

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

MARCH
2017

AJET Logo Contest — and the winner for the 30th anniversary logo contest is...

Walker from IOWA — ALT by day, performing musician by night

Sapporo Snow Festival — read some of our editors' experiences at the biggest snow festival in Japan

Fashion and Masculinity — how the differences from one culture to another could be a shock, but embracing

The Shikoku Pilgrimage — visiting the 88 temples of Shikoku: totally possible



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

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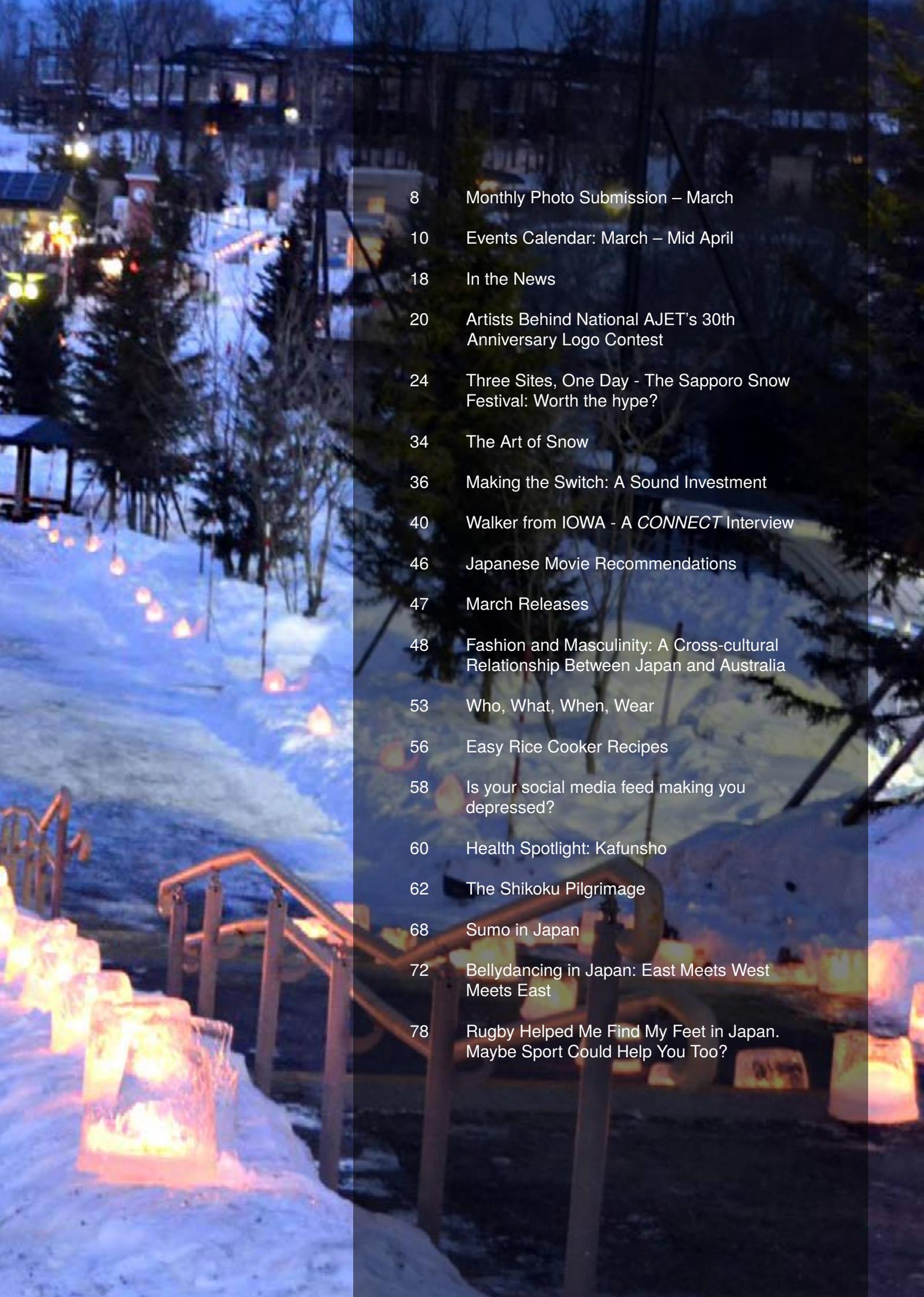
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

March is kind of a “bluh” month, isn’t it? Schools everywhere are preparing for graduation, and while that comes with its own excitement, it does mean everything gets pretty busy. Plus, all the pristine snow is going away, making way for a little while of dreary gray wetness before we finally see spring. Don’t get me wrong, I like rain. But the bare trees and constant mist are a bit of a downer.

Perfect time, really, to get going on all those things you’ve been meaning to do. We always have “New Year’s Resolutions”, but January is simultaneously too cold and too warm with holiday spirit for any kind of strict resolutions. February’s even colder, and we either get elated or deflated at Valentine’s Day, neither state conducive at all to bettering yourself. Let’s all just start them in March, when there’s nothing much to do and not much to see anyway! I think I’m onto something.

I mentioned schools earlier — as it’s almost time for graduation, a lot of changes are going to happen in the workplace. The kids moving on to high school, university, or into the workforce, their successors take their place at the top of the school, and *senpai* become *kohai* at whatever new institution they attend. Follow their example; try something new, make a change you’ve been considering, even if it’s something as small as getting a haircut. It’s warming up now; you don’t need all that hair. Crazy.

I do hope that some of the stories in this and past issues of *CONNECT* can serve as inspiration for you. A recipe, a travel guide, a show, an event — lots here for someone looking for a catalyst for something new. Or you can write something for us, or give us your photos. I want to connect you with a new challenge. Make March your month.

Timothy Saar
Head Editor
2nd Year Gifu ALT



Photo: Illaura Rossiter



NEWS AND EVENTS



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Kelsey Lechner

"Time to don the white collared shirt and the black suit — it's job hunting season!"

EVENTS EDITOR

connect.events@ajet.net

Lauren Hill

"I got an oven now so all I do is look at recipes when I'm free. I think the teachers are concerned..."

Photo: Lauren Porter



Chizu Snow Festival

Chizu, Tottori

Elaine Ho (Tottori)

Elaine Ho is a big
Toronto. Curre
City and is en
can't get enough o
wander the beautiful s
foot or by bike. Com
to get involved in a
working on jugglin



If you're a Canadian girl like myself, Québec's Winter Carnival is likely what you picture when you hear the words "winter festival." If not, then perhaps you think of Sapporo. In other words, you wouldn't assume Tottori (famous for sand dunes and its low population) would play host to the annual Chizu Snow Festival, would ya?

The 18th Chizu Snow Festival was a one-day event held on February 4th. There were live performances, *mochi* making demonstrations, beautiful snow sculptures, and of course food stalls. Arriving shortly after 5 p.m., one of the first things I noticed was a giant snow slope full of gleeful toboggan-toting children. The streets were lined with tiny candle-filled igloos. For such a small town, I was pleasantly surprised to see a variety of sculptures, including Hello Kitty, B-Max, the year of the rooster, igloos (or *kamakura*), and finally a beautiful art installation in front of a temple.

Unluckily, I missed the *Totoro* sculpture, but maybe I'll catch it next year.

city girl originally from
ntly, she lives in Tottori
joying a quieter life. She
of sushi and she loves to
streets of Japan whether on
sidered a dabbler, she likes
lot of things; presently she is
g, swing dancing, and learning
about Ikebana.

Events Calendar:

March - Mid April

Lauren Hill (Tokyo)

Block 1

Hokkaido
Aomori
Iwate
Akita

Block 2

Miyagi
Yamagata
Fukushima
Niigata

Block 3

Ibaraki
Tochigi
Gunma
Saitama
Nagano

Block 4

Chiba
Tokyo
Kanagawa
Yamanashi
Shizuoka

Block 5

Toyama
Ishikawa
Fukui
Gifu
Aichi

Block 6

Shiga
Kyoto
Hyogo

Block 7

Mie
Osaka
Nara
Wakayama

Block 8

Tokushima
Kagawa
Ehime
Kochi

Block 9

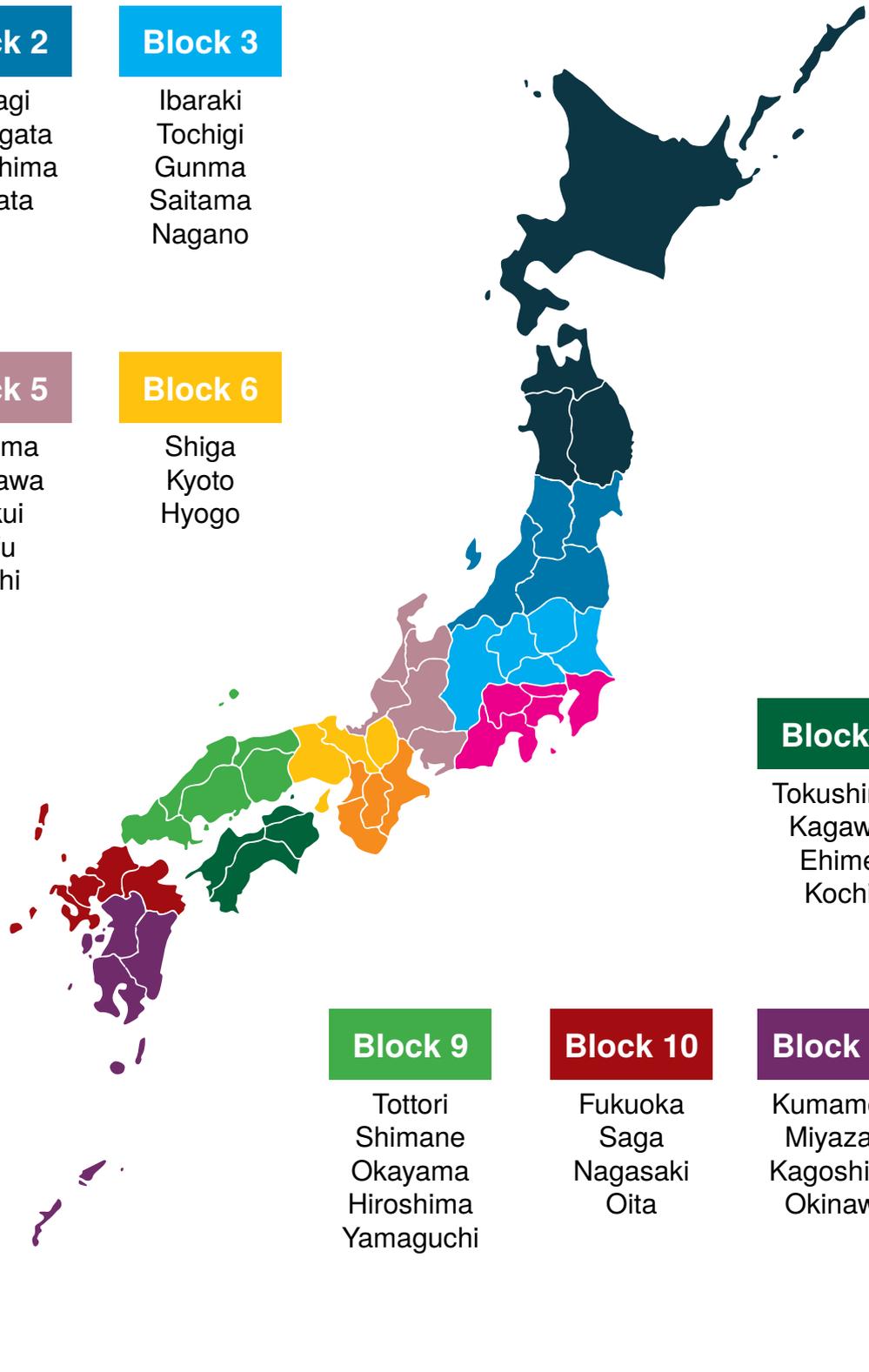
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa



Block 1

Sapporo White Illumination 2016

18 Nov. – 14 March

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

Prefecture

Website

Hachinohe Bouillabaisse Festa

1 Feb. – 31 March

Various participating restaurants,
Hachinohe City, Aomori Prefecture

Website

Azumamine Sake Party 2017

4 March

Hotel Taikan, Morioka City, Iwate
Prefecture

Website

New Concept Fireworks Collection

18 March

Omagari Family Ski Slope, Daisen
City, Akita Prefecture

Website

Kaikoani Matobi Matsuri (Ten Thousand Light Festival)

20 March

Kamikoani Village, Kita Akita District,
Akita Prefecture

Website

Snow Corridor Walk

30 March – 31 March

Goldline Route 103, Aomori City,
Aomori Prefecture

Website

Block 2

Zao Onsen Snow Monster Illuminations

23 Dec. – 5 March

Zao Onsen Village, Yamagata City,
Yamagata Prefecture

Website

Urasa Hadaka Oshiai Matsuri (Naked Festival)

3 March

Fuko-ji Temple, Urasa Town, Minami
Uonuma City, Niigata Prefecture

Website

Snow Festival and Fireworks Display

4 March

Yuzawa Onsen Ski Trail, Yuzawa
Town, Niigata Prefecture

Website

Sake no Jin (Rice Wine Festival)

11 March – 12 March

Toki Messe Convention Center,
Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture

Website

Echigo Matsudai Fuyu no Jin (Winter Festival)

11 March – 12 March

Matsuihiro Gymnasium, Tokamachi
City, Niigata Prefecture

Website

Aizu Higan Shishimai (Traditional Spring Performance and Festival)

20 March

Various sites, Aizuwakamatsu City,
Fukushima Prefecture

Website

Itoigawa Kenka Matsuri (Float Battle)

10 April – 11 April

Amatsu Shrine, Itoigawa City, Niigata
Prefecture

Website

Block 3

Night-time Illuminations

5 Nov. – 26 March

Tobu World Square, Kinugawa
Onsen, Nikko City, Tochigi Prefecture

Website

Wine Fair Suzuka 2017

4 March

Silky Building 3F "Silky Hall", Suzuka
City, Nagano Prefecture

Website

Saito Festival

9 March

Kashima Jingu Shrine, Kashima City,
Ibaraki Prefecture

Website

Haruna Plum Blossom Festival

19 March

Haruna Cultural Centre, Kamisatomi
Town, Takasaki City, Gunma

Prefecture

Website

The 22nd Katakuri Cherry Blossom Festival

25 March – 2 April

Midori City, Gunma Prefecture

Website

Watarase Hot Air Balloon Race 2017

7 April – 9 April

Fujioka Watarase Motor Park, Tochigi
City, Tochigi Prefecture

Website

Ishida Lion Dance

9 April

Fujimiya Shrine area, Kawagoe City,
Saitama Prefecture

Website

Naka City Double Cherry Blossom Festival

15 April – 3 May

Shizumine Furusato Park, Naka City,
Ibaraki Prefecture

Website





Block 4

Atami Kaijo Hanabi Taikai (Fireworks Festival)

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

Gold Dragon Dance Festival

18 March
Sensoji Temple, Asakusa area, Taito Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website in Japanese only

Sumida Park Cherry Blossom Festival

19 March – 9 April
Sumida Park, Sumida Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Anime Japan 2017

23 March – 26 March
Tokyo Big Sight, Koto Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Yokosuka Spring Festa

26 March
US Navy Yokosuka Base, Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Spring Ritual Dance Festival

27 March – 28 March
Kamakazu Shrine, Asahi City, Chiba Prefecture
Website

Shizuoka Festival

31 March – 2 April
Shizuoka Station area, Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Rice Planting Festival

1 April – 2 April
Katori Shrine, Katori City, Chiba Prefecture
Website

Nippon Craftbeer Festival

1 April – 2 April
Sumida Riverside Hall, Sumida Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Kanamara Penis Festival

2 April
Wakamiya Hachimangu Shrine & Kanayama Shrine, Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Shingen-Ko Matsuri (Festival to commemorate Takeda Shingen)

7 April – 9 April
Kofu City, Yamanashi Prefecture
Website

Kamakura Festival

9 April – 16 April
Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website



Block 5

Wajima Senmaida Aze Mantou (Thousand Candle Rice Field Display)

15 Oct. – 12 March
Wajjima City Rice Fields, Ishikawa
Prefecture
Website

Souriike Plum Blossom Festival

11 February – 12 March
Souri Midori to Hana no Fureai Park,
Chita City, Aichi Prefecture
Website

Hounensai (Fertility/Penis Festival)

15 March
Tagata Jinja Shrine, Komaki City,
Aichi Prefecture
Website

Dousan Matsuri (Saito Dousan Festival)

1 April – 2 April
Jozai-ji Temple, Gifu City, Gifu
Prefecture
Website

Inuyama Festival

1 April – 2 April
Haritsuna Shrine, Inuyama City, Aichi
Prefecture
Website

Hida Ikibina Festival (Women's Heian Costume Parade)

