

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

MAY
2017

Tokyo Fashion Week - see what it's like in last month's show!

Japanese Comedians - your guide to the latest funny craze

Fukushima Study Tour - how is Fukushima like now after 2011

A Crash Course in Triathlon - do you have what it takes to represent Japan?

Judaism in Japan - living in Japan while keeping your Jewish Culture



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

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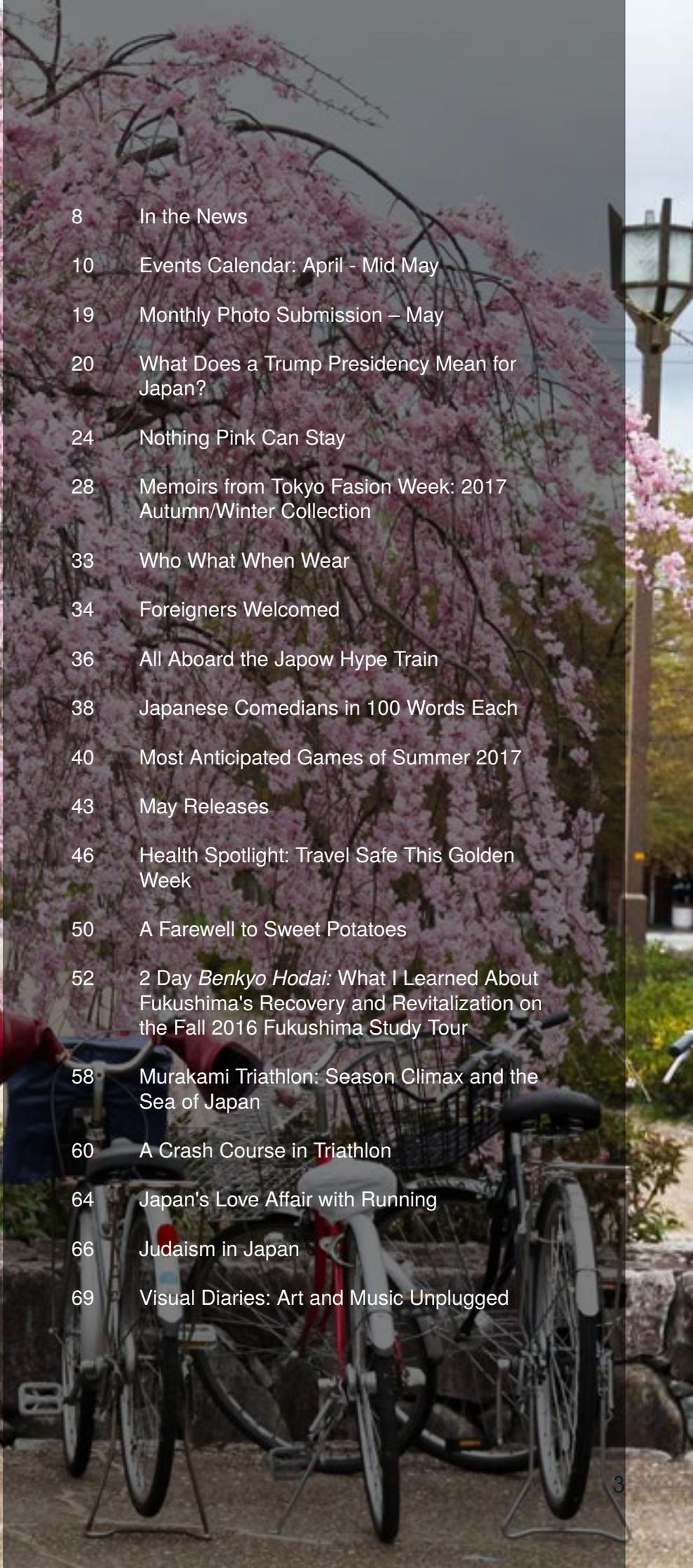
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

And so it comes to my last issue of Connect as head editor. Fans of this section will know that I started at Connect last year as one of the section editors for the Entertainment section. Through Connect I met some fascinating people, and realized one of my dreams of reporting on Tokyo Game Show with a press pass (a souvenir I jealously hold on to!).

Connect let me flex my journalism muscles, as well as develop new ones for management. As my time on JET draws to a close, I can say with conviction that Connect and AJET has done more for me personally and professionally than I could have imagined when I first joined.

I hope I have done the same for Connect and AJET. I am so proud of how Connect has developed this year. There were many pitfalls, but we always managed to climb up from them. I'd like to especially thank Assistant Head Editor Lilian Diep. Without her help, Connect wouldn't be anywhere close to where it is now. I'm happy to say that she will be replacing me as Head Editor for the upcoming term; a fact that puts me well at ease.

I'd also like to thank the rest of the team. They have been an absolute pleasure to work with — many of them have come up with new and innovative strategies and pieces for their section, and I hope they've gotten as much out of Connect as they've given it.

It's not quite goodbye yet, though! This issue is, like always, packed with great articles from expats all over Japan with things to say. We will also soon have a repeat of 'C', our special art issue, showcasing art from those talented folks. I sincerely hope that all of our contributors can enjoy having their voice heard and their art seen through Connect. That's what AJET and Connect are all about. They're run by volunteers from the expat community, but ultimately they exist for you — for us. By us, for us. Consider this as you read through this team's last issue:

What can Connect do for you?

Timothy Saar
Head Editor
2nd Year Gifu ALT



Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



NEWS AND EVENTS

NEWS EDITOR

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Kelsey Lechner

Let's get down to business! --To defeat... the possibility of unemployment after the end of contract.

EVENTS EDITOR

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Lauren Hill

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



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A photograph of a modern building with a walkway and a water feature with stone spheres. The building has a blue and orange facade. The walkway is illuminated with warm lights. The water feature consists of a long, narrow channel with several large, smooth, grey stone spheres placed in it. The water is calm, reflecting the lights and the building.

In the News

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

17 March

25-year-old Tomoya Hosoda is Japan's first openly trans man to be elected into public office, winning a seat as councilor for Iruma, Saitama. Hosoda came out as trans while studying medical sciences, and began his physical transition in 2015. "Until recently, people have acted as if sexual and gender minorities do not exist... We have many hurdles to overcome, but I hope to live up to everyone's expectations," he says. "The more we meet people, the narrow-minded way of thinking will expand." Hosoda says he will work for LGBT rights and to improve the lives of the elderly and disabled. Japan's first openly trans woman to be elected was Aya Kamikawa, a Tokyo municipal officer, who was elected in 2003.

