are at bat. The cheering sections for each team actually have a set of agreed upon rules and manners when it comes to doing these cheers, and it is considered very poor manners to try and disrupt the other team while they are at bat. The cheer conductors keep the crowd excited and involved in the progress of the game. When a runner advances, they play a fanfare. When a runner scores for the Carps, everyone sings "Miyajima-san." The whole

crowd joins together to sing the official Carp fight song during the seventh inning stretch. There is a whole ritual to it, and sometimes you get the feeling that a lot of people are only there for the sense of community and camaraderie they feel when joining their fellow fans to cheer their team on.

When a team is at bat in the seventh it's often referred to in Japan as the "lucky seven" inning, and on that day I went to see the Carp on a lark, it certainly was lucky. The Carp rallied to score seven points and take the lead that inning, going on to win the game eight to seven (and I learned about the "uncaught third strike" rule.) The excitement in the stadium for those last two innings was visceral, and I left feeling my money had been well spent. I began going to Carp games somewhat regularly after that, and I began learning the cheers myself. I got a stadium guide with all of the cheers in it to keep on hand at games, and I have seen multiple young fans at games with the cheers hand-written on index cards.

When you go to a baseball game in Japan, you can pay for a ticket and sit down the whole time and have a great time just watching the game, but I personally find the whole experience much more interactive and exhilarating up with the fans in the cheering section. Sure, when the Carps are having a good inning it really wears you out, but that just makes the beers after that much more refreshing. Personally, I find the interactive aspect that the cheers give the game really make you feel much more involved and attached to your team as they play on the field. It deepens the sense of vicarious participation that draws people to being sports fans in the first place. Be it the bitterness of defeat or the joy of victory, the experience you are having is one that is shared with the team and all your fellow fans.

Karl Warsop lives in Hiroshima and first came to Japan as an exchange student in 2004. Set to become a bartender at a craft beerbar in April, Karl enjoys baking bread, cycling, and playing too many board and role-playing games in his spare time.

Photos:
[Stock Photo](#)

BEING MIXED ASIAN AT HOME AND IN OKINAWA



In the December 2016 issue of *CONNECT* Magazine, I wrote a piece in which I reflected on my mixed Asian identity in Okinawa. I mentioned that it has been a privilege to live in a place where I see many kinds of mixed Asian faces, many of which are my JET ALT colleagues. However, living in a multi-ethnic body is a different experience for each person, and through interviews with eight other mixed Asian ALTs I hope to share their stories as well as their insightful perceptions on what they feel it means to be of mixed-Asian descent in Okinawa.

The eight ALTs I interviewed are Americans, teaching in Okinawa prefecture with the JET Programme. They come from California, Texas, Washington, and Hawaii. We talked about their

experiences growing up with mixed Asian heritage in their home communities and compared this to their experiences while living in Okinawa. Angelica (Angie) Hunter, from Kapolei, Hawaii said that being exposed to many different cultures and people while living in Hawaii has made her 'crave and really miss diversity while being here in Okinawa.'

Many of the Hawaiian JETs that I spoke with expressed gratitude and appreciation for having grown up as a mixed-Asian in Hawaii. Hailey Maeda, from Kailua, who identifies as Japanese, Okinawan, Native Hawaiian American, and Caucasian, feels that 'it could not have been more of a blessing as Hawaii is one of (if not the most) diverse societies in the world. Oftentimes

ethnicities are talked about openly in Hawaii not as a way to disparage or discriminate, but to highlight just what a melting pot Hawaii is. In Hawaii one of the first questions asked is “what are you?” because everyone is mixed.’

Johann Kuipers, of Dutch and Chinese heritage, grew up in both Wisconsin and Hawaii. He said that he stuck out more as a mixed person in Wisconsin than he did in Hawaii. Kikaha Chee, also from Hawaii and who identifies with a mixture of ethnicities including Chinese, Japanese, and European, echoes this sentiment of the uniqueness of Hawaiian society; ‘So many people are at least two things. I have heard that mixed Asians who grow up in predominantly white areas sometimes find it difficult to fit in. I find that so sad and unfortunate, and a reflection of some deeply entrenched, last bastion of the idea of racial and cultural purity that is slowly and thankfully dying.’