3 April
Minashi Shrine, Takayama City, Gifu
Prefecture
Website

Hikiyama Festival and Float Parade

4 April – 6 April
Atakasumiyoshi Shrine (Komatsu
City) & Juzo Shrine (Wajima City),
Ishikawa Prefecture
Website

Tejikarao Fire Festival

8 April
Tejikarao Shrine, Kakamigahara City,
Gifu Prefecture
Website

Mino Matsuri (Flower Parade)

8 April – 9 April
Hachiman Shrine, Mino City, Gifu
Prefecture
Website

Ieyasu Festival and Parade

9 April
City Centre, Okazaki City, Aichi
Prefecture
Website

Takayama Spring Festival

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

Block 6

Kyoto Illumiére 2016-2017

29 Oct. – 9 April
Rurikei Hot Springs, Nantan City,
Kyoto Prefecture
Website

The 4th Kawanishi Townscape Art Museum

19 Feb. – 5 March
Various sites, Kawanishi City, Hyogo
Prefecture
Website

Kiyomizu-Dera Spring Illuminations

3 March – 12 March
Kiyomizu-dera Temple, Higashiyama
Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Higashiyama Foothill Spring Illuminations

3 March – 12 March
Higashiyama Foothills, Higashiyama
Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

En Nen Sai (Prayer Ritual for Long Life)

17 March
Urashima Shrine, Ine Town, Yosa
District, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Hatsu Uma Taisai (Spring Festival)

18 March
Inari Shrine, Toyooka City, Hyogo
Prefecture
Website

Kitano Odori (Traditional Spring Dance by Geiko and Maiko)

25 March – 7 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

Hikiyama Festival

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

Sake Spring 2017

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



Block 7

Nabana no Sato Winter Illuminations 2016-2017

15 Oct. – 7 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 Jan. – 11 April
National Museum of Ethnology, Suita
City, Osaka Prefecture
Website

Omizutori Fire Festival

1 March – 14 March
Todai-ji Temple, Nara City, Nara
Prefecture
Website

Koya no Hi Matsuri (Fire Festival)

12 March
Kongobu-ji Temple, Koyo, Ito District,
Wakayama Prefecture
Website

March Grand Sumo Tournament

12 March – 26 March
Osaka Prefectural Gymnasium,
Namba District, Osaka City, Osaka
Prefecture
Website

KasugaSai (Spring Festival)

13 March
Kasuga-taisha Shrine, Nara City,
Nara Prefecture
Website

Sake and Jazz Festival

13 March
Hotel Granvia Wakayama 6F “Le
Grand”, Wakayama City, Wakayama
Prefecture
Website

Kansai Collection (Spring and Summer 2017 Fashion Festival)

19 March
Kyocera Dome, Nishi Ward, Osaka
City, Osaka Prefecture
Website

Flower Association Festival

25 March – 31 March
Yakushi-ji Temple, Nara City, Nara
Prefecture
Website

Kashihara Spring Festival

07 April – 9 April
Kashihara Jingu Shrine, Kashihara
City, Nara Prefecture
Website

Block 8

Nanrakuen Plum Festival 2017

28 Jan. – 5 March
Nanrakuen Japanese Garden,
Uwajima City, Ehime Prefecture
Website

Exhibition: Tosa at the End of the Tokugawa Shogunate

29 Jan. – 10 May
Kochi Prefectural Museum of History,
Nankoku City, Kochi Prefecture
Website

Big Hinamatsuri (Doll Festival)

19 Feb. – 2 April
Doll Cultural Exchange Centre,
Katsuura Town, Katsuura District,
Tokushima Prefecture
Website

Nanaore Plum Blossom Festival

20 Feb. – 10 March
Nanaore, Tobe Town, Ehime
Prefecture
Website

Takamatsu Ireland Festival

20 March
Takamatsu Marugame-Machi Dome,
Marugame Town, Takamatsu City,
Kagawa Prefecture
Website

Princess Rebirth Parade and Photo Competition

26 March
Nadamachi District, Iyo City, Ehime
Prefecture
Website

Block 9

Irish Festival

12 March
Karakoro Studio, Matsue City,
Shimane Prefecture
Website

Sanin Hamada Port Bridge Relay Marathon

18 March
Hamada Port area, Hamada City,
Shimane Prefecture
Website

Rabbit Happy Festa

20 March
Orange Hall, Toiya Town, Kita Ward,
Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture
Website

Nouji Spring Festival

25 March – 26 March
Saizakicho Noji area, Mihara City,
Hiroshima Prefecture
Website

Momote-sai (Japanese Archery Ritual)

26 March
Okadaya Public Hall, Ube City,
Yamaguchi Prefecture
Website

Sairei-Furyu (Japanese Archery Ritual)

28 March
Hanaike Jinja Shrine, Okinoshima
Island, Shimane Prefecture
Website

Nagashi-Bina Matsuri (Doll Floating Ritual)

29 March – 30 March
Sendai Riverside, Mochigase Town,
Yazu District, Tottori Prefecture
Website

Matsue Musha Gyoretsu (Samurai Parade)

1 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

Block 10

Usuki Hina Doll Tour

10 Feb. – 20 March
Various sites, Usuki City, Oita
Prefecture
Website

Saga Hinamatsuri (Doll Festival)

11 Feb. – 31 March
Various sites, Saga City, Saga
Prefecture
Website

Hita Oyama Plum Blossom Festival

19 Feb. – 19 March
Okubodai Plum Orchard, Hita City,
Oita Prefecture
Website

Kitakyushu Ramen Championship 2017

18 March – 19 March
Mojiko Retro Central Square, Moji
Ward, Kitakyushu City, Fukuoka
Prefecture
Website

Kanoukaen Matsuri (Fire Festival and Samurai Parade)

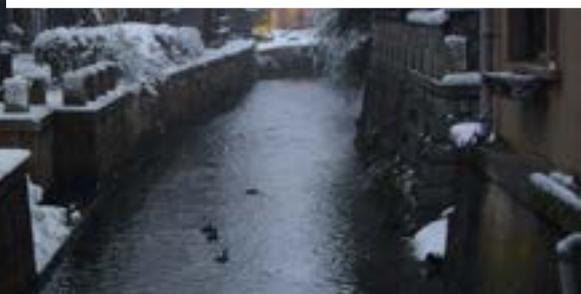
25 March
Chijiwa Town, Unzen City, Nagasaki
Prefecture
Website

Kashima Sakagura Tourism Festival

25 March – 26 March
Various sake breweries, Kashima
City, Saga Prefecture
Website

Doro Uchi Matsuri (Mud Throwing Festival)

26 March
Aso Shrine, Asakura City, Fukuoka
Prefecture
Website



Block 11

Yuyama Onsen Cherry Blossom Festival

20 Feb. – 1 April

Asenohara Water Park, Mizukami Village, Kuma District, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website](#)

Higashison Azalea Festival

3 March – 20 March

Higashi Eco Park, Higashi-Son, Kunigami District, Okinawa Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tamayura Onsen Festival

4 March – 19 March

Tamayura Onsen, Miyazaki City, Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tarou Tarou Matsuri (Spring Festival)

5 March

Hasimasaki Shrine, Hashima Town, Ichikikushikino City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hinokuni Yosakoi Festival

25 March – 26 March

Kumamoto Castle and City Centre, Chuo Ward, Kumamoto City, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website](#)

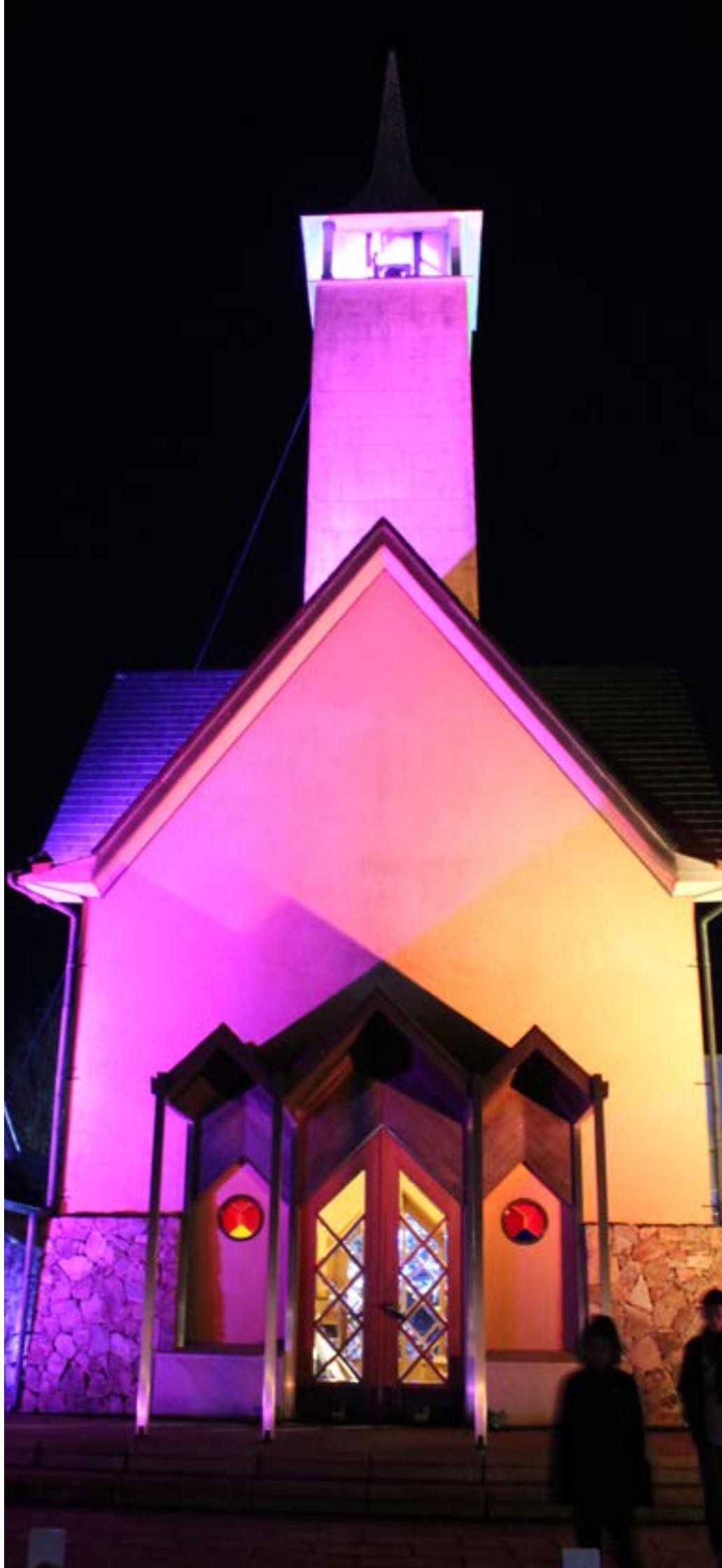
Cherry Blossom Festa Takajo

26 March

Kannon Pond Amusement Park, Takajo Town, Miyakonojo City, Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Photos:
May Zhang
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In the News

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

15 January

APA Hotels have been criticized domestically and internationally after a video was uploaded in January. It features an American student recounting her experiences at the hotel chain after finding the books written by CEO Toshio Motoya, under the penname Fuji. The books, which are placed in every guest room in 155 of the chain's 415 hotels, assert the "true modern history" of Japan, most prominently denying the internationally accepted facts of the Nanking Massacre, the Pearl Harbor attack, and the "Comfort Women" system during WWII, among others. The company does not seem to be willing to offer an apology or remove the books from the rooms, for which it has received praise among some for taking a nationalist and machismo stance. On the other hand, the company has been criticized by other media outlets for a lack of responsibility in wartime atrocities and sexism.

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

<http://bit.ly/2klaM7f>

25 January

Sumo wrestler Kisenosato became the 72nd wrestler to be promoted to *yokozuna*, the highest rank in the sport. He is the first Japan-born *yokozuna* in 19 years — the only other current *yokozuna* are all Mongolian, as the sport is often dominated by Mongolians and Pacific Islanders.

<http://ti.me/2l9JtMt>

27 January

The number of foreign workers in Japan has crossed the 1 million mark for the first time as of October 2016. The country saw a 19.4% increase in foreign workers from the previous year; Chinese are the largest migrant group at about 345,000, followed by Vietnamese at about 172,000 (a 56.4% increase), and Filipinos at 128,000 (a 19.7% increase). The government has expressed a desire for temporary laborers

to fill the labor gaps, especially in preparation for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, without labeling it “immigration.” Despite this, the government has also eased some regulations for the acquisition of permanent residency for some highly-skilled career sectors.

<http://bit.ly/2l21da9>

<http://bit.ly/2kle61P>

9 February

In the first survey conducted by the Cabinet Office on sexual incidents involving 197 young women aspiring to show business, such as models or idols, 26.9% responded that they were requested by their contractors to partake in porn shoots. 32% of the respondents were under the age of 18. A government official stated that the numbers are likely much larger than the results show, and that many women feel ashamed and unable to come forth or reach out about sexual victimization in the workplace.

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

3 February

Japan released a plan to take in 20 Syrian student refugees and their families per year from 2017-2021, totalling 300 refugees over the course of the five years. The students will be given a family stipend and job hunting support upon graduation, granting a path to possibly settling in Japan long-term. While this has been commended as a step in the right direction for Japan to aid the refugee crisis, it has likewise been criticized due to the low numbers of refugee acceptance and stringent acceptance policies. Countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada, and Germany all had taken in tens to hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers by the end of 2016; in comparison, Japan only accepted 28 refugees in 2016 and 27 in 2015, although not all were officially recognized as “refugees.” 10,910 people applied for refugee status in Japan in 2016.

<http://bit.ly/2lDMC86>

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



AJET CONNECT:

Artists Behind

National AJET's 30th Anniversary

Logo Contest

Lillian Hart (Toyama)

2017 marks the 30th anniversary of the JET Program. Although it began with just four countries (the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom), this year the program brought talent from 40 countries to live and work in Japan. In celebration of this great accomplishment, National AJET decided to host a logo contest in which current and alumni JET participants were encouraged to submit a logo. We received 10 beautiful logos from the community. The winner, titled "Sakura Rings," by Joshua Graf, was chosen by a council-wide vote. Inspired by all the participation we had in this contest, AJET wants to highlight some of the outstanding submissions we received.



Meet the Winner: Joshua Graf from Kiryu, Gunma (Block 3)

Interesting facts:

- First year JET
- Became interested in graphic design “through association”
- Studied architecture in university which piqued his interest in design
 - Graphic design was something he frequently had to consider during his studies, finding different ways to represent his ideas, forms, groups, and more

A little bit about Joshua:

As a first year on JET, Joshua encountered many new experiences in the haste of moving from Melbourne to Japan. Moving from a big city to a rural Japanese town, he has re-evaluated and discovered new methods of “learning, teaching, making friends, and communicating.” As far as inspiration in Japan goes, he has been provided with a “different source material to base thinking off [of]. Nature is different, food is different, sounds are different, people are different, even design is different. So naturally all these new inputs encourage different ways of viewing what I already know, which is exciting!”

A little bit about the design:

“Inspiration for the design arose from considering what AJET is, the core values it holds, and how it relates to Japan. As something that all people across Japan (from north to south, native or foreign, students and teachers) can appreciate, the *sakura* flower is used as the foundation symbol of Japan. Predictably then the surrounding rings represent unity, connecting all corners of the flower, providing a network all across Japan, i.e. AJET. The colors are applied to emphasize diversity within AJET. Naturally AJET brings together people from all over the world and all across Japan, and so the intention of choosing a range of different colors that intersect is to represent this quality.”



With his background in architecture, Joshua has used design as a medium to create both graphics and physical works of art. Some of his favorite pieces include an architecture exhibition installation, a wardrobe for the bungalow his father designed in their house, and a logo for the International Student Exchange Program for Melbourne Welcome (all pictured from left to right).

Congratulations Joshua! Thank you for your hard work! If you would like to contact Joshua, please email him at joshua.o.graf@gmail.com.



Artist:

Jonathan Longden
from Moriyama, Shiga (Block 6)

Interesting facts:

- First year JET
- Taught *karate* while studying at university
- Designed images for his university's promotional materials.
- Created original designs for his undergraduate dissertation in biochemistry
- Also created original images for his 140-page Master's thesis in chemical engineering
 - Taking nearly a year to complete 100 original images, it's also his proudest work!

A little bit about Jonathan:

After moving to Japan, Jonathan decided that he might want to change courses from his original path, which was earning a PhD or going to medical school. He finds learning Japanese the hardest task he has ever taken on, and wants to invest more time into learning and using the language in the future. Though only having lived here for six months so far, his experiences have been unforgettable. "Some of my JET *senpai*, or JET alumni that I know have told me that living in Japan changes people, but I don't think that any of those changes are negative."