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

23 March

Hokkaido University has agreed to return the remains of 64 Ainu ancestors to their descendants after removing them from burial grounds in the town of Urahoro in 1934 and 1935. The descendants started the five-year legal battle claiming the university, which said it used the remains for anthropological research, disturbed the cemetery without permission and infringed on the Ainu's religious freedom to honor their ancestors. The university has also been criticized

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna

for improper maintenance of the remains, as some were claimed to be missing bones. The Ainu are Japan's only government-recognized indigenous group, gaining recognition in 2008, after over a hundred years of forced assimilation and assertion that Japan is "ethnically homogenous." <http://bit.ly/2oOi1FK>

31 March

Results from Japan's first ever survey to foreign residents regarding discrimination reveal that racism is more rampant than the government seems to have previously believed. Of the 18,500 respondents, 4,252 (23.0%) provided valid responses, and represented nationalities include Chinese, Vietnamese, American, Brazilian, South Korean, and Filipino. Of the 2,044 respondents (48.0%) who searched for apartments in the past five years, 39.3% were turned down because they are not Japanese, 41.2% were turned down because they couldn't secure a Japanese guarantor, and 26.8% said they were so discouraged by "Japanese-only" policies that they stopped searching. Of the 2,788 (65.5%) of the respondents who looked for employment in Japan within the past five years, 25.0% said they had been ignored by potential employers for not being Japanese, and 19.6% reported lower pay than their Japanese co-workers. In a separate question, 29.8% of

all respondents said they either "frequently" or "occasionally" heard racial insults directed at them, most frequently from strangers (53.3%), bosses, co-workers and business partners, (38.0%) and neighbors (19.3%). Survey takers also reported "receiving weird stares from strangers (31.7%)," "being harassed because of low Japanese-language proficiency (25.1%)," and "being avoided in public spaces (14.9%)." The Japanese government has not enacted any comprehensive law banning racism, with the Foreign Ministry previously claiming that discrimination in Japan is "not serious enough to legalize punitive measures against the dissemination of racist ideology and risk having a chilling effect on proper speech." <http://bit.ly/2p9akuw>

13 April

The Tokyo High Court upheld a lower court ruling finding feminist artist Rokudenashiko guilty of obscenity for distributing 3D scans of her vulva to donors supporting her campaign to make a vulva-shaped kayak in 2013-2014. She was ordered to pay a fine of 400,000. The lower court ruled that the scans "realistically reproduce the shape [of female genitalia] and stimulate the viewers' sexual desire." Rokudenashiko, who has continued making artwork even since her arrest, says she

is fighting the stigma that female genitalia is considered obscene or dirty. Many critics have raised their voices throughout the process over the double standard of Rokudenashiko's fight with the law, as similar expressions of male genitalia (such as those found at numerous fertility festivals) are not considered "obscene" by law. <http://bit.ly/2pHDPQk>
<http://bit.ly/2ohu2jL>

14 April

Police have arrested Yasumasa Shibuya after his DNA was found on personal belongings next to the body of Lê Thị Nhật Linh, a 9-year-old Vietnamese girl in Chiba who went missing on her way to school on March 24. Her body was found naked on March 26 in a normally inaccessible grass field, near where security camera footage also spotted Shibuya's car. Shibuya was Linh's neighbor and head of her school's PTA, who supervised children as they walked to school (although not on the day of Linh's disappearance), helped collect donations to assist Lin's family to return to Vietnam for her funeral, and gave a welcome speech to new students at the school's entrance ceremony on April 11. Police believe that Linh was abducted immediately after leaving home, strangled, and dumped in the field. <http://bit.ly/2ohnpOt>
<http://bit.ly/2oEQsxU>

Events Calendar:

May - Mid June

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

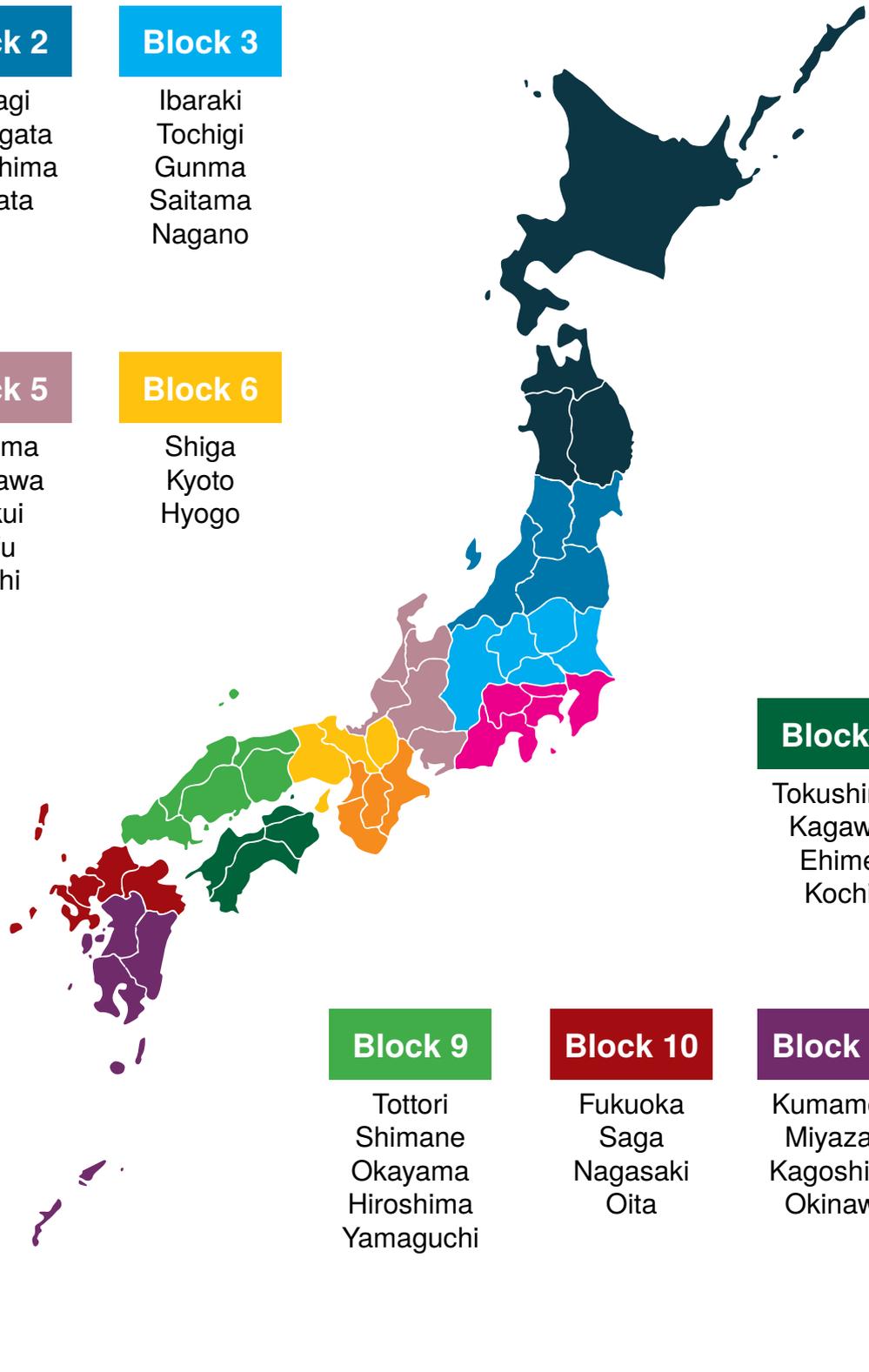
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa



Block 1

Hirosaki Cherry Blossom Festival

22 April – 07 May

Hirosaki Park, Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website](#)

Matsumae Cherry Blossom Festival

Late April – Late May (See link for up to date information)

Matsumae Park, Matsumae Town, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Fujiwara Spring Festival

01 May – 05 May

Hiraizumi Town, Nishiwai District, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

National Baby Crying Sumo Tournament

03 May – 05 May

Mikuma Jinja Shrine, Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

Yosakoi Soran Festival

07 June – 11 June

Odori Park & Others, Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Chagu Chagu Umakko Festival (Decorated Horse Festival)

10 June

Onikoshi Sozen Shrine & Morioka Hachimangu Shrine, Takizawa City & Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

Sapporo Festival

14 June – 16 June

Hokkaido Jingu Shrine, Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Outdoor Day Sapporo

17 June – 18 June

Government Building Events Plaza, Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Block 2