Jenna Lowell, who is of Puerto Rican and Japanese Okinawan ancestry, grew up in El Paso, Texas, in a predominately Hispanic/Mexican American community. She says that growing up, she really only thought about her mixture of ethnicities when answering demographic surveys or when she visited her grandparents. She recalls visiting her Okinawan grandmother in Florida one summer and watching her and her friends dance Eisa (Okinawan traditional dancing usually performed during the Obon season). ‘I watched my grandmother in childlike wonderment as I tried to imitate her dance moves as best as I could. These were fond memories for me growing up in a mixed household, but they were small slivers of my life compared to the rest of my childhood. I’d completely forgotten about being mixed because I felt most at home in my Mexican American community.’

Chris Bell grew up in Bellvue, a town in Washington state about 30 minutes

from Seattle. He identifies as mixed race, half white and half Japanese. His Japanese side of the family has been in the U.S for over 5 generations. However, he felt that he was not exposed to much Japanese culture or language, something he attributes to his family’s experiences with internment during World War II.

Since living in Okinawa, the topic of his mixed ethnicity does not come up that often. He thinks this is mostly due to his outward appearance. He says that at 6”4’ (193 centimeters), he sticks out in a crowd. ‘Everyone assumes that I am white and that I am American. This is fine with me as both these things are true, but I can see why other people get annoyed or offended in this situation. Many people may choose to identify a certain way.’ Hailey, who is also tall at 5”10’, gets approached by people who are surprised by her height. They then ask questions such as ‘are you half?’, ‘are you military?’, and ‘do you speak Japanese?’ She isn’t bothered by and doesn’t feel discriminated by these questions. She understands that she looks mixed, and views these questions as conversation starters.

However, some of the mixed Asian ALTs I spoke with told me of unpleasant or uncomfortable experiences they have had because of their appearance. Hugo Tran from Southern California has a varied background of Asian ethnicities (Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese), and often gets assumed to be Okinawan or from mainland Japan. ‘I could never experience what people call a *gaijin* smash or *gaijin* privilege. I am too foreign to be Asian and too Asian to be foreign.’

Angie, who is black and Filipina, has had instances of women clutching their bags on the monorail when they see her, or avoiding walking on the same side of the street as her. She is fairly certain it is because of her darker complexion. As

an ALT, Angie has even brought the topic of mixed Japanese identity to the classroom: 'I actually did a lesson on what it means to be Japanese and at the end of the project, I showed my class the documentary *Hafu*. The documentary made it very apparent that bullying and misunderstanding is still rooted in Japanese culture today when it comes to mixed Japanese people. Here in Okinawa though, I think they are a bit better because they see them at a higher frequency. My *hafu* students aren't shunned in class and they are usually pretty popular amongst their classmates. However, after talking to a few of them one on one, I can tell they still feel a bit of exclusion from the people around them. Like they don't quite belong, but they've lived here their whole lives.'

Jennifer Blakely from Honolulu, Hawaii, is 'very, very mixed' (Japanese, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, American Indian, French, German, and Spanish). She identifies best as Japanese, but has also approached the topic of mixed ethnicities in her work at school. 'I know that Japanese people in general have a hard time grasping the concept of being mixed, and I even see it among the students in school sometimes. They don't understand it, and so they don't know how to deal with it. It's an opportunity for me to learn about how people perceive us and for me to kind of promote better understanding of what it means to be mixed.'

The idea that Okinawans see mixed people more often compared to people living in other prefectures in Japan was a common theme that came up in the conversations for this article. Asides from Johann, all of the ALTs I spoke with are based on the main island of Okinawa. Johann, on the other hand, is based on Ishigaki island, a western outer island of Okinawa about an hour's flight from Naha. He says that on Ishigaki he does not see many mixed Okinawans. This may be because of Ishigaki's far proximity from the American military bases.

American military bases do influence the mixed population of Okinawa. Some may view this as a sign that Okinawans should be more open minded or accepting of mixed Okinawans. Jenna feels another way; 'I think Okinawa might be one of the hardest prefectures to be in if you're mixed. Especially if your mixed heritage is from a military member and a local. Living on Kadena base with my husband and seeing the protesters every Friday morning when I drive to work I want to

scream and tell them "I wouldn't be alive if it weren't for this base!" My Grandfather was stationed in Kadena base back in the 60s, and that's how my grandparents met. My mother, the wonderful, strong woman that she is, is an *ainoko* (love child) and wouldn't be alive if these protesters had their way. To be honest, I never had to feel like I had to fight for my right to exist more than I do now. If they only knew that they're not only protesting the bases, but the children that come from these mixed relationships.'