"I'm certainly not an artist, I wouldn't consider 'conventional art' a particular hobby of mine. Although it's definitely not conventional art that people would ever admire in a frame on a wall, I was pretty proud of how the finished piece looked. I received commendation on the presentation of my thesis, so it seemed to make all the work worth it."

A little bit about the design:

"I took a typically scientific and logical viewpoint when I was thinking about the logo. I liked the idea of incorporating an image to act as one of the letters, and I thought that a simple map of Japan would work nicely as the 'J' in 'AJET.' I tied the piece together with a very cursive, line-drawn J, which conveniently connected Japan's four main islands. This J is exactly the same style as the one in my signature. The logo was made up solely of red and white, which are obviously the colors of Japan's flag. The lighter shade was also reminiscent of Japan's cherry blossoms."

To contact Jonathan, please email him at jonil93@hotmail.com. Thank you again, Jonathan, for your participation in the logo contest!



Artist:
Joel Conway
*from Minamiaizu-Tajima,
Fukushima (Block 2)*

Interesting facts:

- Has a background in art and logo designing
- Mostly does design and programming as his hobbies
- Hopes to enter other new computer fields like virtual reality in the future

A little bit about Joel:

“I used to go to my grandparents after school, and my gran was super into painting and artsy stuff. After college, I managed to snag a part-time job at a small-run graphic design place where I would make a whole bunch of logo ideas,”

A little bit about the design:

“Inspirations for the logos were the number 30 and aspects of Japanese culture. One I thought was sort of clever was the Kabuki face; I made it have a somewhat hidden 30 on it. Thirty is written in Japanese inside a Japanese shrine gate; the red circle was a nod to the Japanese flag.”

Thank you for your awesome submissions, Joel! If you would like to contact him, please email Joel at Joel.Conway1@gmail.com.

Thank you to all who participated in AJET’s 30th anniversary logo competition. We are very happy to represent an organization that is so actively involved in their community. Here’s to 30 more years!

The image features two large snow sculptures. The background sculpture is a samurai warrior in a full suit of armor, holding a sword. The foreground sculpture is a smaller figure, possibly a child or a smaller warrior, also in armor. The scene is set outdoors in winter, with bare trees and a building visible in the background.

THREE 1
SITES 1

The Sapporo S
Worth t

Lauren H



DAY

Snow Festival:

the hype?

ill (Tokyo)

THE MISSION

Hokkaido's been at the top of my travel wish list for years, so this February I made the trip from Tokyo to take on all three sites of the Sapporo Snow Festival in one long, coffee-fuelled, mind blowing day.

The Sapporo Snow Festival is Hokkaido's most famous winter event, and is well-known both across and outside of Japan. Each year, millions of visitors flock to the island's capital for a celebration of all things frosty. I only had three days in the city, so I decided to see how much of the festival I could experience in just 8 hours.

One tip! Pack sunglasses. I wish I had. If you're not based in northern Japan, you're going to spend a lot of your first day blinking and falling on your face. I didn't know whites this white were a thing. Once your eyes adjust to the brightness, there's not a chance you're going to run out of things to see, so try to make yourself a rough outline before arriving. Mine was simple: Do/eat/photograph/stumble over everything in sight.

Though this year's festival is long over, the spectacular sculptures demolished (although - where can you even *put* that much snow?!), I hope my review may help to inspire you if you're planning your own visit up north next winter.

Photo:
Illaura Rossiter



SITE 1: TSUDOME (SAPPORO COMMUNITY DOME)

Time: 12:15 p.m.

What to see/do

Tsudome is the second largest Snow Festival site, and it was buzzing with families and couples by the time I arrived. This one's for the kids, with many attractions off limits to anyone past junior high, but there was also plenty for adults to get stuck into. Alongside a handful of snow sculptures and an area for children to add their own snowmen to a display, the main draw was the hands-on stuff. Think toboggan slopes, slides, and skiing areas. Tsudome is the winter wonderland of every ten year old's dreams.

Fresh from my sleepover in Narita Terminal 2, a plane ride, and train into the city, I swallowed my jealousy over being too old to get inside the *huge* inflatable *Pikachu*, and headed straight for the snow raft ride (600 yen). My pitiful four hours of sleep were no match for a whizz around the track in a rubber raft, towed by a snowmobile and no seat belt in sight.

What to eat

Tsudome advertises itself as a gathering of Sapporo's culinary specialties, but aside from a few ramen stands, most of the offerings were standard festival fare. There's nothing wrong with a ridiculously sweet choco banana, but my advice is to keep it to snacks here; save the feasting for Odori Park.

What to buy

While all the icy fun was going on outside, there were a handful of merchandise stalls dotted around inside the dome itself selling goods sporting characters from Snowy *Miku* to *Rilakkuma*. There wasn't too much to browse; it was nice to thaw out a little before catching the handy shuttle bus to the Odori Site, though.



SITE 2: ODORI PARK

Time: 3:18 p.m.

What to see/do

Everything. Odori is *Yuki Matsuri's* main site. This is where it's all happening. Here, you'll find enormous sculptures based on *anime*, pop culture, and even architecture. This year's show stoppers were the 3D projection mapping displays on the *Star Wars* and *Final Fantasy* sculptures. Smaller statues featured public figures such as Piko Taro, Donald Trump, and Ghibli's *Nekobus*. That's not all, though! I spent most of the day wandering up and down (and back up) the Odori Site, which stretches 12 whole blocks. During the Snow Festival, each is dedicated to a particular aspect of Hokkaido's winter culture. Throughout the day, skiing and snowboarding professionals performed terrifying stunts, idol groups gave concerts, and a new Hokkaido mascot – a man in a reindeer costume voiced by an elementary schooler – introduced himself on stage as *Kyun-chan*. That seems weirder now that I type it.

Navigating the Odori Site can be tricky. The ice is more lethal than it looks, even in Docs, and the absolute crush of people means it can take a long time to travel between blocks. It was in these close quarters that I met a toy poodle named Suzu (owner's name unknown), whose owner brings her to the festival each year where she commands the attention of sappy tourists like me. Who knows, in a few years we may see a Suzu-themed statue as part of the community sculpture competition!

What to eat

Sapporo's finest! Soup curry, seafood, ramen – Odori has it all. The edges of each block were lined with food and drink stalls (a steaming oasis in a frosty desert, if you will), and somewhere in the middle was a whole block dedicated to northern specialties! If you're feeling like something sweet, the range of snacks and desserts is almost endless, and there's even a world food bazaar. Sample the traditional favourites of Japan, France, Russia Italy, Spain and more – all at the tips of your freezing fingers!



What to buy

I can't speak for the summer months, but I defy any single gift shop to rival the range of souvenirs available between all the stalls at the Odori Site. Whether you're looking for tasty *omiyage* for your colleagues, an official Sapporo Zombear plush, or a classy handmade candle – there are stores for all tastes and price ranges.



SITE 3: SUSUKINO AREA

Time: 6:40 p.m.

What to see/do

The beauty of the *Yuki Matsuri* is that there's really something for everyone. Rides and workshops at Tsudome for the kids, Odori's snowy giants, and then Susukino Site, based in the heart of Sapporo's infamous red light district. It's the smallest site, so there were fewer works on show, but the ice sculpture theme really set it apart from the snow sculptures I'd been ogling all day. Towards the end of the site, there was a cordoned off area where visitors could watch live sculpture carving, chainsaws and all.

What to eat

You won't find any choco bananas here, but if you head to the Ice Bar (literally built of ice, but I don't know why that was still surprising), you can get yourself some steaming *yuzu* liqueur. I'm pretty much obsessed with all things *yuzu*, so I couldn't pay my 600 *yen* fast enough. The price gets you a tiny cup, but your hands will be so warm you'll barely notice.

As for food, there weren't many stalls to speak of, but the Susukino area is crammed full of cheap and delicious restaurants. Name a Sapporo specialty, odds are you'll find it in these streets, and likely cheaper than you expect!

What to buy

Unless you count the convenience stores on every corner, the Susukino Site isn't really the ideal shopping destination. Instead, it's the perfect way to round off your day with a tipsy wander through the sculptures. Everything's on a much smaller scale than at Odori and Tsudome, including the crowds, so you can see it all relatively quickly and you shouldn't have too much trouble getting close to your favourites!

THE VERDICT

Time: 7:27 p.m.

Mission complete!

My AirBnB was quite a trip from the city centre, so I had a bus to catch. Thankfully, I made the last one and didn't have to spend the night in a hastily (shoddily) assembled igloo. Hiroki, my host, cheerily chatted away with almost native English, and went on to mention that until he started accepting guests, he could barely speak English at all. It's been four years, and each winter a diverse range of customers come knocking, all with their own reasons for travelling – many to visit the Snow Festival.

Something about the annual inpouring of so many different people to one place at one time, and seeing first-hand how much it'd changed Hiroki's life, really got me in the warm and fuzzy department. I was longing for my *futon* and at least a third of my way to becoming a snow sculpture myself, but the day ended on a huge high.

So, can it be done? Absolutely! The Sapporo Snow Festival is held at these same three sites each year, and if you're looking to squeeze every second out of your time in Hokkaido then you can definitely visit them all in one day. Being in a bit of a rush may even add to the excitement of it all; it certainly did for me. Even so, I can't help wishing I had a few extra hours to linger around the more stunning spots.

There's always next time, though. See you in 2018, *Yuki Matsuri!*

Photo:
Illaura Rossiter

Snow Festivalled out?

Hokkaido owes the vast majority of its winter tourism to the Sapporo Snow festival, but if you're not based there, chances are you're going to be sticking around for a few days. Luckily, there's no limit to the exploring you can do close to the capital.

On day two, I spent the morning at the [Shiroi Koibito Park](#), home of Hokkaido's signature sweet. 600 yen gets you inside the factory for a chance to peek at the production line. There's an English style café close to the end of the tour, and the line speaks for itself. I tried the Shiroi Roll cake and it honestly ruined me for all other desserts. If you rather not queue, you can save your yen for the multitude of gift shops on the way out. There's loads of choice, but everywhere I looked people were lugging armfuls of Shiroi Koibito towards the counter.

That afternoon I took a local train out to Otaru, in hopes of catching the [Light Path Festival](#) which runs concurrent with the Snow Festival. Otaru is a complete change of scenery; usually a great place to spend a lazy afternoon. The main attraction is a particularly scenic canal. In the winter it feels almost like an extension of the Snow Festival, and it's as busy as any of the *Yuki Matsuri* sites. At this time of year, the streets of Otaru are lined with candles and lanterns of every description, turning the whole town into a living, flickering work of art. If you've time to spare, you won't regret a walk through the Light Path Festival.

On day 3, I headed to [Sapporo Art Park](#) and [Maruyama Zoo](#). Both jump on board with the season; the Art Park has free admission right now, and guests can rent snowshoes to stomp around in while they try to *find* the sculptures under mountains of ice. Part gallery, part obstacle course – this was a great way to wake up. Maruyama Zoo celebrates its own Snow Festival in February, opening until 8 p.m. on the last weekend of the festivities in Sapporo. Red pandas, meerkats, and wolves are an attraction any day of the year, but there's something special about seeing the animals enjoy the snowy season right along with you.

That's it! Of course, there are countless other tourist spots, but these are the few that I managed to see. Bonus? I'm unsure if this is just my Tokyo placement speaking for me, but public transport in Hokkaido is crazy cheap! From central Sapporo to each of these four spots, none of my trips were more than 500 yen! If that's not an excuse to follow your curiosity, I don't know what is.

Photo credits:
Lauren Hill



ARTS AND CULTURE

CULTURE EDITORS

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Annamarie Carlson

Let's enjoy this brief season before the rain returns in earnest.

Michael Sosnick

Excited to emerge from hibernation for the tiny window between coats and sweating through my clothes.

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Sabrina Zirakzadeh

*New flowers, new beginnings, new bruises, new me!
I'm addicted to this high-flying circus life!*

Travis Shaver

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Erica Grainger

Spring into Spring - I'm at Mito's Umeshu festival for plum viewing and sampling 100+ unique umeshus.

Roxanne Ghezzi

Photo: Lauren Porter



THE ART

Annamarie Car

The Final Fantasy sculpture at night.



The lights showing the structure of the temple.



"Trump PPAP" with tiny hands.

Shizuoka Prefecture is a lovely place. With green fields, hot springs, and comparatively mild weather, it's a destination for people who just want to get away from the hustle and bustle, and the rough winters, found in much of the rest of Japan. It is, as some might describe it, the Florida of Honshu, where many people come to retire and enjoy their golden years in the warm weather, drinking the local green tea for health and longevity.

This is all well and good most of the time (although the price of a mild winter is a very hot and sticky summer), but in my last five years before coming to Japan, I got fairly used to life in a mountain town at 7000 ft (2133 m). This was a life which included a decent amount of snow every year; a decent amount meaning about 100 inches (254 cm) of annual snowfall. There are many things about the snow that I do not miss: The extra time it takes to get places, the constant



putting on and taking off of countless layers of clothes, the ever-present concern that you're going to slip and bruise your tailbone — the list goes on. But snow is still, you know, snow. It can be beautiful, and that is the premise at the core of the Sapporo Snow Festival.

The Snow Festival, or *Yuki Matsuri*, is held annually in the northern city of Sapporo in Hokkaido. It is a celebration of cold things being made into art and warm things being made delicious. The pieces of snow and ice art on display range from small, community

Colored lights are use to create changing effects on many pieces.

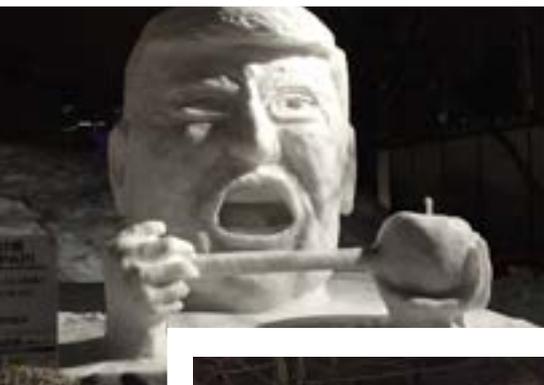


contributions to massive, intricate, sponsored snow sculptures complete with projection-mapped light shows that draw big crowds late into the chilly nights.

The biggest attractions this year were the gigantic sponsored sculptures for Final Fantasy and Star Wars. These large pieces were sculpted by a special unit of the Self Defense Force and a team of experienced volunteers. Both of these pieces towered over the crowded audiences eager

OF SNOW

lson (Shizuoka)



Star Wars was of course a big hit.



PPAP was a big part of this year's community submissions.

to see their short light and sound shows (and trying not to slip on the packed ice pathway). The projection that really stole the show, though, was of the Chu-kondo, or Central Golden Hall of Kofoku-ji Temple in Nara. Its projections used the lines of the building to their advantage as they moved up and down the joints of it in twirling, often *Tron*-esque, patterns before "building" the temple from the ground up with light.

The sponsored sculptures were impressive, of course, but in terms of creativity and memorability, the community sculptures won the award. From multiple different representations of PPAP and too many Pikachus to count, to more

political entries like Donald Trump as Pikotaro with tiny hands, and Trump as a "trump" card, these efforts from parts of the Sapporo community are what really bring the Snow Festival its unique spirit.

No festival would be complete without food, and as one of the biggest festivals in Japan and the festival that draws some of the biggest international crowds, the Snow Festival does not hold back on its food offerings. With local ramen stands and international booths selling everything from piroshkyis to deep fried pizza, the sheer number of food choices can either be a dream or a nightmare, depending on the length of your stay versus the size of your wallet and stomach. As the nights got colder, there were countless different hot drinks to keep you

Ice sculptures are illuminated at night to show their real craftsmanship.



Trump as a "trump" card.



The newest part of the festival is ice sculptures.

warm including hot chocolate, hot lemonade, hot Hokkaido milk, and many different versions of hot wine.

There were no parts of the Snow Festival that I disliked. There are plenty of things to keep you entertained, but not so many things that you can't at least see the whole festival in a single weekend. And whether you are seeing snow for the first time or spent 20 minutes digging out your car just this morning, the Snow Festival will give you a new appreciation for the things that can be created with the right kinds of frozen water. No matter where you live, this festival is worth the trip.

Photos:
All photos credited to Annamarie Carlson



MAKING THE Switch: A SOUND INVESTMENT

2014 saw one of the roughest financial stretches in history for Nintendo, owing to disappointing Wii U sales and pressure from the dominant mobile gaming industry. Since then, Nintendo has undertaken various initiatives to embrace the mobile gaming audience, such as the release of last year's explosively popular *Pokémon GO*. Formerly known by codename "NX," the Nintendo Switch is the company's successor to the Wii U. It is a hybrid system, working as both a handheld and at-home console that aims to bridge the gap between the two markets. At a Tokyo press conference on Jan. 13 this year, Nintendo laid all its secrets bare: The Nintendo Switch will launch on March 3 for an asking price of ¥29,980. Not only that, but the company announced a demo event at the Tokyo Big Sight convention centre, free to those willing to brave the early morning cold. For yours truly, a Canadian born and bred to love the fresh smell of an ice arena in the morning, this was no sweat.