Fukushima Ramen Show

28 April – 07 May

Kaiseizan Park, Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website](#)

Yonezawa Uesuga Matsuri (Festival in Commemoration of Uesugi Kenshin)

29 April – 03 May

Various sites, Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Sakata Matsuri (Giant Float Parade)

19 May – 21 May

City centre area, Sakata City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Aoba Matsuri (Dancing Parade)

20 May – 21 May

Various sites, Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Shirone Takogassen (Grand Kite Fighting Battle)

01 June – 05 June

Nakanokuchi Riverside, Shirone City, Niigata Prefecture

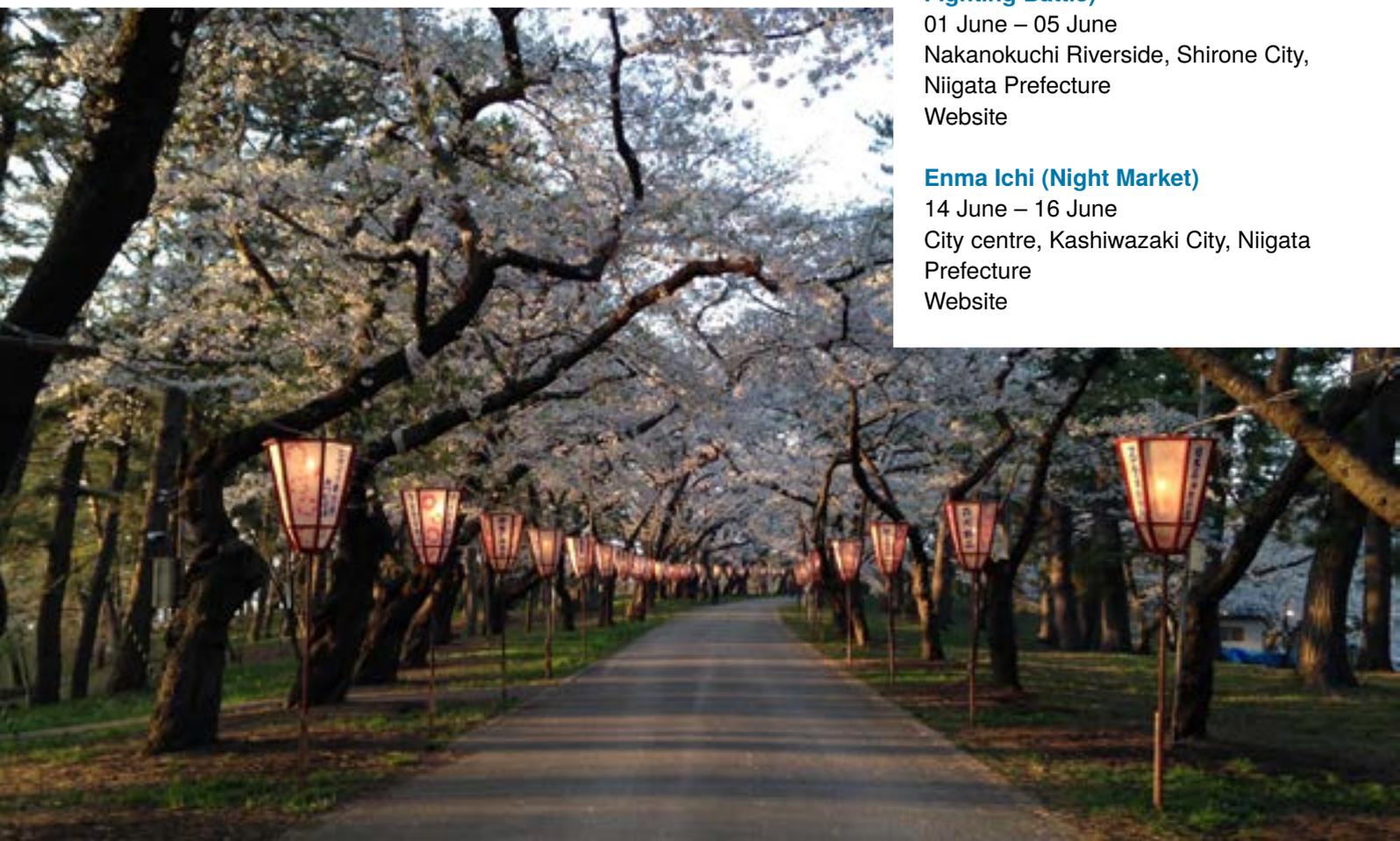
[Website](#)

Enma Ichi (Night Market)

14 June – 16 June

City centre, Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website](#)





Block 3

Naka City Double Cherry Blossom Festival

15 April – 03 May
Shizumine Furusato Park, Naka City,
Ibaraki Prefecture
[Website](#)

Daffodil Festival

22 April – 21 May
Norne Minakami Ski Resort,
Minakami Town, Tone District, Gunma
Prefecture
[Website](#)

Kasama Ceramic and Fire Festival

29 April – 05 May
Kasama Art Park, Kasama City,
Ibaraki Prefecture
[Website](#)

Saku Hot Air Balloon Festival

03 May – 05 May
Chikumagawa Sports Exchange
Plaza, Saku City, Nagano Prefecture
[Website](#)

Snake Festival

05 May
Mamada Hachimangu Shrine,
Oyama City, Tochigi Prefecture
[Website](#)

Shiobara Onsen Botan Festival

08 May – 31 May
Myounji Temple, Shiobara Town,
Nasu District, Tochigi Prefecture
[Website](#)

Yorii Hojo Matsuri (Battle Re-enactment)

14 May
Yorii Town, Osato District, Saitama
Prefecture
[Website](#)

Keyaki Beer Festival

17 May – 21 May
Keyaki Hiroba Events Plaza, Chuo
Ward, Saitama City, Saitama
Prefecture
[Website](#)

Iris Festival

27 May – 25 June
Suigo Ayame Itako Gardens, Itako
City, Ibaraki Prefecture
[Website](#)

Block 4

Exhibition: Yayoi Kusama: My Eternal Soul

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

Atami Kaijo Hanabi Taikai (Fireworks Festival)

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

Tokyo Rainbow Pride

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

Grand Sumo Tournament – May

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

Makuhari Messe Flea Market

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

Tama Flower Festival

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

Yabusame (Horseback Archery) Performance

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

Shizuoka Hobby Show

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

Yamato City Festival

13 May – 14 May
Hikichidai Park, Yamato City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Sanja Matsuri (Mikoshi Float Parade)

19 May – 21 May
Asakusa Shrine, Taito Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Black Ship Festival

19 May – 21 May
Shimoda Port, Shimoda City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Takigi Noh (Traditional Theatre Performances)

20 May
Naritasan Temple, Narita City, Chiba Prefecture
Website

Minato Matsuri (Port Festival)

27 May – 28 May
Harumi Wharf, Chuo Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Tennousai (Float Parade)

02 June – 03 June
Susanoo Jinja Shrine, Arakawa Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Yokohama Port Festival

02 June – 03 June
Rinko Park, Minato Mirai, Nishi Ward, Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture
Website

Dontsuku Matsuri (Celestial Ritual Festival)

03 June – 04 June
Inatori Hot Spring Resort, Inatori Town, Kamo District, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Flying Dragon Kite Festival

03 June – 04 June
Tenryu Riverside, Hamakita Ward, Hanamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture
Website

Tsukiji Shishisai (Mikoshi Float Parade)

09 June – 11 June
Namiyoke Inari Jinja Shrine, Tsukiji area, Chuo Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website