Chris too believes it can be hard for children with mixed heritage living in Okinawa. 'I would think that being proud of all parts of your heritage would be a more difficult state of mind to reach. Especially in Okinawa, as most of the mixed kids here are part American and the military bases cause a slightly negative outlook on Americans. I think that the conflicts surrounding the bases would be a very difficult topic for these kids to not only talk about, but also to hear about from the people who surround them.'

Although it can be hard living in a mixed race body, Kikaha ultimately believes that people who are of mixed heritage have a lot to offer Japan and Okinawa as encouragers of empathy and understanding. 'Whether Japan/Okinawa likes it or not, they will need to adapt and be more inclusive in order to survive as a culture. I don't believe that the basis for culture is race. That is an antiquated world view. I want to tell the mixed Japanese kids that they are the future, even if they cannot comprehend it, as I'm sure many full Japanese people can't. I want to tell them that as someone different in a country of perceived homogeneity, they must better themselves and excel in whatever they decide to do and that they will have to work harder because of misinformed perceptions. They must be a positive example of what can be in order to erode the racism, xenophobia, and stigma towards mixed Japanese in Japan.'

Shaina Somers is an ALT in Okinawa prefecture from Vancouver, Canada. She has a passion for immigration policy and stories of migration. She herself is of mixed Chinese, Irish and German heritage. She would like to thank Chris Bell, Jennifer Blakely, Kikaha Chee, Angelica Hunter, Johann Kuipers, Jenna Lowell, Hailey Maeda and Hugo Tran for being so open to share their rich stories and perspectives.

Photos:
Hailey Maeda
Angelica Hunter



feel the beat

A FOREIGNER'S GUIDE TO LEARNING THE STEPS

Brad Breiten (Hokkaido)

Sapporo is known for many things: beer festivals and factories, a thriving consumer culture, being Japan's fourth largest city, and having one of the most impressive snow festivals in the country. One thing it is most certainly not known for is Latin dance. For those unfamiliar, Latin dance is an umbrella term that focuses on a variety of social dance styles that originated in and around Latin America and Latin American culture (i.e. salsa, bachata, merengue, and kizomba, just to name a few). Although small by some standards, the Latin dance scene in Sapporo is alive and growing with engaged dancers, frequent gatherings, weekly lessons in various dance styles, and skilled instructors.

Social dancing, to me, is intoxicating. It starts by walking through the door of a dimly lit restaurant/bar; the warmth of the place splashes over you as you walk in from the biting Hokkaido cold. As you enter, the room is electric — the music filled with congos, guitars, brass, and piano, the people filled with the excitement of moving. En route to hang up your coat and bag, you run a gauntlet of friendly greetings with fellow dancers, then to the bar for your refresher of choice — ginger ale, straight, on the rocks, twist of lemon — or you know, whatever you like. From there on it is a blur of stepping, swaying, spinning, dipping, and whirling until you realize the time has come to go home. To know the euphoria

of spending a night like this is an experience I wish for everyone to experience.

Social dancing is a wonderful way to meet new people, make friends, get some exercise, escape stress, and integrate with a local community for a sense of belonging. It is also a great way to combat many of the sources of depression in those of us feeling isolated in a foreign country. The movement coupled with human contact, and the pleasure of existing in the energy of the movement, releases a whole host of pleasure-inducing chemicals into our bodies, not the least of which are endorphins and dopamine. Having danced socially in ten countries on four continents, I have come to see that Latin dance scenes the world over have similar structures. Here I would like to introduce the people and places of the Sapporo dance scene that represent the integral parts of structures found around the world.

Latin dance scenes generally have two main types of activity hubs: bars or clubs that offer beginner to intermediate group lessons, open dance floors, and wonderfully loud music, and studios where you can take private or group lessons tailored to your skill level, drill the basics, and get immediate and professional feedback on your progress. The primary hubs of Latin dance activity in Sapporo are Habana Club, El Mango, and Studio Dream (童梨夢)



24. Habana club and El Mango represent the former of the two types. Both are cozy, dimly lit bars with good drink and good food. Two to four nights a week they offer group dance lessons followed by open dance floor. The classes are fun, and learning together strengthens the bonds of friendship and community between the dancers who after the lesson can enjoy honing their newly acquired combinations on the open dance floor.