Much like any public event in Tokyo, the place was packed to the brim with people. Having endured long lines for the last two years at Tokyo Game Show, I knew that the wait would be worthwhile. I was lucky enough to play not just one but two games on the show floor, both of which gave me greater insight into what the Nintendo Switch is about.



THE CONSOLE

When playing the Switch on the go, there are two configurations available. First, there is the portable form, which closely resembles your traditional handheld system. Both Joy-Con controllers satisfyingly slide and lock into place on opposing sides of the tablet, and transitioning from playing on your TV to playing by hand takes a matter of seconds. In this mode, the Switch is about the same size as the Wii U GamePad and, much like its predecessor, it felt comfortable in my hands. In its tabletop mode, both Joy-Con controllers detach from the tablet and are held one in each hand. The tablet features a kickstand which extends, allowing you to play the Switch virtually anywhere with a tabletop. Sadly, for those of us with big hands, the Joy-Cons feel small and flimsy on their own.

Nintendo has showcased the ability for

two friends to enjoy multiplayer together in split-screen, on a single Switch screen in tabletop mode. However, players may find themselves drawing straws over who is the unlucky one to receive the right-sided Joy-Con. Not enough care was put into this portion of the device, with the analog stick being too close in proximity to its respective A, B, X, and Y buttons. If the player tilts the stick too far to the right, they



may find their B button being obstructed by their thumb, making competitive play more difficult. With the Switch's release mere weeks away, it's unlikely that this critical controller flaw can or will be fixed in time for launch.

Nintendo has said that the Switch's average battery life will range from two-and-a-half to six hours on a single charge via USB-C connectivity. Fans have rejoiced over this news, as Nintendo has historically opted for a proprietary charger with its handhelds. If you already have a USB-C adapter for charging your personal phone or tablet, you will also be able to use it when charging your Switch. For a system whose main selling point is its portability, it's great to hear that we won't need to pack any additional cables or adapters. USB-C's other biggest advantage is its lightning-fast charging time, which means you'll spend less time waiting and more time gaming.

THE GAMES

The first title I played was the newest incarnation of *The Legend of Zelda*. It's been well over five years since the last mainline Zelda game, and hardcore fans of the series have endured multiple delays, but at last, *Breath of the Wild* is almost here. The latest addition to the franchise, undoubtedly the crown jewel in the Switch's launch lineup, will also be made available for the Wii U; however, Switch users will benefit from improved visuals owing to the system's newer and improved tech. The game looks beautiful — trailers and screenshots don't do it justice. Zelda is embracing a massive open world for the first time with *Breath of the Wild*, sizing in around twice as big as 2011's *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. I had twenty minutes to play in its sandbox, and even then it wasn't enough. There was a plethora of things to do, and the game is shaping up to be an instant classic.

As someone who prefers top-down Zelda games on handhelds, switching from the TV to the handheld was a little jarring at first. For me, the perfect handheld Zelda experience is one that is bite-sized; something that can be played in short bursts. I worry that when exploring *Breath of the Wild's* long, highly-detailed 3D dungeons, it will be difficult to pause and resume your play without having forgotten what you were doing beforehand. As impressive as it is being able to play a Zelda game of this caliber, I fear it won't pan out as well as a handheld game.

The second title I tried with was *1-2-Switch*, a compilation of party mini-games that make extensive use of the system's Joy-Con controllers. *1-2-Switch* relies almost entirely on audio cues and the "HD rumble" functionality, which promises ultra-precise feedback. It's rare that you will find your eyes glued to the screen for extended periods of time when playing *1-2-Switch*, which raises the question of whether it fits the definition of a video game at all — but despite that, it's really fun. When offered



to demo two mini-games, I chose “Quick Draw” and “Milk.” “Quick Draw” mimics a cowboy duel, where both players face one another, wielding the Joy-Con as if it were a pistol. Players are given the signal to fire, and whoever draws fastest wins. “Milk” utilizes the Joy-Con’s unique motion controls to pit its players against each other in a cow-milking contest. The player who produces more jugs of milk wins.

As engaging as it sounds, *1-2-Switch* carries a hefty cost of ¥5,400, and it’s hard to argue that these mini games warrant that price. I hoped Nintendo would recall how bundling 2008’s *Wii Sports* together with their Wii system was not only a sound business strategy but also smart consumer strategy. Players want to be able to enjoy their new system fresh out of the box; they want to be able to showcase what makes it unique to their friends and family. Nintendo’s decision to neglect *1-2-Switch* as a potential tie-in game will inevitably lead to poor sales at its launch.

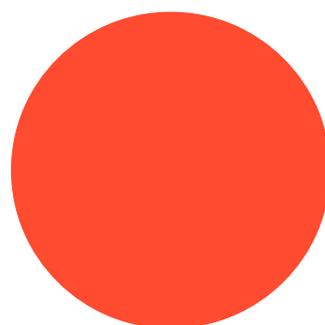


THE FINAL VERDICT

Despite my mixed feelings after demoing the Nintendo Switch, I still hold that the device has unlimited potential. While many unanswered questions remain mere weeks before its launch (Virtual Console games, anyone?), it is worth noting that most console launches don't go smoothly. What's important is where the Switch will be standing in a year's time. Should you pick up the system next month? I wouldn't; if you have a Wii U, you already have access to the Switch's biggest launch title. For the time being, look forward to E3 2017 in June and what future games Nintendo announces there. Personally, I'll be ready to "make the switch" when *Super Mario Odyssey* launches this holiday.

Chad Grover is a third year ALT based in Tokyo. His hobbies include video games, professional wrestling, and getting told he looks like Seth Rogen a lot. You can ask him which brand of canned coffee he's currently addicted to on [Twitter](#).

Photos:
All photos from Wikicommons



Walker for

A CONNECT EXCLUS



From JOWA

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Philip Walker (Nagasaki) and Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)





Living in Japan provides ample opportunity to get involved in the community, but some people take it further than others. ALT Philip Walker has been part of a successful local pop group, named Walker from IOWA, since arriving in Japan. Read on for an exclusive interview about these rising stars from Nagasaki!

Sabrina: First, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and why you came to Japan?

Philip: My interest in Japan [first came from] watching anime and playing games as a kid. I pretty much forgot all about Japan until my senior year in high school, when a friend introduced me to Japanese *richii* (mahjong). That was interesting enough to make me take Japanese as my required foreign language in college. I loved it so much that I ended up majoring in Japanese at the University of Iowa. I learned about the JET Program during my first year of college, but didn't consider it seriously until my third year. Ever since then, I knew I was going to aim for JET.

Sabrina: What are some of your past musical experiences?

Philip: I started playing piano just before I turned nine years old. It's pretty silly, but what first got me interested was when a friend of mine started playing the melody to *The Simpsons* on the piano. I had no idea that you could play "regular music"



on the piano back then. It was enough to spark my interest. I started taking formal lessons and [...] went to quite a few competitions, placing second in a national competition during high school. I ended up minoring in piano during college.

Philip: Despite that, I never enjoyed classical music all that much. Going back to why I started learning as a kid, I wanted to play the songs I'd heard and loved since I was young and, for me, that was lots of game and anime music. I also played the cello, and took orchestra during high school. Eventually, friends of mine in orchestra class started asking me to play songs they knew on the piano, and I'd end up posting them to YouTube so they could listen. I ended up with 4,000 or so subscribers, but haven't posted much since high school. Nowadays, I'm self-learning jazz and improvisation, and I'm making digital music as well.

Sabrina: What was the catalyst for starting Walker from IOWA?

Philip: During my self-introduction at one of my elementary schools, I played a jazz piece [...] Later that day, one of the teachers, Kenpy, asked me if I would come to the music room after lunch. When I got up there, he was sitting at a drum set, and told me to play the piece from earlier. As soon as I began, he started playing along on the drums. I was amazed, and it was such a neat moment. After that, he asked if I wanted to start a band. Without hesitating I said yes.

For a few weeks I would lug my digital piano over to Kenpy's place, and we started to come up with a few piano/drum songs that we could show potential candidates for the band. Kenpy grew up in Nagasaki, and met many members from other bands while playing at live shows. He showed them our short piano/drum demos, [found] a bassist (Keiko), guitarist (Yuki), and vocalist (Micchan) for the band fairly quickly, and we started practicing a few months later.

While we were thinking up a name, Kenpy told me that he thought of "Walker from IOWA." I honestly thought he was joking, so I flat out said "no way!" I realized later he was serious, and the name stuck.

Sabrina: Tell us a bit about the group's early days.

Philip: I would still consider it our early days, as we've only been a band for about a year, but during the earliest days we were debating what kind of style we wanted for the band. The songs that Kenpy and I made were too dark/serious for what the other members wanted, so we ended up not using them. We finally decided that we wanted our music to fit the following categories: Summery, positive, classy, and the feeling of "let's go drinking." We actually didn't draw too much from any specific musicians or groups, but rather those feelings we all decided on.

Sabrina: Do you write your own music?

Philip: Yes, as a band. It generally begins with Yuki thinking up some chords on guitar. From there, Micchan starts thinking of a vocal line (melody only, no lyrics). They bring what they thought up to the rest of us during practice, and we all start fumbling through it together, making our parts up as we go. We refine it for the next few weeks until we finally have something that resembles an actual song!

Sabrina: Are there any songs you guys have done that really resonate with you? Why?

Philip: For me, it's definitely "Replay." I really like songs with fun/catchy chord progressions, and stuff that is a little jazzy. "Replay" has both those things. It's also the first song that I actually felt comfortable playing on as a band member. Before Walker from IOWA, I'd only been playing solo. If you can imagine always being the only one creating all the music, phrasing, dynamics, etc...well, learning how to change from that mode of playing to being one part of the bigger thing that is the band, it took some time for me. I'd say I'm still a complete beginner in that regard, but I like to think I'm getting better.

The lyrics are great, too!



Sabrina: What was the group's first success, in your opinion?

Philip: For me, the first success was being in a band at all, as I'd never been in one before. But for all the other members...I would say that the first big group success would be winning the contest at Studio DO! [on Sept. 25, 2016].

Sabrina: How did you learn about the Studio DO! contest and what made you decide to compete?

Philip: Studio DO! is one of the more popular places for practicing, recording, and live concerts in Nagasaki city. We always practice at Studio DO! so we pretty much know whenever there's something going on there!

We decided to join, because it was a great opportunity for another live show, and of course because we were hoping to win. Kenpy was confident of our victory from the moment we decided to enter, but the rest of us weren't so sure.

Sabrina: What was winning the contest and recording in the studio like?

Philip: It was amazing. I am usually a bit hard on myself when it comes to music, so I was incredibly surprised when they announced that we had won. Recording was a ton of fun as well. We started out with Kenpy, who recorded his part in one go. Keiko was done pretty quickly, too. Yuki was a bit nervous, but did great! I thought my part was going to take a while, but I ended up pretty much doing it in one go as well. Micchan couldn't make it that day, so he recorded a few weeks later.

Sabrina: Has the group faced any challenges?

Philip: Last year, Kenpy found out that he would be moving schools, and we weren't certain that he would be close enough to continue band practice in Nagasaki. It was a scary moment for the band, but especially for him. He ended up moving a bit further away than he was originally, but still within a reasonable distance. He has a minimum two hour commute to get to band practice, but he still makes it every week.

It's a bit tough for Micchan to get to practice sometimes. He runs a bar, and is often up until 4-5 a.m., so making it to morning practice the next day is rough.

As for being mixed group, there haven't been any big difficulties. It helps that I can speak (some) Japanese. Other than having to ask repeatedly what was just being said, it isn't much of a problem.

Sabrina: What are your hopes and plans for Walker from IOWA in the future?

Philip: Personally, I just love being in the band and getting to play with everyone. I just take it as we go, without thinking too much about where we want to end up. If we ended up getting big, that would be amazing, and who knows, maybe it could be something I'd continue to pursue after JET.

Sabrina: Do you have any advice for other foreigners in Japan who would like to start up their own band or musical careers in Japan?

Philip: Don't be afraid to put yourself out there! Play often. Perform at every opportunity. Meet as many people as you can. Keep doing what you love and see what happens!

Philip is a 2nd Year ALT living in Saikai-shi. Aside from playing in a band, he enjoys working on digital music and art. You can find him on [Youtube](#), and check out Walker from IOWA on [Twitter](#).

Photo credits:
All photos credited to Philip Walker





Japanese Movie Recommendations

Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)

CONNECT Recommends

Gojira (Godzilla)

(Drama, Sci-Fi Horror): I recently re-watched the original *Godzilla* film (again!). It's a bit dated, but holds up remarkably well. Being a fan of giant monsters, it's always good to go back to their roots. If you've only ever seen the American remake, I think you'll find the Japanese version to be much more dramatic!—Timothy Saar, Head Editor

Kagi-Dorobou no Mesoddo

(Romantic Comedy): It's a comedy with some romance that revolves around a failing actor that switches lives with a man at a bathhouse. Little does he know is that the man is an assassin.—Lilian Diep, Assistant Head Editor

Kimi no Na Wa (Your Name)

(Sci-Fi Romance, Animation): This is the anime that has swept Japan by storm. Whilst the first twenty minutes of the film feel like a subpar anime pilot, the second two thirds of the film tell an original and interesting story and put a twist on the cliché body swapping trope.—Jessica Williams, Heath and Nutrition

Princess Mononoke

(Action, Animation): Apart from the beautiful animation and amazing soundtrack, this movie also has a powerful message about respecting the environment, with a mature and subtle touch. I also appreciate how the "villain" is ambiguous in her "villainy" because from another perspective she's good. It also has violence, lots of fun violence.—Ashley Hirasuna, Head of Visual Media

Sakasama no Patema

(Animation): If you enjoy visually stunning movies, you will be in for a treat. *Sakasama no Patema* shares a story about overcoming differences between two races, the Inverts and the citizens of Aiga, in order to coexist. Hold on tight, a beautiful roller-coaster adventure awaits! (Yes, your screen will flip and rotate. People with motion sickness beware!)—Pameline Kang, Heath and Nutrition

Readers Recommend:

Classic Studio Ghibli and Makoto Shinkai (Animation): *Porco Rosso* is seriously under-rated! I could also watch *Castle in the Sky*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Kimi no Na Wa (Your Name)* over and over.—Renata Janney, Fukushima

Photo: Illaura Rossiter

MARCH 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 March!

Movies

- 3 Mar.** *Assassin's Creed* (Action Adventure): Starring Michael Fassbender, Marion Cotillard, and Jeremy Irons
- 3 Mar.** *Loving* (Zombie Horror): (Biography, Drama, Romance): Written/Directed by Jeff Nichols, starring Ruth Negga and Joel Edgerton
- 4 Mar.** *Haruchika* (Music, Mystery): Directed by Masahide Ichii, starring Kana Hashimoto and Shouri Satou
- 10 Mar.** *Moana* (Animated Musical): Starring Auli'i Cravalho and Dwayne Johnson
- 24 Mar.** *Passengers* (Romance Adventure): Starring Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence
- 31 Mar.** *Jackie* (Biography, Drama): Starring Natalie Portman and Peter Sarsgaard

Music

- 1 Mar.-7 July.** Sakanaction SAKANAQUARIUM 2017—All of Japan; March performances in Sendai City, Miyagi, and Fukuoka City, Fukuoka (J-Pop/Rock)
- 3 Mar.** *WE ARE X*, X Japan (J-Rock, Documentary Movie Soundtrack)

Live Theater and Events

- 1 -19 Mar.** *Cirque du Soleil Presents TOTEM*—Fukuoka City, Fukuoka (Performance Art Circus)
- 10 Mar.-17 Apr.** *The Scarlet Pimpernel* —Takarazuka City, Hyogo (Historical Musical)
- 18, 20, 26 Mar.** *Kamen Rider Super Live 2017* —Fukushima City, Fukushima, Tokushima City, Tokushima, and Saitama City, Saitama (Live Super-Sentai Theater)
- 24 Mar.-7 May** *Haikyuu!! Winner and Loser*—Tokyo, Tagajo City, Miyagi, Osaka City, Osaka, and Fukuoka City, Fukuoka (Anime Musical)

Games

- 3 Mar.** Nintendo Switch (New Nintendo Gaming Console)
- 3 Mar.** *Disgaea 5 Complete* —on Nintendo Switch (Comedy Action Roleplaying Game)
- 3 Mar.** *The Legend of Zelda* —on Nintendo Switch (Fantasy Roleplaying Game)
- 24 Mar.-7 May** *Senran Kagura: Peach Beach Splash*—on Playstation 4 (Watergun first-person shooter)

Sources

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

Photo: Sarah Pragnell

The background of the cover is a night photograph of a building facade. The building has a grid of lights, and a large, stylized ampersand symbol is overlaid on the right side of the image. The ampersand is filled with a pattern of small, colorful lights. The overall scene is festive and celebratory, likely during a holiday season.