Torikoe Festival

10 June – 11 June
Torikoe Jinja Shrine, Taito Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
Website



Block 5

Echizen Suisen Land Illuminations

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

Takaoka Mikuma Matsuri (Spring Festival)

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

Nagoya Antique Fair

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

Kamezaki Shiohi Dashi Matsuri (Float Festival)

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

Chotto Onsai Matsuri (Little Village Festival)

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

Yansanma (Flowered Horse Performances)

04 May
Kamo Shrine, Imizu City, Toyama
Prefecture
Website

Ogaki Matsuri (Float Festival)

13 May – 14 May
Ogaki Hachiman Shrine, Ogaki City,
Gifu Prefecture
Website

Kamo1 Grand Prix (Local Food Contest)

14 May
Nakagawara Waterfront Park,
Higashishirakawa Village, Kamo
District, Gifu Prefecture
Website

Spring Float Battle Festival

15 May
Fushiki Shrine, Takaoka City, Toyama
Prefecture
Website

Mikuni Matsuri (Doll Float Parade and Festival)

19 May – 21 May
Mikuni Jinja Shrine, Mikuni Town,
Sakai City, Fukui Prefecture
Website

Visual Diaries: Art and Music Unplugged (ALT/Expat art show)

21 May
Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture
Website

Tsuzawa Yotaka Andon Matsuri (Float Parade and Battle)

02 June – 03 June
Area surrounding City Industry and
Commerce Building, Oyabe City,
Toyama Prefecture
Website

Hyakumangoku Festival (Traditional Parade and Acrobatics Performances)

02 June – 04 June
Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture
Website

Shobu-Yu Matsuri (Soaking Iris Leaves in Hot Water Festival)

04 June – 05 June
Yamashiro Onsen Resort, Kaga City,
Ishikawa Prefecture
Website

Rei Sai (Annual Grand Festival)

05 June
Atsuta Jingu Shrine, Atsuta Ward,
Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture
Website

Yotaka Festival

09 June – 10 June
Children's Kabuki Hikiyama Hall,
Tonami City, Toyama Prefecture
Website

Yosakoi Dance Festival

09 June – 11 June
Main street, Wakura Onsen Resort,
Nanao City, Ishikawa Prefecture
Website

2nd Annual Ishikawa Drag Show & Party!

17 June - 18 June
Puddle Social, Kanazawa City,
Ishikawa Prefecture
Website



Block 6

Ohara Matsuri (Traditional Costume Festival)

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

Mibu Kyougen (Traditional Play Performances)

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

Kameoka Mitsuhide Matsuri (Festival in Commemoration of Akechi Mitsuhide)

03 May
Various Sites, Kameoka City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Spring Festival

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

Iwashimizu Illuminations

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

Iba no Sakakudashi Matsuri (Float Dropping Festival)

04 May
Sanposan Shrine, Higashiomi City, Shiga Prefecture
Website

Shinoda Shrine Firework Display

04 May
Shinoda Shrine, Oumihachiman City, Shiga Prefecture
Website

Miyazu Festival

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

Aoi Matsuri (Spring Festival)

15 May
Various sites, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

International Jewellery Kobe (Jewellery Fair)

17 May – 19 May
Kobe International Exhibition Hall, Chuo Ward, Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture
Website

Kobe Festival

20 May – 21 May
Various sites, Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture
Website

Mifune Matsuri (Parade of Boats)

21 May
Katsura River, Arashiyama District, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Kifune Matsuri (Giant Float Parade)

01 June
Kifune Jinja Shrine, Sakyo Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Kyoto Takigi Noh (Traditional Performances)

01 June – 02 June
Heian Jingu Shrine, Sakyo Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Taue-Sai (Rice Planting Festival)

10 June
Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine, Fushimi Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
Website

Block 7

Nabana no Sato Winter Illuminations 2016-2017

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

Starlight Illusions ~ Seasons ~ (Fireworks Display)

29 April & 03 May – 05 May
Wakayama Marina City, Wakayama
City, Wakayama Prefecture
Website

Nozaka Mairi (Festival Week)

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

Tado Yabusame (Horseback Archery) Festival

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

Makura Matsuri

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

Princess Rebirth Performance

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

Fan Throwing Festival

19 May
Toshodaiji Temple, Nara City, Nara
Prefecture
Website

Takigi Noh (Traditional Open Air Performances)

19 May – 20 May
Kofukuji Temple & Kasuga Taisha
Shrine, Nara City, Nara Prefecture
Website

Lobster Fair

03 June
Hamashime Marine Park, Shima City,
Mie Prefecture
Website

Shaka Shaka Matsuri (Farmers' Parade)

05 June
Kashihara City, Nara Prefecture
Website

Buddhist Lotus Flower Festival

07 June – 08 June
Ominesan Ryusenji Shrine,
Toshikawa Village, Yoshino District,
Nara Prefecture
Website

Otaue Shinji (Rice Planting Festival)

14 June
Sumiyoshi Taisha Shrine, Sumiyoshi
Ward, Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture
Website



Block 8

Exhibition: Tosa at the End of the Tokugawa Shogunate

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

Exhibition: Yuichi Yamamoto's Chainsaw Wood Carvings

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

Fruhlings Fest (Spring Festival)

03 May – 04 May
Naruto German House, Oasa Town,
Naruto City, Tokushima Prefecture
Website

Patio Handmade Flea Market

13 May, 10 June & 08 July
Patio Square, Takamatsu City,
Kagawa Prefecture
Website

Live Earth Festival

21 May
Yasuragi Square, Shiroyama Park,
Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture
Website

Bonito Festival

21 May
Nakatosa Town, Takaoka District,
Kochi Prefecture
Website

Rice Planting Festival

30 May
Oyamazumi Jinja Shrine, Omishima
Island, Ehime Prefecture
Website

Block 9

Exhibition: To Things Beloved – Shiotani Teiko

06 March – 08 May
Shimane Art Museum, Matsue City,
Shimane Prefecture
Website

Cardboard Amusement Park 2017

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

Hagi Spring Pottery Market

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

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

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

Hagi Tea Ceremony

03 May
Various sites, Hagi City, Yamaguchi
Prefecture
Website

Hiroshima Flower Festival

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

Tamano Port Festival

20 May – 21 May
Uno Port area, Tamano City,
Okayama Prefecture
Website

Hawakoi Beer Festa

26 May – 28 May
Shimoishii Park, Kita Ward, Okayama
City, Okayama Prefecture
Website

Toukasan Matsuri (Yukata Festival)

02 June – 04 June
Toukasan Temple, Naka Ward,
Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture
Website

Ritual Dance at Amedaki Falls

03 June
Amedaki Falls, Tottori Prefecture
Website

First Day of Climbing Season – Fire River Festival

03 June – 04 June
Mt. Daisen, Tottori Prefecture
Website

Mibu no Hanadaue (Rice Planting Festival)

04 June
Mibu Jinja Shrine, Kita-Hiroshima
Town, Hiroshima Prefecture
Website

Oshikuragou (Traditional Japanese Boat Race)

04 June
Hashimoto River, Hagi City,
Yamaguchi Prefecture
Website

Gore-E Furu (Traditional Horse Racing and Performances)

05 June
Tamawakasu Mikoto Jinja Shrine, Oki
Island, Shimane Prefecture
Website



Block 10

Exhibition: Ghibli's Great Exposition – From Nausica to Marnie

15 April – 25 June
Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture, Nagasaki City, Nagasaki Prefecture
Website

Arita Ceramic Fair

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

Hakata Dontaku (Citizens Festival)