The bar owners and instructors who coordinate the classes also periodically throw bigger dance parties on weekends which draw larger crowds and a greater variety of skill and style. In a small scene like Sapporo, it is a privilege to have so many people committed to creating opportunities for dance every week, and a group of dancers who do not exclusively dance in one location. This way you get to see and practice with new friends frequently.

While Habana and Mango are great for getting to meet people in the scene, learn the basics, and have a good time, for those that find themselves firmly ensnared in the loving grip of Latin dance, the real magic happens at the studios, where you can get 1-on-1 instruction, tailored group lessons and, in the case of Sapporo, monthly dance parties. Studio Dream 24 in Sapporo is the current base of operations for North Japan SALSA Company. In addition to teaching salsa, the founder of North Japan

SALSA Company, Naomi Tamura, invites performers, instructors, and DJs from around Hokkaido and all of Japan to North Japan SALSA Company monthly parties that provide students and other members of the Latin dance community opportunities to hone their skills in a welcoming, relaxed, and supportive environment (not to mention the benefit of the studio's high quality dance floor and sound system).

In short, the scene in Sapporo is small, but growing. It is open, inclusive, supportive, and encouraging, and is a great place to meet new people. I know I have described here the basics of the scene specific to Sapporo. However, if you find yourself wishing for company, excitement, energy, and opportunity, look no further than a Latin dance community. I hope you can use the examples here to help find the community hubs in your cities and towns. And if you ever happen to be in Sapporo, look no further than the Latin dance venues listed above for a friendly face and an evening of dance.

Brad Breiten is a first year ALT in the winter wonderland of Iwamizawa-shi, Hokkaido. A jack of many trades, but a master of none, he fills his hours with teaching, researching Japanese performance art, dancing and teaching Latin dance, playing the shamisen, practicing judo, bouldering, and traveling all over the beautiful island of Hokkaido.

Photo: Iba Jun (射場淳)

CONNECT SPECIAL

**COLLABORATION BETWEEN SPORTS
AND ENTERTAINMENT**

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

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Sabrina Zirakzadeh

Seeing flowers blooming along the river outside my apartment on three sides is the best part of spring!

SPORTS EDITORS

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Subane Abdi

I could say something profound to welcome spring, but I'd rather shout in joy for warmer weather, yaay!!

Emma Riley

Photo: Ikuko Tanigawa





high flying fitness

Emma Riley (Tokyo), Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)
and Subane Abdi (Shiga)

This month, the Entertainment and Sports sections brings you a special article, delving into the fascinating world of circus acrobatics. Filled with intricate and expertly executed moves of wonder that grip the attention of the many that watch this awe-inspiring spectacle, this article interviews a circus performer and instructor with her own circus school, Ikuko "Ikko" Tanigawa. Curious about the benefits of circus training, the excitement, and the allure, Sabrina Zirakzadeh of CONNECT Magazine went to interview Ikko about her passion of circus training.

Sabrina: What level of prior training did you do before starting circus training?

Ikko: My father trained me when I was child. I would do things like pull-ups 20 times at the high bar in the park, handstands on the grass, martial arts and boxing at home... also watching Rocky together!

In school, I competed in the high jump and 400 meter races for nine years on the track team. I also studied gymnastics for three years in junior high school, but there was no teacher so we practiced with the wrong technique (our teacher was a tennis player, so we mainly taught ourselves watching videos and reading books). I played lacrosse for one year in university.

As an adult, I worked as a fitness instructor for seven years in Tokyo on NHK BS Aerobics and at Club Med in Okinawa, as well as later teaching yoga in Kyoto, Osaka, and Indonesia. In 2009, I began studying at the National Institute of Circus Arts in Australia, focusing on aerial training. I then moved on to work for three years as a stunt performer at Universal Studios Japan, and finally founded Ikura Circus in 2015.

Sabrina: Some of the feats accomplished can seem daunting or near impossible for beginners. What tips could you have for aspiring or curious readers?