Fashion & MASCULINITY

A Cross-cultural Relationship
Between Japan and Australia

By Rhys Coleman (Tokyo)

Photo: Sarah Pragnell

PRADA





Prior to the University of Canberra, I'd never lived anywhere that's considered 'the big smoke.' When I first lived in Japan in Gifu City, even at 400,000 people it is still larger than Canberra.

In my small Australian hometowns, I noticed men usually wore:

- Flannel
- Blue jeans
- Rugby shorts
- Track/sweat pants
- Singlets (tank tops)
- Thongs (flip flops, or sandals)
- Shirts with a whimsical quote (e.g. "this is not a beer gut, it's a protective covering for my six pack")
- On a more formal day, dress shirts

My Early Experiences

These days, I often wear those items, despite never playing a full game of rugby or Australian football in my life. Although, when I was growing up in the countryside, I often thought (and knew) that wearing anything too different would result in some ridicule. If I did decide to wear something 'edgy' outside of the house with confidence, by the end of the day my spirit would be completely diminished. I can now relate this experience to the infamous Japanese phrase "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down." The irony is that many people living in less progressive areas will gloat about how free-thinking their nation is (especially in comparison to Japan), despite harshly judging many people within their own communities.

In Japan

Upon moving to Japan, I'm grateful that many of my worries regarding how I dress seemed to have disappeared instantly, but honestly it never really dawned on me until my friends visited. Having grown up in small towns, many people I've played tour guide for have only ever lived in rural spaces within Australia. Thus, while there's a laid back Australian attitude, even the laxest of Australians can fall victim to culture shock. I probably should have expected the wide variety of comments I heard every day from family and friends. For instance, this comment happened on the bustling streets of Nagoya: "There are so many gay people here!" Any LGBT person in Japan would scoff at this comment just like I did. I prodded further and realized I'd never noticed that men often carry handbags, or wear wide brim hats and suede and leather patterned clothing. I'd failed to recognize the cultural differences in everyday presentation between Australia and Japan. Most Australian men wouldn't wear what Japanese men wear (and Japanese men are unlikely to wear what most Australian men would), but due to the lack of fear I have in Japan in comparison to Australia, I've never really been afraid to step out of my house, or even my friends' houses, in the deepest *inaka* countryside. Avant garde or otherwise, I recognize and appreciate the freedom I have to explore myself and how I present myself in my new home.

The Ideal Image

This, however, is at odds with how many others feel in Japan. The advertising on trains, buses, and buildings presents a certain type of "attractive" man and "attractive" woman, with the exception of posters featuring comical or eccentric characters. Each country has their own sense of what's "attractive," but the difference between these archetypal Japanese and Australian men is that there's absolutely no way some of us could fit the mold of some of these archetypes. For example, I'm a tower of a human being, with curly or wavy hair. My voice booms even when I talk with a friend on the train or in a quiet cafe. I am not your stereotypical Japanese man, and it took a lot of work to embrace who I am. In Australia, I did this with a lot of resistance, as it was more likely that I would cave to the pressures and fit the mold. But when I moved to Japan, I felt all the resistance and pressures fade. I could never possibly fit the mold in Japanese society, so I feel free to do what I like with how I look. I now have no hesitation buying amazing clothes and accessories the world over.





Fitting In

Many of my friends don't fit these archetypes, either. But rather than feeling like they can break further out of their boxes, they feel the stranglehold of society for not being thin or pale enough, for not being the right height or using enough makeup. I personally know those lingering sets of eyes and stares from strangers directed at those who do not fit the mold. There's a fatigue involved, especially in a country of such ethnic homogeneity, and we all deal with it differently. As a man, I feel I can ignore the looks from passersby more than some women do, but sometimes I feel like a zoo animal. Nonetheless, to get myself through it, I like to think of myself as putting on a show. Whether I've meticulously detailed my presentation before stepping out of the door, or if I've just thrown myself together haphazardly, I am always looking for the fire within myself to not get bogged down by molds that I know I can't fit into.

Just Be Yourself

Such a small percentage of us fit into a mold. Even if we do, moving to a different country can alter this image drastically. Fitting in most certainly affords us so many luxuries in the world, but when we can't, what is there to do? We uplift others to further push their boundaries and find confidence in whatever brings them joy, rather than being bogged down by these societal pressures. The way we dress is just one way to push our boundaries. There are so many ways we can continue to uplift and support our friends and family, by letting them shine and know that we will be there to support them, as we all learn to navigate an ever-changing world.

Rhys was a JET in Tsushima, Aichi, for two years before moving to Tokyo to work for a travel company which specializes in walking tours of Japan. He likes staring at art.

Find him on [Instagram](#)

Photos: Rhys Coleman

Who What When Wear

Roxanne Ghezzi (Gifu) and Masumi (Gifu)

Who

Roxanne: This is Masumi Takeyama! She is an event coordinator, graphic designer, and mother of two beautiful girls. Masumi was born in Nagoya, but currently lives in Hida Kanyama, where she spent most of her childhood. She went on to study design at Bunka Fashion College in Shinjuku. English quickly became a priority for her personal and professional journey, and Masumi later moved to Los Angeles, California. Now, she has retired to a life in the countryside to be a mother to her children and continue to pursue her creativity.

What

Masumi: I have to say that I really don't have a particular style. It's been so many years, and I still can't figure out my color. It's almost like a quest for me. I wear whatever feels right in the situation, and I never set limits for myself on what I can or can't wear. However, my style definitely changes depending on where I am or what I'm doing. When I lived in Nagoya, I loved wearing high heels and bright colors. I miss that a lot about living in the city!



Photos: Masumi Takeyama



When

Masumi: Since becoming a mother and moving to the countryside, I dress more comfortably and have noticed my style become more monotone. People don't typically wear very flashy colors in these parts of Japan, and my style has definitely changed over the years to reflect that. When I dress up my look with what you see in the pictures, it's usually for events related to my artwork or the rare occasion that I can escape to the city with friends. These pieces are custom by a dear friend of mine, so I don't wear them very often.

Wear

Masumi: The kimono-sleeve cardigan and black wool dress were completely designed and stitched together by my dear friend and designer, Ayumi Shibata. We met at university in Tokyo, and have remained best friends ever since. Ayumi now owns her own designer brand, *éis*, and was honored with the WWD New Designers award for her work. She has also been commissioned to produce clothing worn by Lady Gaga in her music video "Judas" and Imagine Dragons in their video for "I Bet My Life."

Although I don't wear Ayumi's pieces often due to their sentimental value, they are extremely comfortable and it is easy to connect to the world around you in them. Ayumi and I are both people who believe in *hitsuzen*, meaning fate. Wearing her clothing, I can look back on the fate that brought us together in this world and remain forever close to her despite the distance. brought us together in this world and remain forever close to her despite the distance.

LIFESTYLE

A night photograph of a park. In the center, a large, weeping tree is illuminated with warm orange lights. In the foreground, a road curves through the scene, with long, glowing light trails from cars in shades of purple and blue. The background shows other trees and buildings, some also lit up.

HEALTH & NUTRITION EDITORS

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Pameline Kang

It's spring time now! Time to fight over the best sakura-viewing spot!

Jessica Williams

*The flu here sure doesn't mess around!
#nomoreIV'skthanksbye*

TRAVEL EDITORS

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Dylan Brain

Lara Bigotti

"I have no idea what to expect there, but I'm sure it'll be strange and wonderful, just like everything else so far." — Carrot Quinn

Photo: May Zhang



EASY RICE COOKER

RECIPES

Rice cookers aren't just for cooking rice. This versatile kitchen gadget can be used to churn out hearty meals from stews to desserts. Why don't you try out these simple recipes contributed by our readers!

LAZY YET CREATIVE FRITTATAS

Alfie Blincowe (Yamaguchi)

Frittatas are super easy things to make and can be very healthy depending on what you put in them. Frittatas are like a pizza or a salad, you can add as many toppings as you want and have a wide variety of recipes. You can make frittatas with meat, tofu, or entirely vegetable ingredients. This a very easy recipe that can be made with whatever leftovers you have in the fridge. So long as you have eggs, you can make a frittata.

Traditionally, frittatas would include onions, potatoes, peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, mushrooms, leeks, and of course eggs. You would also cook them on a hob and then finish them off in an oven or grill. This recipe is foolproof and can be made with easy-to-find ingredients in Japan. Pretty much any of the ingredients below can be substituted, so have a go yourself, and get creative.

INGREDIENTS:

- Garlic powder
- 1 small green pepper, cut into small dice
- 1 onion cut into small squares
- Diced tofu or cooked pieces of chicken (optional)
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

To prepare the egg mixture, mix 6 large eggs, 100 grams of grated cheese of any kind (or more if you want), salt and pepper, and a tablespoon of olive oil.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. First, heat up your frying pan with a tablespoon of olive oil. Next, fry your diced onion and peppers until the onion pieces are soft and golden.
2. Grease the inside of your rice cooker with another tablespoon of oil (or butter). The easiest way to do this would be to use some baking paper. Now add your six eggs, 100 grams of cheese, and salt and pepper. Next, whisk the ingredients. If you use a metal whisk or metal fork make sure not to scratch the non-stick coating off your rice cooker.
3. Once the egg mixture is smooth, add the other ingredients. Try and distribute them evenly around the bowl.
4. Now put the rice cooker on as normal and once it's finished cooking, you should have a nice, simple frittata.

No. 14291

サンヨー

ADZUKI AND SESAME SEED CAKE

Alfie Blincowe (Yamaguchi)

Next we have a simple rice cooker cake recipe. It may not be quite as easy as the frittata but it can hardly be called difficult either. This recipe should give you a nice sweet snack for when you get home after a hard day's work, or could just be something to make your lunch a little bit more interesting. If the frittatas ignited your creative cooking passion, then you can experiment with this recipe as well by replacing the azuki beans with something sweet, such as raisins or chocolate chips.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 eggs
- 40 grams of sugar
- 30 grams of vegetable oil
- 50 grams *nerigoma* sesame paste
- 100 grams cake flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 100 grams canned azuki beans
- 1 teaspoon toasted sesame seeds

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. First, put 2 eggs, sugar, and vegetable oil into a mixing bowl or blender. The ingredients need to be mixed until they become a pale liquidy paste. This may take a few minutes if you don't have a blender.
2. Once the mixture is sufficiently sloppy, add in the sesame paste. Mix the paste into the mixture, and things should start to thicken up.
3. Next, you need to add the flour and baking powder, but you need to sieve these into the mixture carefully to avoid clumps. When the mixture is thick and even, it's ready.
4. Add the toasted sesame seeds and canned boiled azuki beans into the bowl and mix everything together.
5. Now you pour your mixture into the rice cooker. Try to make sure the ingredients are evenly distributed, and then switch on your rice cooker. Once it beeps, check that the cake is cooked all the way through with a tester stick or chopstick. You may have to cook the cake two or three times depending on your machine, but once it's finished, you should end up with a very Japanese cake.

VEGETABLE BEEF (OR PORK) MIXED RICE

Elisheva Clinton

This is a really quick and simple recipe for when you're done with the world and just want to relax.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup of rice
- 1 piece of *kombu*
- Sliced pork (or beef) cutlet (Already cooked)
- 40 grams of mushroom
- 20 grams of *gobo* (burdock) root
- 1 teaspoon of mirin
- 1 teaspoon of soy sauce
- Ginger
- Salt
- Pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. First, wash one cup of rice and place it in your rice cooker along with your one piece of kombu.
2. Next, chop your mushrooms and *gobo* root. (If you don't have or want to use these ingredients, then you can use any frozen vegetables.) Drop the mushrooms and *gobo* into the pot along with the cutlet.
3. Lastly, season the mixture with salt, pepper, ginger, soy, and mirin to add to the taste. Then, turn on rice cooker and eat when done.

Optional: When the rice cooker is done, open and crack an egg on top for each person eating. Close, and let egg cook to your preference.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Alfie Blincowe is a writer who is also the fiance of an Iwakuni JET. In between passion projects, he teaches at Higashi-Hiroshima University, Hiroshima Jogakuin University, and an eikaiwa in Hiroshima city.

Elisheva Clinton is an army brat who loves to cook and to read. Her background is in English Education. She is a JET alumni and is currently working at Indiana University. While on JET, she was placed in Saitama.

Photo: Leia Atkinson

A photograph of a weathered blue corrugated metal wall. In the center, there is a utility meter with a brown cover and a digital display, mounted on a wooden board. Several white and blue wires are connected to the meter and run across the wall. A black and yellow power cord is visible in the upper right corner. The overall scene suggests an outdoor utility area in an older or industrial setting.

is your social media feed making you depressed?

Ashley Dorrell (Shizuoka Prefecture)

Recently, I've been dreading seeing the little red notifications near my social media apps. What was a happy morning ritual of checking in on Facebook to see how friends and family are doing back at home has become more of something I dread. Instead of photographs of random recipes tried and places gone, my feed has become flooded with political memes, statuses, and fights. And while there is nothing wrong with this outright — I am finding myself getting increasingly fatigued by it.

In today's world of technology, it is easy to be in the know about what is going on back home. All you need to do is open an app and read the news or log onto Facebook and Twitter and you not only know what is up — but you also know people's opinions and comments. And when it comes to controversial news or depressing news, it becomes dangerously easy to get sucked into a negative spiral.

It is also getting easier to find oneself in the middle — even if you don't agree with one side and support another, you might know people on the other side.

The biggest advice of course is to unplug — but after that, how do you take the edge off otherwise? Words will stick no matter what. Once we close the laptop or the app, they can still stick in the back of our minds, playing on anxieties and fears. Research conducted by the Pew Research Centre revealed that more than one-third of social media users are worn out by the political content they encounter on their social media feed, with 59 percent finding it stressful and frustrating rather than it being informative. [1]

Many a time, I have friends from opposing viewpoints and beliefs clash on statuses I post or on things I share. Even things my friends share on my social media feed will sometimes attract attention from my friends and family. It is easy to feel trapped and overwhelmed when inundated with fighting opinions and commentary from all sides. So what should you do when you start to get fatigued, tired, and even outright depressed from all of this?

1 Remind yourself that being informed shouldn't cost your sanity.

It is easy to excuse yourself and try to cling to reading the news and negative comments or share things or immerse yourself in it — this argument being that if you don't, you won't be as informed. You need to read the comments of those back home, or talk about it extensively since you only get a small view or taste of things while so far away. And while this is somewhat true, it should never come at the cost of your sanity and peace of mind. There will always be scary or negative things to read about in the news. Immersing yourself in it can often do more harm than good. It is ok to take a break from it, and you shouldn't feel bad for doing so.

2 Re-root yourself back in your surroundings.

Social media can make things seem a lot closer to home and cloud things up. And while things might be bad back at home, it is important to disconnect from those things and reconnect with your surroundings. It is OK to feel happy here even when things are going wrong back home.

Taking the time to remind yourself what exactly you have going on here can help you relax. Take a walk, immerse yourself in the local community, and talk with your neighbors or friends. Even taking trips or going sight-seeing can not only get your mind off the negative, but it gives you new memories and things to share with others creating a bit more positive space.

3 Take time for yourself

Everyone has a hobby or things they do to relax or help themselves stay sane. If you are feeling anxious or depressed, make a list of things you can do that make you feel better or more at ease, shows you can always turn on or watch to feel better, and people you can contact when you are feeling down. Keep that list somewhere safe and when you are feeling a bit overwhelmed — take it out.

One of the things I like to suggest to people stressed is aromatherapy/aromatic items. Japan has a ton of great bath additives such as bubble bath, salts, and oils that can refresh and relax you. Taking a night to yourself where you relax, curl up with tea, coffee, or your favorite beverage and do something that you enjoy doing can help distract you a bit as well as give you new things to focus on.

4 Pace yourself.

When you do return back to social media or the news, pace yourself. When coming back from your short or long break, make sure to not completely overwhelm yourself once again.

Social media can play a useful role in helping us get involved with issues (political or not) that are important to us. Defending our opinions while hiding behind the computer screen can inadvertently strain the relationship with our loved ones. If you find yourself being caught in a web of disagreement with a friend or a family member, zoom out of the virtual world and instead, sit down and have an intellectual discussion with them *in person* over coffee or tea (or whiskey) We can agree to disagree. But let's keep it off Facebook.

Author's Bio:

Ashley is an ALT in Shizuoka Prefecture. She mostly spends her time attempting to grow flowers, trying to cook things, writing, and watching videos of adorable animals doing adorable things.