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

Oita Ekimae Ramen Exhibition

03 May – 07 May
Horuto Hall area, Oita City, Oita Prefecture
Website

River Crossing Festival

20 May – 21 May
Tagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture
Website

Yobuko Outsunahiki (Big Tug of War)

03 June – 04 June
Yobuko Town, Karatsu City, Saga Prefecture
Website

33rd Saga Gatalympics (Sports Festival in Mud)

11 June
Nanura Kaihin Sports Park, Kashima City, Saga Prefecture
Website



Block 11

Okinawa Flower Carnival 2017

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

Kyushu Beer Festival - Kumamoto

28 April – 07 May
Hanabata Square, Hanabata Town, Chuo Ward, Kumamoto City, Kumamoto Prefecture
Website

Kanoya Rose Garden Spring Festival

29 April – 04 June
Kanoya Rose Garden, Hamada Town, Kanoya City, Kagoshima Prefecture
Website

Naha Hari Matsuri (Marine Festival)

03 May – 05 May
Naha Port, Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture
Website

Sand and Flower Festa

03 May – 31 May
Sand Dunes, Minamisatsuma City, Kagoshima Prefecture
Website

Black-Tailed Gull Festival

20 May
Kashima Port, Satsumasendai City, Kagoshima Prefecture
Website

Jakaranda Matsuri (Flower Tree Festival)

27 May – 18 June
Nango Village, Higashiusuki District, Miyazaki Prefecture
Website

Seppetobe (Dancing in Muddy Rice Field)

04 June
Various sites, Hioki City, Kagoshima Prefecture
Website

Photos:
Illaura Rossiter
Illaura Rossiter
Giovannie Perez
Sarah Pragnell
Illaura Rossiter

Mino Matsuri

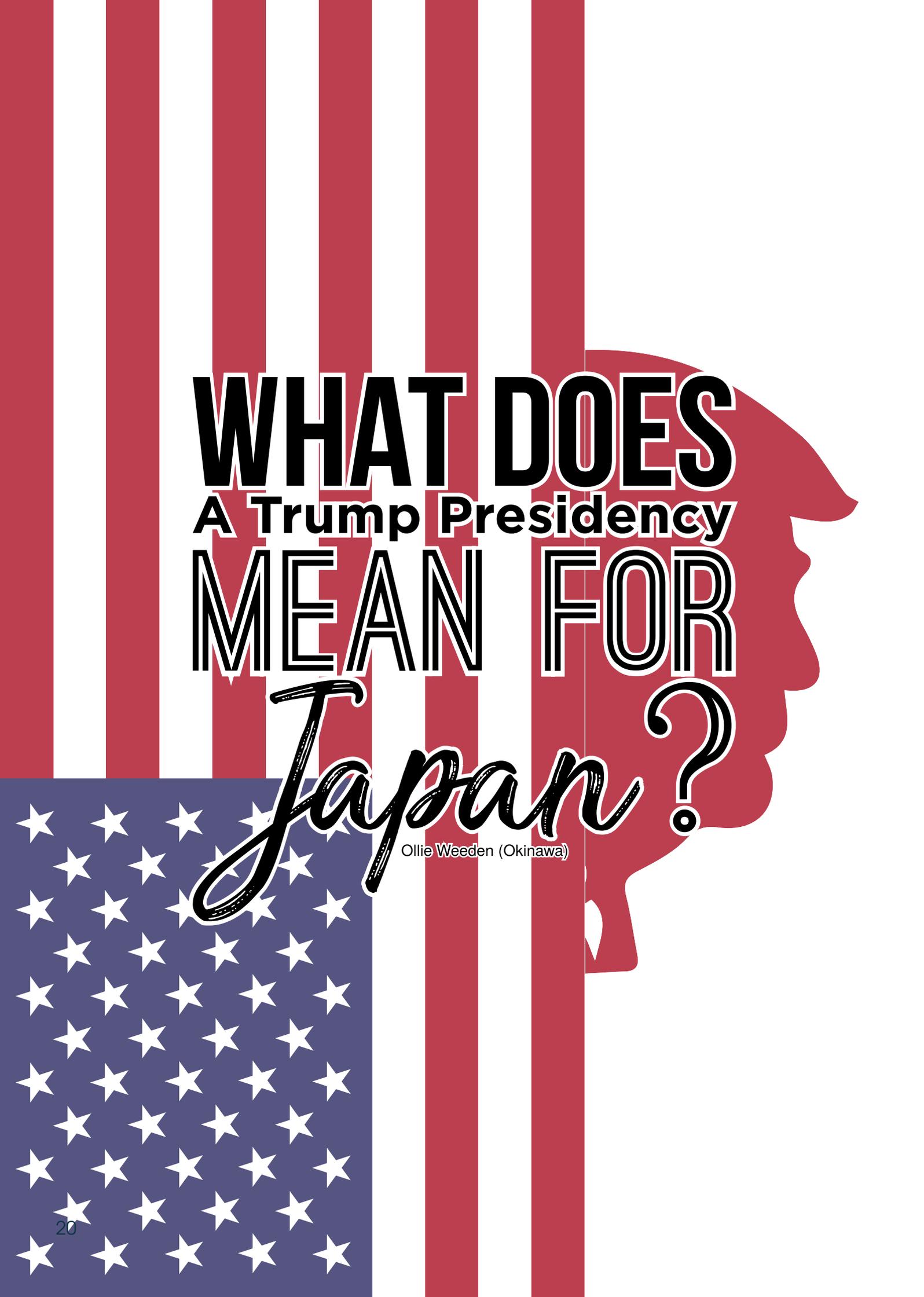
Mino, Gifu; April

Sarah Demery (Gifu)

Mino is a little town in Gifu Prefecture, where local groups spend hours tirelessly making bright pink *washi* flowers to be strung together and hung off the *mikoshi* that will be paraded around the town at the annual Mino Matsuri in early April. The festival is a lively affair; groups joyously dance through the town carrying heavy *mikoshi* spilling over with the bright pink trees of *washi* flowers, sporadically spinning and throwing them into the air as they go. I loved the group of local women who carried the first *mikoshi* and lead the parade through the town, showing the male groups they were more than capable of toting a 1 tonne *mikoshi* whilst dancing and downing copious amounts of *nihonshu*! If you're looking for an exciting festival in a rural setting, consider heading out to the Mino Matsuri next April!

Sarah Demery lives in Gifu and is about to begin her 3rd year as an ALT on JET. She spends her spare time learning more about photography, eating ridiculous amounts of sushi, and road tripping around Japan with friends.





WHAT DOES A Trump Presidency MEAN FOR *Japan?*

Ollie Weeden (Okinawa)



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and US President Donald Trump have both denounced North Korea's most recent missile test launches, saying that the four missiles, which all landed in the Sea of Japan — the closest just 200km off the north Japanese coast — represent a provocation which violates UN resolutions in staunch defiance of the international community. It is feared that the launch drill was made in preparation for future attacks on US military bases in Japan. North Korean state media has warned of a nuclear attack on the United States at the first sign of American aggression (1). The comments were made after recent military exercises were conducted by the US Navy in the Sea of Japan (2). If the provocations are designed to strain relations between Japan and the US, it seems that thankfully they have had the opposite effect (3). "The fact that it did not take long for the leaders of Japan and the US to hold a conversation after yesterday's missile test proves that the US and Japan are always together," Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters after he spoke with Trump. "President Trump said that the US won't tolerate the provocation from North Korea and that the US is 100 percent with Japan. He also asked me to deliver his message to the Japanese people" (4).