Ikko: Please come and try! It's fun! You don't need to compare yourself with other people! The most important thing is to enjoy yourself. If the bar is too high, we can lower the bar closer to the floor. We will teach you easy stretching and conditioning before going up in the air, and we will teach you basic movement first. If you think the circus is still too difficult for you, try Aerial Yoga class (also known as Hammock Yoga), which is easy for anyone. I have a student, she is 70 years old, and she can still join our classes and have fun!

Sabrina: Describe a usual day's training schedule.

Ikko: I usually spend 11 a.m. - 9:30 p.m. at Ikura Circus six days a week. Depending on the day, I teach 1-5 classes, and if I don't have to teach many classes, I do paperwork, computer work, edit music, edit videos, direct the show, organize the rehearsals for upcoming event, do scheduling for teachers and performers, banking, business meetings, etc.

I don't usually train for myself anymore, as when I teach and demonstrate for my students I have enough strength training. Usually I do 20-60 push ups, 10 pull-ups, and 200-400 reps of abdominal training just through teaching 2-5 classes a day. If I have an upcoming event and need to rehearse for my aerial act, I do 60-90 minutes of practicing (climbing up the tissue, dancing, juggling, hula hooping, etc...it depends on the show).

Sabrina: What is the allure of circus training and performances as opposed to conventional sports or gymnastics?

Ikko: It is an art. It's not a competition. You can feel the music and tell a story through physical movement. You can say whatever you would like to tell to the audience. Sometimes, I feel like our body could be like a part of a musical instrument that you perform with, so you can share your story with the audience and take them to your own world. It is very beautiful to share the moment with someone and become a part of music, it unites everything, it creates smiles, tears...you can be the guide to bring the audience their own feelings...as for challenging your physical ability, you can gain confidence. To corroborate with your teammates will build strong friendships. Most importantly, the circus is a fun activity! I really love seeing everyone become like children with lots of smiles!

Sabrina: From a fitness point of view, what benefits are gained from circus training?

Ikko: You gain flexibility from the warm-ups. Hanging from the bar, or silks or rings,

you can stretch your shoulders, back, and whole body. It is great feeling to just hang on the bar like a monkey. You can also gain core strength doing your own body weight training: for example, handstands, pull-ups, floor rolls, or hanging upside down. It is so much more fun than doing repetitive weight training at the gym.

Sabrina: Tell us a bit about the performances and showcases that Ikura Circus puts on.

Ikko: We have two main businesses: the school, to teach circus to beginners and professionals, and the planning and directing department for agents.

At the school, we have an annual student showcase. Students prepare their own act: duo trapeze, aerial tissue, juggling, etc. They work very hard for this big event and some of them create their own costumes! We also have seasonal parties once every few months such as Valentine's Day and Christmas parties. These are potluck-style; students and their families and friends bring food and drink to share, enjoy the conversation, see the students' showcase...it is a very friendly, welcoming party! We are a circus family!

We [the teachers] are professional entertainers with warm hearts! All the performers have great skills and entertainment backgrounds, such as Tokyo Disneyland, Universal Studios Japan, overseas circus shows, Chinese Acrobat troupes, world champions at kung fu, Cirque du Soleil registered performers, and so on. As part of Ikura Circus, our students and teachers both have performed on cruise ships docked at Osaka Port,





a Kobe Harbor Land, the Umeda Hannkyu Christmas events, the Osaka Kinki Deaf Event Circus show, Universal Studios Japan, Rokko Konan Hospital's Charity Christmas, and general shows and workshops in Osaka, Kobe, Fukuoka, and even an earthquake benefit in Oita. It is a good way to start promoting yourself and get in performance experience before and after professional performing work!

Sabrina: What advice do you have for aspiring performers who might be curious about circus training and how it can benefit them?

Ikko: We have professional trainers who have great skills and experience. Please feel free to tell your trainers about your goal or dream that you would like to achieve! We will support your dream and we can work towards it together! Take private lessons if you would like to focus and train seriously. If you would like to have fun and make local friends, I will recommend you to attend group lessons. Overall, having fun is the more important part. I hope you can make your circus dreams come true!

Ikuko "Ikko" Tanigawa is a professional aerialist, circus performer, stunt artist, and trainer, as well as the founder and owner of Ikura Circus in Osaka, Japan. With more than fifteen years of experience, she hopes to spread her love of the circus to anyone who has an interest, no matter what! Learn more about Ikko at her [website](#) and check out [Ikura Circus' homepage](#) for more information about circus training in Osaka!

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