Photo: Leia Atkinson

Health Spotlight

Kafunshou

Pameline Kang (Ishikawa)

Ahh March, the season of cherry blossoms, graduation ceremonies and ...*atchoo!*... allergies?

Kafunshou (花粉症), also known as hay fever, is a common occurrence in Japan during the cherry blossom season. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, hay fever is an allergic reaction to the pollen of certain plants, leading to symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, and itchy eyes. *Kafunsho* is considered a national affliction, and sufferers have increased steadily over the past 20 years. [1]

Besides the sakura trees, the *sugi* tree (杉), which is closely associated with the sake industry, and the *hinoki* tree (檜) are also pollen-pumping culprits.

花粉症	かふんしょう kafunshou	hay fever
花粉	かふん kafun	pollen
アレルギー	arerugii	allergy

If you are allergic to pollen, the symptoms might have already surfaced (or will soon). So how can you survive this dreaded allergy season in Japan? Here are some ideas .

1 Wear a mask

You will find that there will be a sea of mask-wearers in the months of March and April. Many drug stores will be stocking up on a variety of masks. You might want to look out for brands that are able to filter or block out pollen particles, especially the PM2.5 types.

Keywords: PM2.5, 超快適マスク

2 Use a pollen-block spray



If you find that your masks are ruining your beautiful make-up or fogging up your glasses, consider using a pollen-block spray. This facial spray creates an invisible shield to repel pollen. There are many brands in the market with Shiseido being the most popular brand.

Keywords: 透明マスク 花粉・PM2.5

3 Stick some mini filters up your nostrils



Filters for your nose? Yes, you heard right. These tiny filters are to be attached to the underside of your nose, with each end going inside a nostril. This might probably look and sound uncomfortable. But hey, it beats sniffing and sneezing the whole day!

4 Rub ointment in your nostrils



We admit, those nose filters might be a tad too crazy. If you do not want to walk around with plastic shoved up your nose, you can consider the ointment version. Just squeeze the ointment onto a cotton bud, apply around the inside of your nostrils, and you are good to go!

Keywords: 鼻マスク

5 Stock up on allergy medicine

From pills to nasal sprays to eye drops, there are many brands of allergy medicine to help alleviate hay fever symptoms. Drug stores carry over-the-counter medicines through brands such as Allegra (アレグラ), Alesion (アレジオン), Talion (タリオン), and Zyrtec (ジルテック). Do consider seeing a doctor if your allergies take a turn for the worse — especially those who are asthmatic.

6 Check the tenki.jp website or app

Tenki is a pretty popular weather website and app on mobile phone. Besides using it to check the weather, you can also check how high the pollen count is outside. Now you can plan ahead and not be a sneezing mess when out and about!

Website: <https://tenki.jp/pollen/>

Source:

[1] <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/new-info/kobetu/kenkou/ryumachi/kafun/ippan-qa.html> (Japanese only)

Photo: Leia Atkinson

THE SHIKOKU PILGRIMAGE

Ryan Monahan (Ehime Prefecture)



Connect: Ryan, how were you inspired to attempt the Shikoku Pilgrimage?

Ryan: Because I have lived in Imabari, Ehime since 2015, I had researched Shikoku before beginning my job as an ALT. I learned about the pilgrimage but wasn't really inspired to take on the challenge of visiting all 88 temples until September of my first year when I joined a walking tour of the six temples in Imabari. It was a wonderful weekend. We visited five on Saturday, spent the night in the fifth temple we stopped at, located at the top of a small mountain, and then visited the last one on Sunday. Although the temples and the route were of course beautiful, it was more than just a pleasant stroll around my city; it really was peaceful and meditative to stop and pray at these ancient, famous temples. That's when I decided it would be worthwhile to attempt to visit them all.

C: Some people walk the Pilgrimage, others bike and still others take buses or cars. Which did you choose, and why?

R: A big reason why I did the Shikoku pilgrimage was to see more of the island I live on. Shikoku is so naturally beautiful! Everywhere you go, you can see some truly amazing nature. But it's difficult, if not impossible, to experience that nature in a car or bus. Since I already love cycling, it felt like a natural choice for me to visit the temples by bike. However, because I live in a convenient location in regards to many of the temples, I decided not do the entire pilgrimage all at once; instead, I went out every few weekends or during vacations and visited as few as one or two and as many as 15 or 20 in one trip. I would take my bicycle on the train with me (as long as it's in a bag, it's okay to bring it on trains), hop off, cycle around to where I wanted to go, and either make the trip back by bicycle when possible or take the train back again. Of course, there are many temples high up on mountains, so when I was unable to cycle, or it was just impractical to cycle, I hiked.

There are no "rules" stating that a pilgrim must complete the temples in a certain amount of time, or complete them in a certain order, or anything like that, so I felt no pressure to visit all 88 quickly. I enjoyed taking my time to finish the pilgrimage.

C: You had to carry all your gear with you, then. What did you bring?

R: On my frequent multi-day trips, I brought only the necessary gear to be comfortable: a few changes of clothes, my tent and sleeping bag, cycling gear (extra inner tubes for my tires, tools, etc.), and that's really it. I didn't bring food, because there are so many grocery

stores or convenience stores along the route. With a bicycle and the appropriate bags to attach to the bike, it's easy to carry all the gear, which is another reason why I felt inclined to do the pilgrimage by bicycle, and not on foot.

C: There are several different routes to take along the Pilgrimage. How did you decide which route to take? How long did your journey last?

R: Although the temples are numbered 1-88 and pilgrims frequently visit them either in order or reverse order, I didn't visit the temples in any sort of order at all. The first ones I visited were those in Imabari, and those six are numbered in the 50s. So really, it was a matter of time and convenience. If I had just one weekend, I might take a cycling trip out east from Imabari, visiting a few temples I still needed to visit along the way. It's very easy to cycle from Imabari to Kagawa, and there are a great number of temples along the route and even more around the city center of Takamatsu. During longer vacations, I did two extensive cycling trips, one beginning in western Ehime and ending in Tokushima City in which I visited all of temples in Kochi prefecture; and the other was a three or four-day trip in Tokushima Prefecture, which was the biggest cluster of temples that was significantly far from Imabari, so it made sense to visit them all in one trip. In total, I visited temples for about eight or nine months before I finished all of them.

C: Was your timing out of convenience, or did you wait for a certain season to start your trip?

R: Like I said, I began to visit the temples during my first September in Japan. However, I didn't visit very many during the rest of 2015, so when 2016 rolled around, I decided to "restart," and I revisited the temples that I had already gone to (Imabari, Matsuyama, and Saijo, my "home" city and the two bordering it) and then went from there. Not only was it a good time weather-wise to begin a *henro* trip, but I felt that it was a bit symbolic to begin a trip that many believe to be a rejuvenating, enriching experience in the spring, when the world sort of springs into life again. I finished the pilgrimage last October 2016.

C: Did you meet many other people along your journey? Anyone you still keep in touch with?

R: Unfortunately, I don't believe I met anyone that I still keep in touch with. But that doesn't mean that I don't remember the many, many people I met. I could write an entire article just about the people: the French uncle and niece who I joined on a hike up Mt. Ishizuchi; the kind woman working at one of the temples who, upon closing time, stopped her car

when she saw me on bicycle just to give me coffee and some sweets and urged me onward; the man cycling the opposite way across Kochi who shared his dinner with me at the campsite we happened to share; the family of surfers who camped next to me at a site and invited me to share their meal, their beer, and their wonderful company for the night; the man working at a temple right here in Imabari who took the time to explain all the parts of the temple's stamp and mark a special page in my stamp book in beautiful calligraphy detailing my name, where I am from, and his own name; the wonderful people in Tokushima who, on an unbelievably hot August afternoon, gave me a frozen bottle of water to keep cool; the incredible old man who let me sleep in his car with him at a road station; meeting David Turkington, a man pictured in a very popular Shikoku 88 temple guidebook which he helped to create, who I didn't recognize until after I said goodbye and opened up my book to see which road to take next; and the countless people who gave me small gifts when they noticed that I was doing the pilgrimage, ranging from *mikan* or bottles of water to gifts of money. And these are just a few of the people that stand out in my mind.

C: Was there something you did at each of the temples?

R: When I first began, I tried to do the sutras that one is "supposed" to do at the temples, and I wore the appropriate clothing as well. I could never feel comfortable doing that, and I realized after a few times that if I don't feel comfortable doing it, I shouldn't. I didn't feel any sort of satisfaction from doing the sutras, and as a foreigner, I didn't enjoy dressing up in the pilgrimage attire. That's not to say it's not acceptable to do so as a foreigner; there were plenty of foreign people who I met or saw along the way who dressed the part and did the sutras, and everybody welcomed that. For me, personally, I felt much more comfortable going to the temples dressed normally and doing my own private prayer. At every temple I "meditated" or reflected on whatever seemed appropriate and relevant to my life at the moment, and I think doing so was a very enriching experience. From time to time, I'll still go to the *henro* temple located close to my apartment to do similar prayers.

C: Where did you sleep on your trip? Did you find spots to camp or did you book accommodation ahead of time?

R: When I did my multi-day trips, I camped. I only

stayed at hostels in Takamatsu and Tokushima, the big cities with many temples that I knew would take at least a couple of days to visit. When I camped, I would shoot for a campsite, because those are the most comfortable places, usually with some type of shower facility, but it wasn't always possible to stay at a campsite every night. Any public park suited my needs just fine. I remember crawling out of my tent one time and being greeted amiably by a kind woman walking her dog five feet away. I'm not sure, but it may be technically illegal to camp at public parks, so I kept out of the way and always tried to leave the place cleaner than it was before I stayed there.

C: Did you have to get a permit before your trip, or can anyone start the Pilgrimage whenever they desire?

R: No permit or anything like that required for the pilgrimage.

C: What did you learn from this experience?

R: What did I learn from this experience... that's a broad question. It's tough to put my finger on anything specific. There was no big "ah-ha!" moment where I experienced a ray of enlightenment or sudden realization about anything in my life. However, it was definitely valuable to me to have 88 places to visit for reflection and meditation. I guess if I had to answer this question, I would say that the pilgrimage had taught me how to be at peace on a day-to-day basis.

More than anything else, what still resonates with me to this day is a sense of accomplishment. I think it's a big feat to travel all around the island of Shikoku and visit each and every temple. I'm proud of myself for sticking with it, through all of the difficulties and challenges, and being able to say with satisfaction that I completed the Shikoku *henro* pilgrimage. It has brought me much closer to the island I live on, and I have become so proud of the place that I now call my home.

C: Tell us about your favorite day of the journey.

R: When I was on my cycling trip across Kochi Prefecture, visiting all of the 20-something temples along the southern half of Shikoku, I experienced one day of absolutely horrendous weather. It was fine for most of the day, but by mid-afternoon rain had started, and by 4 or 5pm the rain was coming down in sheets, and the wind was viciously strong. It was downright

dangerous. riding in su to stop at a from where I resolved eki (road s and getting employees the gear th bags (the s dinner at th bench cover to sleep or a train sta that particu rain would impossible out of his ne two plastic and his Eng but the two the *nihons* into the nig asked me v to which h his van. So be cold, da bit miserab van in his back of his the sun wa into the bat came back moved on. been so we

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Photos: Ryan Mona Ryan Mona

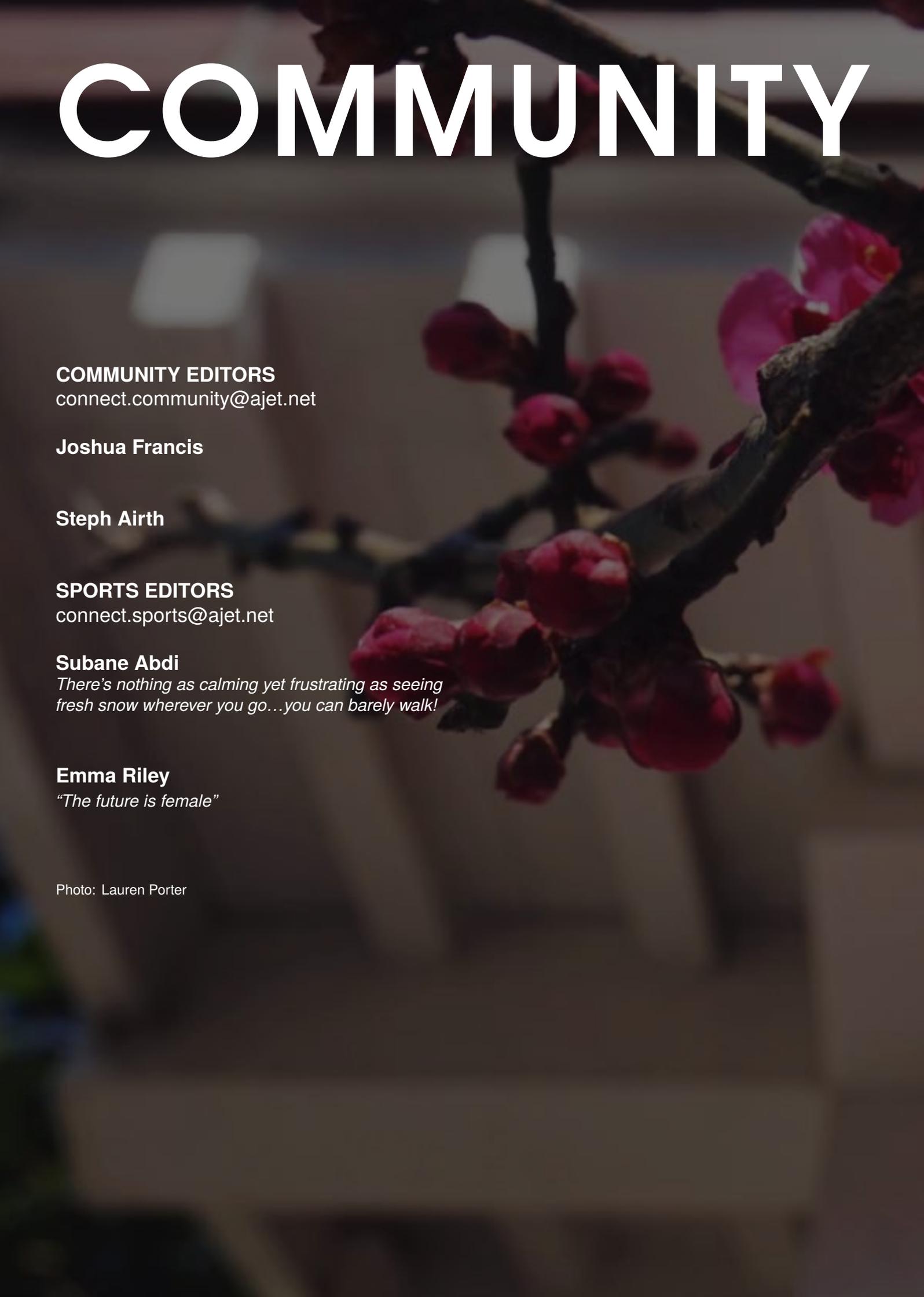
, not to mention uncomfortable, to be
uch weather. Although I had wanted
a campsite about 15 kilometers away
e I ended up, I couldn't continue, so
to spend the night at a *michi-no-*
station). After finding a bit of shelter
g newspaper from the kind station
, I did my best to dry my clothes and
at got damp despite my "waterproof"
storm really was awful), then ate a hot
e attached restaurant. After, I sat on a
ered by a roof thinking about whether
n this bench or across the street at
ation bench (no camping allowed at
ular road station, and the wind and
have made setting up a tent near
). As I contemplated, an old man got
earby van with a bottle of *nihonshu* and
cups. Now, my Japanese is very bad,
glish skills were basically nonexistent,
o of us had a wonderful time draining
shu bottle and communicating well
ght. When the drink was finished, he
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e said "no no no!" and motioned to
o, on a night when I thought I would
amp, uncomfortable, and just a little
le, I spent the night in a toasty warm
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hroom to brush my teeth, and when I
the old man and his van had already
It could have been a dream, had I not
ell-rested.

ommends the website <http://www.protrail.com/> for help planning your
— it's written entirely in English. If
questions or want advice about the
or Shikoku in general, you can e-mail
rankmonahan@gmail.com.

han: "Yakuriji"
han: "Goshoji"



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There's nothing as calming yet frustrating as seeing fresh snow wherever you go...you can barely walk!

Emma Riley

"The future is female"

Photo: Lauren Porter



SUMO IN JAPAN

Mitchell Parent

Around the world there are more than a few quintessentially “Japanese” things that come to mind when people think of this small island nation. For many of us, it was exactly those cultural commodities that sparked our interest in moving to Japan; hence, *CONNECT* magazine, the JET Programme, and all of us myriad individuals from around the world have gathered in The Land of the Rising Sun to teach English and experience all that this culture has to offer. The list of personal interests in our community is large with some aspects well known to all of us and some not so much: *manga*, *anime*, and video games being pretty universally shared; *samurai*, *ninja*, cafes of varying sorts, *sakura* and *hanami*, Japanese cuisine, literature, art, etc. When we think about martial arts, however, *karate*, *judo*, and *kendo* come to mind. But let us not forget the largest and most grand of them all (both literally and figuratively): *sumo*.