Following the conference between the two leaders, Japanese Defence Minister Tomomi Inada, US Defence Secretary James Mattis, and South Korean Defence Minister Han Min-koo also held a teleconference reiterating that both bilateral and trilateral talks were critical in responding to the threat from the North. Newly appointed US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson also stressed that American diplomatic patience is wearing thin and all options are now being considered, including reintroducing nuclear weapons in South Korea. Japan and the US also agreed to soon schedule a meeting in person of their respective defence and foreign ministers (5).

It appears therefore that relations between the two countries have quickly recovered after Trump made some worrying statements regarding his foreign

policy during his campaign. Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's recent visit to the White House earlier this month may have further dispelled concerns regarding Trump's past rhetoric on Japan. Abe returned to Tokyo proclaiming that his first official meeting with Trump had been a "resounding success" despite the infamously awkward handshake between the two (14). Trump never seemed to have mentioned his previous promise to force Japan to pay more for US military protection or risk their withdrawal at a time when tensions with China and North Korea run high. At one point during the press conference, Trump even thanked Japan for hosting US bases on their own soil (6). Trump's campaign suggestion that Japan should instead develop and deploy its own nuclear weapons also never made an appearance. Instead, the two leaders took the rather more amicable, if predictable, course of reiterating the importance of bilateral security and Washington's commitment to defending Japan. The ongoing issue of the disputed Senkaku Islands did however prove once again to be a sensitive topic given Trump's already delicate relationship with the Chinese (13). Their meeting also coincided with another, earlier North Korean launch of a medium range ballistic missile.

Abe evaded Trump's notion of a bilateral trade deal between the two countries, something which could have proved a stumbling block as Tokyo believes it would risk duplicating or otherwise undermining the equally controversial Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) deal. As an alternative, Abe suggested that a new forum for "economic dialogue" be created, with discussions to be held between Vice President Mike Pence and Japanese Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso on the issue. These talks would regard monetary policy, trade and co-operative projects (7). Another potentially divisive issue, which Abe managed to avoid, was that of the Japanese domestic economy, amid allegations that Tokyo had manipulated currency to benefit exports and the national economy (12).





Overall, Japanese voters seem to be satisfied — for now. A recent poll by Kyodo News Agency concluded that with more than 70% of respondents expressing their satisfaction with the outcome of Abe's first visit to America's new President, Japanese voters seem to care little about who the president is and instead place more value upon maintaining a strong working relationship with America regarding matters of security and trade. "I'm not sure if 70 per cent praised the outcome of the meeting because my sense is that most people here are simply indifferent," said Mayako Shibata, a university student who helped to conduct the poll. "People don't care if Trump is the president — it could have been Bush or Obama — but they just want Japan to have a good working relationship with America in terms of security and trade," she said (12).

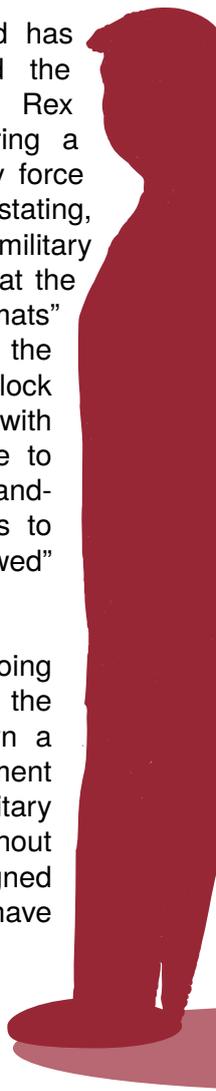
Despite all these victories for Abe it is important to still view the US-Japan relationship with a discerning eye. Trump's now more benign attitude towards Japan, something so far removed from the promises he made on the campaign road, cannot be sustained without risk of attracting accusations of inaction. His promise to restore thousands of factory jobs supposedly taken by Japan, Mexico and other countries seems at present unrealistic. Trump acknowledged on the campaign trail how he reasoned that the United States continues to run up such a heavy trade deficit with these countries is because they "cheat" through the "currency devaluation game". Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Commerce and Peter Navarro, director of the National Trade Council, have since supported this theory (8).

For much of Trump's core voter base economic tensions with Japan are unfavourable. Many small to medium sized business owners in Trump's major supporting states rely heavily on cheap imports from Japan and China for their supply chain. A return to a 1980s style trade war involving sky-high tariffs would disrupt this, to the detriment of both nations' economies (9).

Regarding defense, the nature of future joint policy will in part be defined by the relationship to be had between Mattis and Inada. Despite Mattis' "Mad Dog" moniker (16) (a nickname he picked up after his distinguished service during the Battle of Fallujah in Iraq [10]), both the Japanese and South Korean press seem to have taken to him during his recent visits to each country. The Mainichi Shimbun described him as "Thoughtful and diligent," and the Tokyo Daily Sports described him as "the only sensible person in the Trump administration" (11). Little has changed in the past few months regarding American foreign defense policy in the region. The same primary concerns still remain, the balance between standing firm in the face of North Korean aggression and Chinese expansionism and reassuring Japan of the United States continued military commitment.

Despite this long held objective, discord has already appeared between Mattis and the controversial new Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Mattis expressed caution during a press conference with Inada over military force being used to curb Chinese ambitions, stating, "There is no need right now at this time for military maneuvers or something like that" and that the dispute is "something best solved by diplomats" (11). In contrast, Tillerson suggested that the United States should be prepared to block China's access to the Senkaku Islands with force if necessary. "We're going to have to send China a clear signal that first, the island-building stops, and second, your access to those islands is also not going to be allowed" (11).

Tensions also remain over the ongoing situation in Okinawa. A court in Naha, the capital of Okinawa, recently struck down a decision made by the prefectural government to disclose an agreement with the US military regarding the use of a public road without consent. Petitions such as these, designed to delay the construction of a new base, have



plagued Okinawan politics ever since the Supreme Court of Japan rejected the prefectural government's last ditch appeal in January 2017 over the central government's decision to relocate Futenma base in Ginowan City to Henoko, near Nago City (17). Environmentalists have expressed concern over the devastating effect which the new base will have on the local habitats of endangered species and the natural beauty of the region. Ongoing protests made by local residents have been blocking the access to the base construction site, resulting in the high profile arrest in November of Hiroji Yamashiro, one of the protest leaders who remains in custody. Demonstrations made to secure his release have been continuous outside Naha District Court (18).

A Trump presidency therefore may not be so different from the days of the Obama administration. US foreign policy in East Asia has remained identical, and concerns over Trump's previous rhetoric seem to have subsided for the time being. With North Korean missile test launches becoming ominously more and more regular in recent months, Trump and Abe do however face an imminent challenge in combating North Korean aggression whilst appeasing an equally sensitive territorial dispute with the Chinese. However, public opinion for now appears to be on their side. Trump has so far managed to stave off criticisms over his foreign policy in Asia due to the success of recent cabinet visits and his meeting with Abe. The Japanese Prime Minister also has now an opportunity, by way of a staggering constitutional change regarding the maximum terms leaders can serve, to become Japan's longest serving premier ever. Should events escalate over Korea and the Senkaku islands, this opportunity and his political legacy will be placed severely at risk.

Sources:

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



NOTHING PINK

CAN STAY

Photo: Katie Steen

I remember last August, moving into my new home in a sleepy Hiroshima village of gardening *obaa-chans*. Outside, the cicadas were deafening. Inside, my apartment smelled pleasantly of wood, and was filled with light and *tatami*. In cupboards and drawers, tucked in shelves, relics of ALTs past waited to be discovered. A Hiroshima Carp whistle. A pack of cards from Ireland. A Wi-Fi modem(!). An assortment of teaching books and supplies. Next to those books, perched on the bookshelf, a glazed wooden carving of *kanji*. The message of the carving was translated on a Post-It note: “Enjoy every encounter, for it may not occur again.” I moved the carving on top of my dresser, where I could see it every morning.

I’ve gone through my time in Japan thus far with this phrase in mind — in a way, to validate that the cross-planet move was worth it. To tell you the truth, when it was time to board a plane to Tokyo on a sticky, smelly July day in Brooklyn, I wasn’t ready to leave yet. I was excited to travel to Japan for the first time, of course, but oh, how I had wished I were Group B so I could have just one more week with my friends, my family, and my dogs.

I don’t think I fully accepted that I was on my way to Japan until I had smacked some poor Japanese man on the plane with my backpack, and wanted so badly

to apologize, but couldn’t. I didn’t know the words. A flight attendant rushed over instead to bow with an apologetic vigor utterly unprecedented in New York City. Even though the plane had yet to take off, it hit me — as far as it mattered, I was already in Japan (oh God).

Now, however, that the countdown to leaving Japan and returning to Brooklyn has begun, I am feeling once again frantic with this same feeling that there is simply not enough time, wondering why oh why did I decide to only stay one year? The answer isn’t simple and I won’t attempt to explain my reasoning. Instead, I want to focus on the present.

After what has felt like months of anticipation — plastic pink flowers popping up in *konbini* aisles, floral-canned *Asahis*, cloyingly sweet lattes, an appearance of oddly fragrant pink-gray *soba* at an *enkai* — *sakura* season in Hiroshima has finally bloomed.

Oh, but it’s a shy one this year. At *hanami* last weekend, up a hill in Onomichi, only a few trees had decided to display their colors. The rest of the gang still had their buds mostly closed, holding back for an extra boost of encouragement from some sunshine and warm air. Still, as of writing this, I have yet to see



the quintessential image of spring touted in tourist magazines — that dizzying bubblegum haze, petals falling like snow upon basking couples and pigtailed children.

And yet, by the time this article is published, *sakura* season will have come and gone, dissolved in a mush of pink-white petals, washed down the gutters. And soon after that, endless rain, then oppressive heat, then fleeting bursts of autumn leaves and *koyo* viewings, then huddling under the *kotatsu* all winter, then *sakura* once again. But I won't be here.

The other day, a woman in my town messaged me a picture of *sakura* in a vase, blooming. She told me the *sakura* reminded her of me — “so young, beautiful, and full of dreams.” Taken aback, I could only really say “thank you,” later telling my friend about her incredibly kind message. He laughed, saying, “yes, you're exactly like sakura — so young, beautiful, and going to fall and die soon.” I laughed too, but when I thought about it, he's not that far off the mark. I'm not planning on biting the dust anytime soon, but I am leaving this incredible country in less than five months. I'm here in Japan now, and yes, some days last longer than others — when I'm stuck in traffic, or eyeing the clock waiting for 4:15 p.m., or sweeping and re-sweeping the imaginary dust off

the teachers' room floor for the 200th time. But the truth is, like *sakura*, I'll be gone from Japan soon — sooner than I'd like, if I'm being honest.

But of course, part of what gives *sakura*, my time in Japan, and life in general meaning is the very fact that it is limited.

So to all the ALTs reading this, 1st years and Unicorns alike: seize every opportunity whilst you are here. Push yourself to discover new experiences. Talk to new people, in a broken bastardization of Japanese if you have to. Take the long way home from school. Sign up for an *aikido* class; wreck your eardrums practicing *taiko*. Try the hole-in-the-wall *ramen* place in your town, even if you can't find someone to go with you. Blow money on a *shinkansen* ticket to anywhere. Try the *sakura* latte, even if you know you'll hate it. Try the *sakura Asahi*, even though it tastes the same as any other *Asahi*. Say “*ohayou*” to a stranger; cry at graduation; give a gift just because. Go lose it over some pink flowers, because they will be gone from Japan sooner than you realize, and you probably will too.

Katie is a 1st-year ALT in Toyosaka, Hiroshima. She likes smiling at shiba inu and the sound of the frogs at night.

Photo: Katie Steen

ARTS AND CULTURE

CULTURE EDITORS

connect.culture@ajet.net

Annamarie Carlson

Guess who's back? Back again? The bugs are back. No need to tell a friend because we can hear them.

Michael Sosnick

That's not sweat. I've just been crying about the end of ski season. (It's sweat.)

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

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Sabrina Zirakzadeh

Break out your rollerblades, picnic bentos, and pup tents, it's almost summer music festival time!

FASHION EDITORS

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Erica Grainger

Happy Fashionable Golden Week and don't forget a stylish hat/parasoll!

Roxanne Ghezzi

Photo: Leia Atkinson



Memoirs from
Tokyo Fashion Week:

2017

Autumn/Winter
Collection

2017AW
Runway Show

CONNECT GETS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH ALL THE GOSSIP FROM THE AMAZON FASHION WEEK TOKYO 2017 AUTUMN/WINTER COLLECTION. ONE OF OUR FASHION EDITORS,

ERICA, WAS INVITED TO ATTEND. THESE ARE PAGES FROM HER DIARY. ENJOY!



Monday March 20

Opening Day

Dear Diary

Today was a fashion marathon! 11 shows in 11 hours! How, you might ask did I manage it? With lots of coffee, adrenaline, and excitement. This is my 6th time at Tokyo Fashion Week and the highlights are always Opening and Closing Day. Today was Opening Day, and I wasn't disappointed. The opening show, "5-knot," was a stylish and playful collection. The day ended at 9:30 p.m. with "Ujoh," featuring an innovative triple runway with three models parading simultaneously. A fashion feast for the eyes!



HIGHLIGHT

Junhashimoto: An excellent installation show featuring a five minute film presentation of the fashion collection. Following this was a small panel representing the designer brand, including the creative designer, Jun Hashimoto, the CEO, the marketing director, and brand ambassador. I had the opportunity to ask questions and directly speak to them, and we could even touch and try on the clothing! A fashion editor's dream!



EXCITING ENCOUNTER

Being reunited with the media fashion gang — the international press community! After 3 years and 6 fashion seasons, we're like a family.

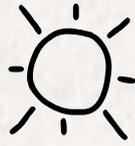


LOWLIGHT MOMENTS:

A mad dash for trains and trying to squeeze meals into the fashion-packed schedule. I usually end up surviving on the complimentary hors d'oeuvres and wine at fashion reception parties.



Friday March 24



Dear Diary

The 1st show, "MURRAL" was at 3:30 p.m. and casual and modern, followed by "YUMA KOSHINO" at 4 p.m., who never fails to impress with theatrical hairstyles and bold, elegant designs. After this, I rushed to PREFACE's exhibition, in Omotosando (refer to highlight) before YUKI TORII INTERNATIONAL's show in Ebisu. This collection was feminine, floral, tweed, and classic with a modern twist, featuring playful 70's disco music, "yes sir, I can boogie," to set the mood. The final show, "LITHIUM," used minimalistic designs with predominantly sleek black leather jackets, reminding me of a 90's bikie style Calvin Klein.