Sumo, the definitive “Big Man” competition. With roots dating back centuries, *Sumo* began as a Shinto ritual of fertility, asking for favour from the gods for everything from fertility in women to fertility in the land. Typically held during times of planting and harvest, *Sumo* eventually caught the interest of reigning lords, at which point representatives from the provinces were ordered to court to fight, travelling at their own expense (“*sumai no sachie*”). Over the centuries, *sumo*

practices and popularity changed due to the influence of whoever was ruling and its utility as a training tool during periods of civil unrest, but it was under the dictates of Oda Nobunaga that *sumo* began the metamorphosis into what it is today. Under Nobunaga, the ring that *sumo* is so well known for came into being somewhere around the 16th century, although wrestlers wore loose loincloths (*fundoshi*) rather than the stiff *mawashi* belts used today.

Sumo today happens at two levels: *o-zumo*, which is what we see on television with the pomp and rituals; and the smaller festivals that happen around the country in smaller towns and inlets. Last summer I was fortunate enough to take part in a small *sumo* festival in Furudono in Fukushima Prefecture, a small farming community a little to the east of Iwaki City. All told, with myself and others, there were about a dozen foreigners and a couple of Japanese gentlemen taking part. The day began with all the old men in the community taking us up to a shrine just up a small hill. After a short ceremony at the shrine, large tarps were laid out at which point the men begin eating and drinking with gusto. The participants cups were never left empty, the ultimate goal being to get us all half smashed to oblivion in preparation for putting on our *mawashi* and taking part in the main event.





We were split into two teams, and our wrestling order was decided. The wrestling itself was in the spirit of good fun, but there we were all drunk enough to still want to win. Someone was tossed and ended up with a mild concussion, someone else had a bracelet ripped off, and yet another left with a bleeding hand somehow. We were all banged up, but it was a wonderful, communal experience. Honestly, there is something severely satisfying about making your friend touch the ground. After the festival ended we all left to clean up. Members of the festival organizers' families invited us into their homes for a shower, conversation, snacks, and then we all met back at venue for dinner and, yes, more booze. The next day we all had hangovers from hell, but we were all a few *sen* richer, and satisfied with our appeal to the gods of Furudono for a good harvest.

Author's bio

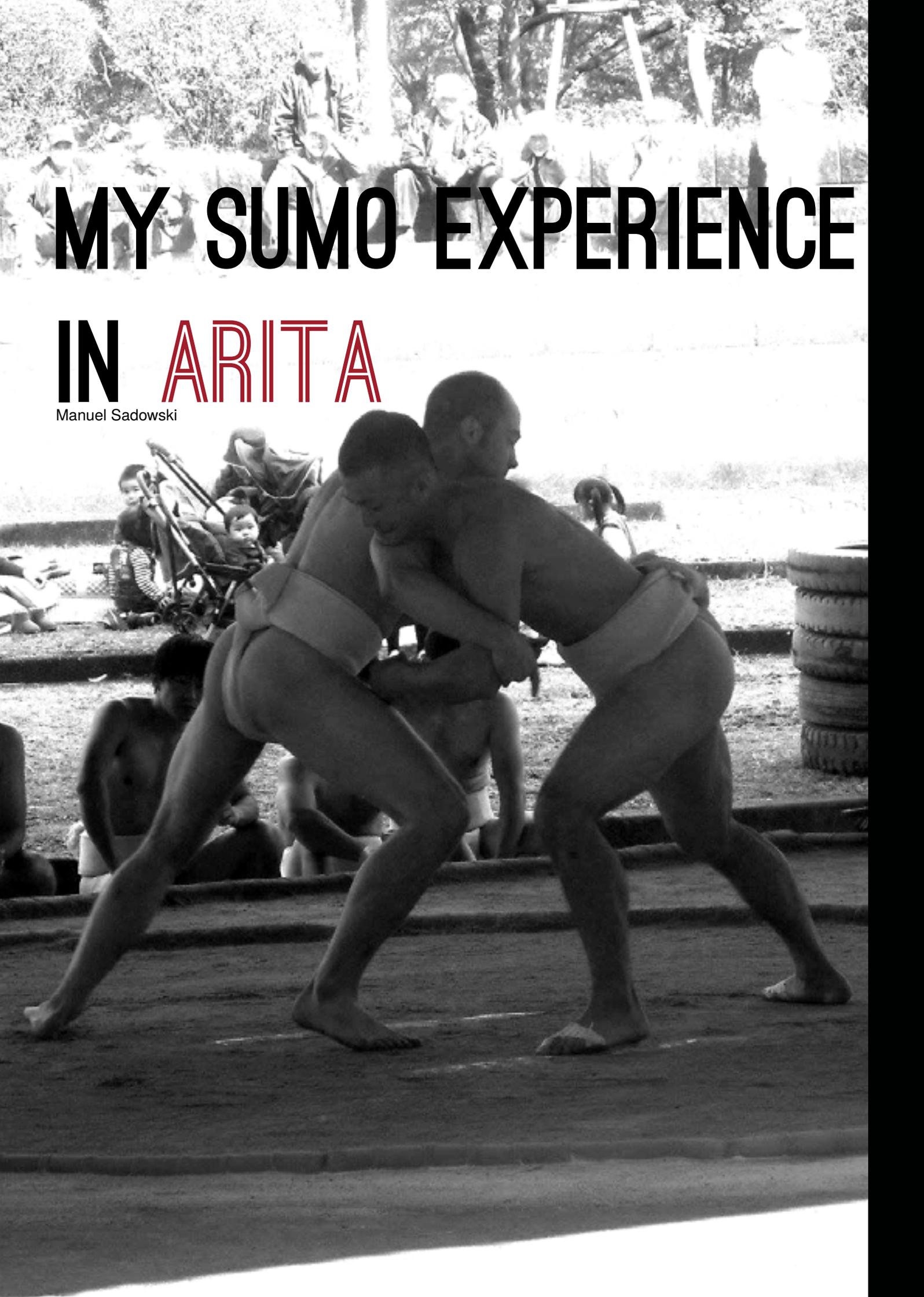
Born and raised in the shadows of the Canadian Rockies, Mitch is a second-year ALT from Calgary, Alberta. Having moved to Iwaki City in Fukushima Prefecture in 2015, he spends his weekdays teaching English in elementary schools around the city, and his weekends reading, studying, or hanging out with friends around the prefecture. Mitch currently spends the majority of his free time studying computer programming, updating his math skills, cooking, or relaxing with a coffee and a good book.

Photo:
Mitchell Parent

MY SUMO EXPERIENCE

IN ARITA

Manuel Sadowski



In my first year being a CIR in Arita, a beautiful town in the Saga Prefecture of Kyūshū, I tried out *sumo* — a traditional Japanese sport.

Arita is the birthplace of porcelain in Japan and has been making it for more than 400 years. But the town also hosts the yearly “Arita Ishiba *Sumo* Tournament,” which has a tradition that is just as long. In the beginning, *sumo* used to be performed in order to pray that Arita’s porcelain may be prosperous for a long time.

The tournament is held every year in mid-November, when the arena is surrounded with beautiful colored autumn leaves next to a quarry. It features team matches as well as individual matches for adult members of the community and also team matches and individual matches for all the ward residents of the town, where even children can participate.

When I was in junior high school, I experienced *judo*, which is also a traditional Japanese sport. The section I am employed at in the town hall oversees the organization of the event, where the local community comes together for about half a day to watch local residents participate in the tournament. Amongst the several employees of private companies that are participating, the town hall also comes up with at least one team consisting of three *sumo* wrestlers (*rikishi*) in the team matches. I was asked if I want to participate at least for the team matches, and while being reminded of my former experience in *judo*, I agreed without hesitating and was looking forward to it, whilst also knowing that most likely I wouldn’t be a great support for my co-workers.

In early November, we practiced together a few times after work and participants of earlier tournaments explained to us the very basics: what to do when entering the *sumo* ring (*dohyō*), which is 4.5 meters wide in diameter; how to behave within the *sumo* ring, and when leaving it. Though I found that the way one is fighting in *sumo* shows some similarities to *judo*, there was one major difference: I did not wear any clothes except a so-called *mawashi*, which is the silk

belt a *sumo* wrestler wears, and since it was November, I was first a bit frightened about catching a cold.

During the tournament, I had two matches for the town hall team, and as expected, I lost them both. I also could not win the individual match. In the first match, I got pushed out of the *sumo* ring in less than three seconds in a rather painful way, the other two fights took about 20 seconds, which in the moment, felt to me like an eternity. It also surprised me, what muscle aches can be caused through such short-lasting matches.

Until that moment where I experienced *sumo* for myself, I actually did not notice how dangerous it could be. Luckily, I did not get injured, but one has to be careful all the time. Nevertheless, I thought it is definitely worth experiencing *sumo*, especially when having previous experience in other traditional Japanese sports. It is also a good occasion to get in touch with the local community apart from your work environment or neighborhood. If you want to try out *sumo* by yourself, you could ask your supervisor at work, for instance, if he or she knows about *sumo* tournaments for the local community or you could also contact the tourism association in the town or city you are living in, who should advertise the event.

Author’s bio:

Manuel Sadowski is a second-year CIR in Arita Town, Saga Prefecture in Kyushu. His main tasks include translating email correspondences between Arita and its German sister city Meissen (also famous for porcelain and strongly influenced by porcelain from Arita), interpreting whenever the need arises, and writing a monthly column for the town magazine about German culture to name but a few. Manuel also enjoys travelling across Japan on local trains, singing at karaoke on several other occasions, and recently being more or less successful, at eagerly trying to play the guitar while singing!

Photo:
Manuel Sadowski

Bellydancing in Japan

East Meets West Meets East

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

Connect: So what is bellydance, exactly?

Kelsey: That's a very good question, actually, and surprisingly a bit more difficult to answer than you'd imagine. It has its earliest roots in folk and ethnic dances in North Africa and the Middle East, but due to the complicated history of colonialism in those areas, a certain exoticized and eroticized form of it was exported to the West. Over several decades, the US developed it and exported it, both back to the Arabic world (ironically) and to places like Japan. Now, Egypt is regarded as one of the modern meccas for bellydance.

So even though there are many styles of, even within Arabic cultures, such as what people call Oriental style (meaning having less Western influences) or American Tribal Style, there's really not one entirely pure, local variety in how it's treated in the modern day. (For example, one girl with a background in ballet recently joined my class, and so our teacher made choreography drawing from elements of ballet.) I'm saying all of this not as an expert, though, just what I've gathered in my experiences and the limited research I've been able to do (scholars really didn't start looking into bellydance until the past two decades or so), and there's a lot of conflicting information and opinions out there.

But long story short, bellydance is a blend of cultures and traditions, drawing predominantly from the Middle East and often mixing them with new forms, and primarily focuses on the chest and midriff; if ballet is a dance of the legs, bellydance is a dance of the torso.

C: How did you get into bellydance?

K: I was never an athletic girl. Especially as a kid, I'd never had sky-high body confidence. I was always the slowest runner in a group, and my hand-eye coordination is absolutely terrible. While I'm usually not the heaviest girl in the room, but I'm also not the skinniest. This isn't to say that I've always had zero body confidence

— I'm not particularly concerned on a day-to-day basis — but in modern American society, as a young woman, I'm supposed to be downing pumpkin spice lattes with my small salad after hours at the gym to be the ideal skinny, feminine consumer. (Then, in my experience, the Japan version is I'm supposed to be eating big bowls of white rice at every meal and still doing no more effort than walk to work every day and vacuum the floor to stay stick thin.) I think no matter how much confidence you have in your body (my motto is "I *have* fat — doesn't mean I *am* fat"), you still have fat days, you know? In any case, even though I'm fairly healthy, my stomach has always been my particular trouble spot. It's only flat in the mornings before I eat breakfast. I've never owned a bikini showing my midriff since I hit puberty because I've been too self-conscious about showing it.

However, a lot of this started to change in college. My university gym had free Zumba lessons, and I started going to those regularly during my freshman year. I fell in love with it, and I could really see the progress with how I became able to move. I was finally *good* at something physically active. I especially liked the moves such as salsa and Bollywood-inspired techniques that focused on hip movement. Somehow those just clicked with me.

Sophomore year, I decided to sign up for a class called "Middle Eastern Dance," which is another less-common term for bellydance. Unfortunately it didn't go higher than just the one semester course, so I stopped there. But that's the story of how I got into it to begin with. I've been practicing in total for about two years now.

C: And what pushed you to continue in Japan?

K: My junior year I studied abroad in Nagoya and learned that bellydance is actually fairly common in Japan—not quite but almost comparable to the popularity of ballroom dance. (I also need to note that while it's been around Japan since



the 80's, this boom just happened in the past decade or so.) This surprised me, because I figured Japan would be much more hesitant to adopt such a "sensual" and "revealing" style of dance. (I'm saying this based on common stereotypes, still probably lingering around from its colonial legacy. I think conservative critics overlook that dances such as the rumba and other popular ballroom dances can be just as or even more sensual, since the choreography often involves close touching of opposite sexes, whereas bellydance is nearly exclusively a communal or solo performance.) After all, this is the country in which, until fairly recently in its history, just the nape of the neck exposed from a figure-constraining kimono was considered erotic.

But going back to your question, the basic answer was that I just enjoyed doing it, and being from a more rural, very conservative area in the US, I was hard-pressed to find classes there. I had done a bit of YouTube tutorials to continue, but I learn much better with an actual instructor in a studio. I now live in Utsunomiya, Tochigi, which is almost the exact same size (in terms of area) with my hometown. Here, there are about three studios to choose from—even more if I took the train for about 15-30 minutes—compared to the single studio in my hometown, which I just now found from a quick Google search.

The deeper answer is that it gives me even more confidence than I expected. And not in the "I lost a lot of weight and gained body confidence!" sort of trope. Unlike Zumba and other cardio-based dances, unless you get really, really good, bellydance doesn't really offer much of a workout in the traditional sense. It's very low-impact and more of activating muscles you'd probably never considered before. Also, you'd be surprised how much of the movement doesn't even come from muscle necessarily—such as knees creating hip movements. It gave me confidence in being able to utilize the muscles and fat on my body that I already have and developing technique with them.

Starting public performances also helped reinforce this. Until my first performance in June of last year, I don't think I'd ever performed something where I was in the spotlight before (apart from MC-ing an event or reciting a few lines in a play as a kid)—much less doing it while wearing an outfit revealing my stomach, next to a lineup of mostly stick-straight

Japanese women—and I was so nervous. However, doing it was a crazy high. Once I got over the nerves, I was really enjoying myself—like "Look at me! See what I can do! I know, I know, I look great!" It reinforced the fact that in bellydance, having a bit of fat is seen as an advantage; it gives you more to work with and jiggle, to be blunt. I felt that, at times, I looked somewhat better than some of the skinnier upper-level students. This isn't to lose all humility and say that everyone else was terrible, and I alone am awesome. There are in fact some very thin women who move *amazingly*—but it shows that there's more to the body than just a low number on a scale.

To give another example, my first teacher was a much curvier, heavier woman than me, and I remember thinking, "I can't move like that, I don't have those curves!" When I was learning from YouTube, the instructor was very tall with a very long torso and little body fat, and I remember thinking, "I can't move like that, I don't have a long enough torso!" In the end, that was all excuses—the amazing thing about bellydance is that it's all about the technique and working with the body you have, whether you're a man or woman, or even pregnant.

C: You mentioned that there are a lot of conservative critics—have you gotten any criticism yourself for engaging in this dance style?

K: Not too much. Especially when I first started, I was embarrassed to be too open with conservative friends and family. Most didn't openly criticize me, but since they tend to have this rather negative image of it in their minds, they didn't take me seriously—more like "Oh jeez, what's Kelsey up to now?" or the backhanded "Huh, I never thought you'd do that sort of thing." Or they just kind of brushed it off. Luckily, during my first semester of the class in college, I ended up becoming great friends with two classmates, and we supported each other. It wasn't until I started performing that I got more positive support—being called beautiful in my outfit, being told that my performance was really cool, that sort of thing. I'm now more confident and open about it and eager for more friends to come watch. Occasionally, I still get an only half-joking "It's too sexy!" from a friend, but whatever I am not doing it for them. Otherwise the only negative experiences I have as of

late is the creeper *ojisan* (middle-aged men) trying to drunkenly hit on me or coerce me into marrying them for a visa (not kidding) after performances. A lot of men still expect this dance to cater exclusively for their own male gaze, even though more often than not, in the US it's treated more as a method of feminist empowerment, and in Japan, just a fun hobby for casual exercise. (What you don't see at the performances is the hours and hours of practice for women by women—and I'll get to an issue with this in a second—in our own little community.) But in any case, I'm used to dealing with those men anyway just going about my daily life, unfortunately.

C: Why do you think it's gained so much popularity in Japan?

K: Looking at the reasons why bellydance became a thing in so many different countries is really fascinating. I gained a lot of insight through one woman's PhD dissertation on the rise of bellydance in Taiwan, and she touched on it in Japan a bit as well. While, as of the last few decades, it rose to its current levels of popularity in the US as part of the feminist movements, and currently the emphasis is on spirituality and body-confidence, these elements are rarely seen in the bellydance culture of Japan. While none of this is based on extensive research on my part, I personally attribute it to three factors:

First, here, it's more of a luxury hobby for middle-aged women (considering the prices per lesson here are much higher than other East Asian or US counterparts) and women trying to get their "*joshiryoku* up." The costumes are glitzy and beautiful, the movements are flexible and flowing, that sort of thing. Second, since it's low impact, people of all age groups—from children to the elderly—can participate (I'd say my current instructor is in her 60s, although I think she'd kill me for saying so), and it offers a bit of exercise. As someone used to going to the gym every day back in the US, to me it's not too much of a workout (unless we really focus on one group of muscles, which rarely happens in my class), but many of my classmates who are naturally skinny yet unaccustomed to doing any more than ambient exercise claim that they sometimes get sore for days after a one-hour session. Third is the effects of globalization. Migration to Japan of people from all over the world is increasing rapidly now, which in turn makes international cultures more visible here. I think the idea of wanting to be like the "sexy foreign woman" is a strong selling point,

and it unfortunately largely excludes men from joining (which, FYI, they totally can! Check my links!). Despite this, I've found that relatively few women engaging in bellydance desire to learn more about its roots or Arabic culture; it's a very commercialized thing here.

Bottom line: the "get slim" and improve your *joshiryoku* like the "exotic" women is the main marketing point for it here.

C: Is there any Japan-style evolving?

K: Not particularly that I've seen or heard of. China and Taiwan have started integrating traditional folk and ethnic dances into the mix, which is pretty cool, but Japan's been staying pretty close to how it's going in America, although I have heard of one woman blending the gothic Lolita culture with tribal style. It'd be cool if they could blend their own cultures, though—I think doing a tribal style performance to a song by the Yoshida Brothers or one with Okinawan flair would be awesome.

C: Speaking of blending styles and traditions—are there any issues with cultural appropriation in bellydancing?

K: Issues aplenty! For example, there are articles out there calling all white bellydancers essentially racist cultural appropriators and even more backlashes to those statements. Honestly, you could argue that bellydancing is a massive cultural appropriation in and of itself—given its colonialist history—that has evolved into what it is today. For example, a common trait in American bellydance is dropping the middle and ring fingers during dance—this has also spread to Japan. However, according to one Moroccan dancer, this looks like an obscene gesture in the Middle East. Nevertheless, after giving cultural insight, she states that while she personally doesn't like it, this doesn't mean everyone should completely cut out the technique; rather, one needs to be aware of his or her audience, and is free to do it in a non-Arab audience, but should perhaps reconsider it if performing in front of Arabs. To me, being aware of cultural sensitivity is more important than worrying about cultural appropriation.

C: How can our readers get involved in bellydance in Japan?

K: Even in rural areas, there are studios in every prefecture. One of my favorite websites for finding more information about studio locations or events is [Bellydance Tokyo](#). You can use the studio search tool to find classes in your area, although it's not necessarily complete. (For example, they don't have any studios registered for Yamaguchi Prefecture, but by doing a quick Google search, I found two. It also doesn't even come close to registering the full number of studios in Tochigi Prefecture.) If you don't read Japanese, have a friend help you.

If you're not keen on spending money or can't find classes close enough to you, the internet is your friend! Two of my favorite resources are [Free Bellydance Classes](#) and [Essence of Bellydance](#).

Both have tons of free videos on YouTube, which will be your core tool—YouTube has everything from beginner-level choreography to [Sia's "Cheap Thrills"](#), to [hour-long classes](#), to even short advanced movements to [retro Pokemon game music](#), if that's your thing. Even if you already are taking lessons at a studio, it's very beneficial to dabble in instruction from other teachers as well, since everyone has a different way of explaining moves and tips.

Kelsey is a second year CIR in Tochigi Prefecture. She is also serving as this year's news editor, so make sure you don't miss her articles (please and thank you)! In addition to bellydance, in her spare time she cuddles shelter dogs, watches Parks and Recreation, practices calligraphy, and has righteous outbursts about social issues—all at the same time, of course.

Photos:
Kelsey Lechner





RUGBY HELPED ME FIND MY FEET IN JAPAN. MAYBE SPORT COULD HELP YOU TOO?

Fred Howells (Gunma)

Introduction

Rugby has been rapidly growing in popularity in Japan as the country gears up to hold Asia's first Rugby World Cup in 2019. As Japan's success in the sport continues to increase, Fred Howells, a first year JET, reflects on his experience playing rugby in Japan.





Sport is arguably the world's most universal language, probably more so than the language we've all been sent here to teach! What I hope this article can show you is that you could, and should, use this vital form of physical expression to your full advantage during your time in Japan. No matter what age, size, fitness, or level of prior experience, I can almost guarantee there is some form of physical activity for you in your local area; one that could open up endless avenues of opportunity. We are well within the depths of the Japanese winter and for many of us this can mean endless days melting into your *kotatsu* or peering at your phone over a sea of blankets. Hopefully, I can advertise something to break that monotonous cycle, something that exerts both the mind and body. Now, before sounding like an overly zealous article in Men's Health, getting a sweat on is important. I hope to relate all this to my very recent experiences playing rugby in Japan.

Only four-and-a-half months of my life so far have been spent in Takasaki, Gunma, a very insignificant time in Japan compared to many of the hardened JETs reading this article, I'm sure. With no prior experience of Japan, and my Japanese language ability being comparable to that of a wooden chair, my transition from suburban London could have incurred many a difficulty. Rugby has, I feel, helped me overcome many of them. It has given me something to focus on, a regular event to feel excitement for whilst also creating friendships with local residents I would otherwise never have met.

Rugby has for the most part been a very big constant within my life and I wanted to continue that into my time living in Japan. Since the age of six, many weekends have been spent braving the elements on wet and cold fields in Southern England chasing a strange, egg-shaped ball. Throughout those years of endless physical pain

and exhaustion, I can honestly say it was well worth it. Not just for the friends made, but the general character building experience. I have also been blessed with the fact that I have travelled with rugby, touring to places such as Canada, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands — the last two mainly due to the fact that we as a team could legally drink before we were 18, but don't tell Mum. Anyway, those experiences relate well and truly back to the first statement of this article: a bunch of very silly people, playing what looks like a very silly game, with very silly rules, in very silly conditions, were able to traverse any forms of cultural or language separation, a very pure element of sport that has for some time almost been forgotten, I feel, in the age of sporting professionalisation.

Learning from those experiences back home, I was very proactive before coming to Japan to try and find a rugby club in my local area. Like I previously said, I had no ability in any form of Japanese, but this did not stop me. Two words: Google Translate. I am well aware that using this application to actually communicate in Japanese is a bad idea, but for finding a rugby club in Takasaki, it did the job. Two months before even arriving in Japan I had found my new club, Takasaki Rugby Club, or TRC. It was nearly impossible to decipher any of the translated language on the website to gain any information on practice location and times. As a result, I simply packed my rugby kit into my luggage and decided to do some further investigating on arrival to my new home.

What I hope the first lesson you might be able to take away from this article is if you had any sort of passion back home, and find yourself missing it or bored, give it a little internet search. If you find yourself bearing no results, ask teachers or anybody with knowledge of your local area. If they don't know someone directly, then a mutual

friend of theirs might. There is literally no harm in asking, and you don't know what could result from it. On arrival to my school, I asked one of my JTEs to type a quick email to an address found on the club site. Literally within the next two hours I got a call from a man named Uchida-san. Calling on a Friday, he told me that he would pick me up to take me to a game that Sunday. Finally, the once distant dream of playing rugby in Japan was beginning to materialize.

Now, it would be impossible for me to talk about rugby and Japan without mentioning the massive rise in fortunes for the sport here. As a sport unknown to many of you, I'm sure, I would say there has been no better time to take some form of interest in rugby than while you are here in Japan. It may be a confusing sport with many rules and confusing stalls in play, but it is a sport based on inclusion and good spirit. The game may appear extremely physical, but there is always a handshake and manner of courtesy that follows a game unrivaled in most sports.

If you do take an interest whilst here, you will be rewarded. Japan will be holding the Rugby World Cup in 2019, the first time the tournament has entered Asia, and I have come to realize that many people are unaware of this fact. Get excited, and get interested, as you could really involve yourself in a great sporting event! Japan's national team is improving on a massive scale and domestically there have been real advances in the game's popularity and strength. In September of last year, Japan undeniably caused the greatest upset in rugby history beating rugby giants South Africa in the 2015 Rugby World Cup. I advise you to go to YouTube now and watch the highlights of that very important game. I watched that game with my family from the Sunday dinner table; the result left us all flabbergasted. The Tokyo-based Sunwolves were inducted into the Southern Hemisphere Super Rugby league as of last year, placing them against the best professional teams from South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina. This was after years of fighting from the governing rugby body in Japan. Hopefully, this new development could take Japanese rugby to the next level. The new season begins again this upcoming February, if you're in and around

Tokyo after February, be sure to check out the Sunwolves website.

With all these very recent developments in Japanese rugby, it was easy to find plenty of material to break the ice when Uchida-san did come to pick me up from my apartment that initial Sunday morning. Thankfully, Uchida-san's English ability allowed us to bridge the communication gap. He told me much about his personal history in Japan playing rugby, whilst also mentioning that I was not the first ALT to have played for the team. On arrival to the rugby ground, I was introduced to the whole team with much intrigue being aroused by the new face. Nerves were prominent at the time for me, mainly due to the fact that I could not express myself, barring the few terms I had learnt at the Tokyo Orientation a month earlier. As soon as we started to train and warm up, the nerves significantly settled. I was able to express myself through my physical movement and energy. I became aware very quickly that it was good to be back playing rugby, it was made all the better by simply looking around me and realizing the unique nature of what I was doing. Another noticeably relatable point was how the people on this field compared to what I had at my rugby club back home: men of different sizes all laughing and joking around, catching up on the week's happenings or struggling to overcome the effects of the previous night "letting off steam;" the hardened veterans of the club, older men with fifty plus years membership still making the effort to attend and spectate each game; wives, dogs, and children all playing on the side watching for what their husband/father might be doing on the pitch. Nostalgia was high at the time, but being able to relate my home experiences to something new was notably comforting.

After that game, Uchida-san and I celebrated with local *yakiniku*. This brings me to the final point of my article that I hope you might be able to gain something from. Through Uchida-san, I have made an already endearing friendship, this is especially helpful in the *inaka* setting my home is in. Uchida-san took me to a very inconspicuous restaurant that I would have never have found otherwise, one that has become a personal favorite for delicious food and beer. After games, this is

the spot that both Uchida-san and I have gone to mull over the games just played, and to just generally talk. This has allowed me to learn far more about my local area whilst also giving me a greater insight to the thoughts of people in Japan who have many shared interests. Genuine friendship has been made that can be relied on in a time of boredom or desperation if ever something bad might happen. It's also rather fun to have yourself a Japanese drinking partner.

The rugby season in Gunma is brief; it finished by the middle of December, helping ease fears of weekly commitment. I now feel free to explore Japan but have the satisfaction of getting four games of rugby out of my system. TRC came second in the league, and we will be having a playoff game against the first place team in May. Win enough games, and we could be in a Japan wide tournament. We can dream as a team at least. Christmas Eve was spent at the team's



Christmas party. Christmas Day felt a bit slower as a result of it. I genuinely hope that people will read this and be spurred on to look for a form of activity or interest locally, something to do outside of their normal JET circles. If my experiences are anything to go by, you could get some good ol' exercise and test yourself to step outside of your comfort zone. You might find yourself taking comfort in doing something that was a big part of your life back home and making plenty of friends while you're at it. Give it a go. You literally do not know what could come of it!

Photo: Fred Howells

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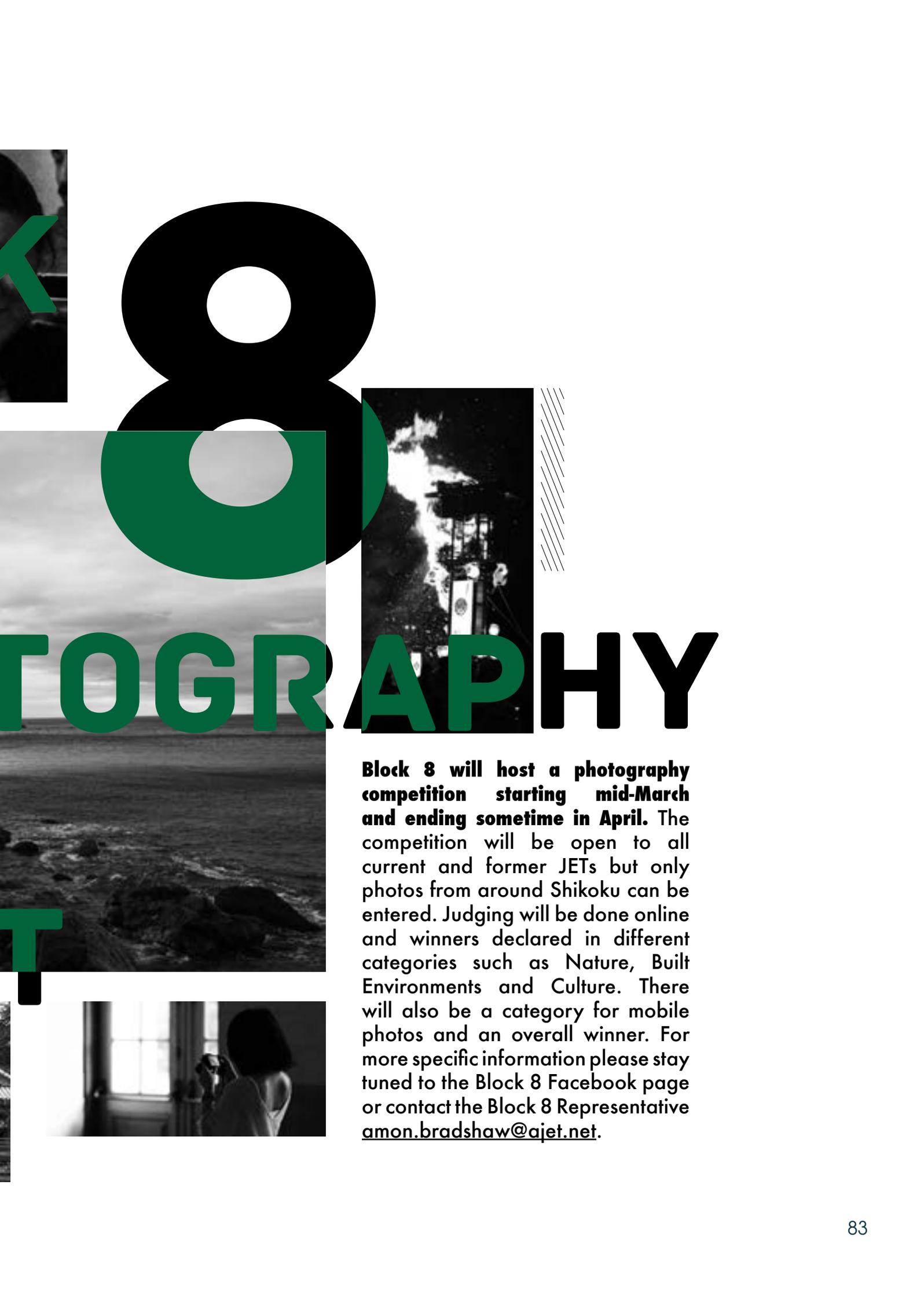


PHOTO



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Block 8 will host a photography competition starting mid-March and ending sometime in April. The competition will be open to all current and former JETs but only photos from around Shikoku can be entered. Judging will be done online and winners declared in different categories such as Nature, Built Environments and Culture. There will also be a category for mobile photos and an overall winner. For more specific information please stay tuned to the Block 8 Facebook page or contact the Block 8 Representative amon.bradshaw@ajet.net.



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

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

COMMENTS

Let us know what you think. Interact with us on Facebook, Twitter, and issuu.com.

PHOTOS

Members of the JET community contributed to the photos you see in this issue. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Lehlogonolo Mokotedi, at lehlogonolo.mokotedi@ajet.net.

HAIKU

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

COMICS

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



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