Lithium



Yuki Torii International



INVITATION

RECEPTION PARTY

2017年春夏シーズン「PUMA」はスウェーデンがデザインする「Yoshiokubo」として「Yoshiokubo by PUMA」として発表された。このコレクションは、最新のファッションやアパレルのトレンドを、新しいファッションへのPUMAの挑戦が、セレクトショップにてその日より発表。この発表は、発表前日の3月24日(土)にセレクトショップにて開催された。この発表は、発表前日の3月24日(土)にセレクトショップにて開催された。

2017.03.24 FRI 20:30 -

PUMA STORE 原宿

東京都渋谷区神宮前1丁目13-14 原宿

※この発表の際は会場の受付にて本画像をご提示ください

HIGHLIGHT

PREFACE: Image Politics in Fashion and Art, a private tour in Studio A of several Austrian designers' collections. The perfect chance to meet these designers, interview them, and discuss their inspirations and themes.



EXCITING ENCOUNTER

PUMA by Yoshiokubo's reception party! All the movers and shakers were in their element and I shared a laugh and chuckle with some.

LOWLIGHT MOMENTS:

Locating the PUMA party was a nightmare! It's never advisable to wander around Tokyo after several sakes with drunk companions, but it's certainly memorable.





To be Dressed or Undressed That is the Question



DressedUndressed
Reception Party

WHEN: SATURDAY APRIL 8
WHERE: SHOWER, HARAJUKU



DressedUndressed premiered their Autumn/Winter collection during Fashion week, but I was invited to view the clothing at a private reception party in Harajuku. So, I eagerly brought Jim, a 5th year Kobe JET, along and we met the designer and browsed his collection. Think: Structured and formal meets casual sporty! Hence the name "DressedUndressed." Leather pants, leather trenches with funky sleeve zips, corporate stylish shirts, but contrasting this was casual hoodies, t-shirts, and baseball caps with printed slogans 'control' and 'isolation' on them. Jim modeled some new styles and experimented with his look. Overall, it was a really interesting collection with contradictory elements cleverly playing on formal and casual wear.



Who What When Wear

Erica Grainger (Fukushima)

Who

Introducing Mitchell Poyau! He's the Associate Creative Director & Art Director at Ogilvy & Mather and works in advertising and design. "Image is everything!" He studied communication and graphic design at the School of Visual Arts and Parsons School of Design in New York. Originally from America, he now lives in Tokyo. He thinks that "life is like a river, you can't stand still. You have to constantly push yourself and your creative boundaries."

When

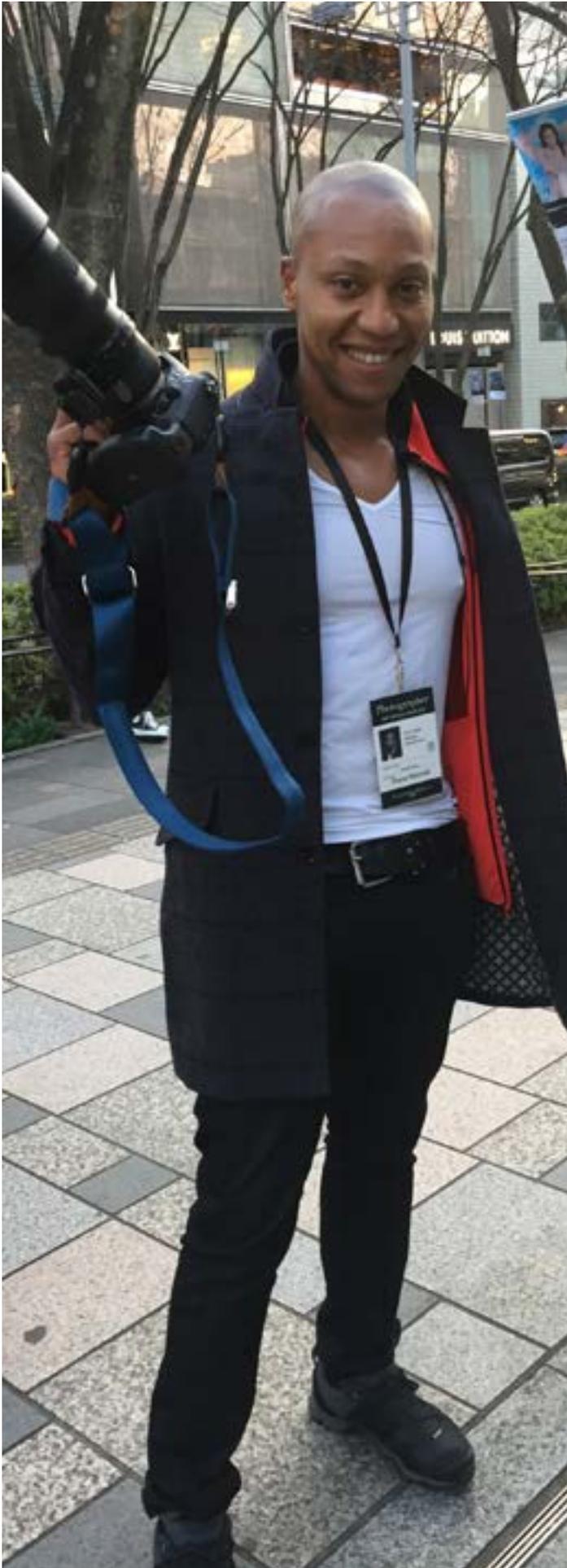
Generally he wears similar clothing for work and social events, but goes that extra mile for special events. His daytime look is more loose and casual, but he can easily wear his daytime clothing at night. "I just add a stylish jacket and I'm ready to go!"

What

His fashion style is very textured with an accent of colour. He wears a lot of black and neutral colours. His style is sporty and relaxed, but with an edge! He favours clothing brands with a classic yet modern approach, and prefers fitted sizes. For example, Ted Baker. "I shop there for staples and I love their classic elegance," he says.

Wear

He's wearing a Ted Baker coat with a New Balance tangerine jacket, jeans, a TAG watch, belt with Adidas shoes, and his trusty Canon camera. This was taken during Amazon Fashion Week Tokyo on the streets of Harajuku.



Photos: Mitchell Poyau

A scenic landscape of a river flowing through a valley. The river is in the foreground, surrounded by lush green trees and rocks. In the middle ground, there is a small town with several buildings, including a prominent one with a red roof. The background features rolling green mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The entire scene is framed by a white border.

Foreigners Welcomed

Avah Atherton (Shizuoka)

In the quiet, unassuming town of Gujo-Hachiman, stubbornly built wooden houses reminiscent of the Edo period line narrow streets. Many small towns boast of having maintained their antique look, treasured from an age long past, and Gujo-Hachiman at the first glance seems like any other. Ten months out of twelve, it is just another stuck-in-amber town. But during the summer months of July and August, it makes itself worthy of the time and energy taken to travel north through Gifu prefecture for its Obon festival, the Gujo-Odori.

The cheery bubble of spring water echoes from the canals that run in front of each home, a cute addition that becomes starkly significant when paired with the old, rusty bells that hang under each eave. A long time fire had almost destroyed the entire town, and so a dual solution system was adopted. In case of fire, ring the bell and use the water from the canals to stop its spread. So quaint; so uniquely Japanese.

For 31 days during summer, the town of Gujo-Hachiman celebrates Obon with an elaborate town-wide traditional dance festival. For a handful of those days, the dancing continues throughout the entire long summer night, townspeople in regular and traditional dress; their *geta*-covered feet slowly click-clacking in tandem with an almost hypnotic choreography.

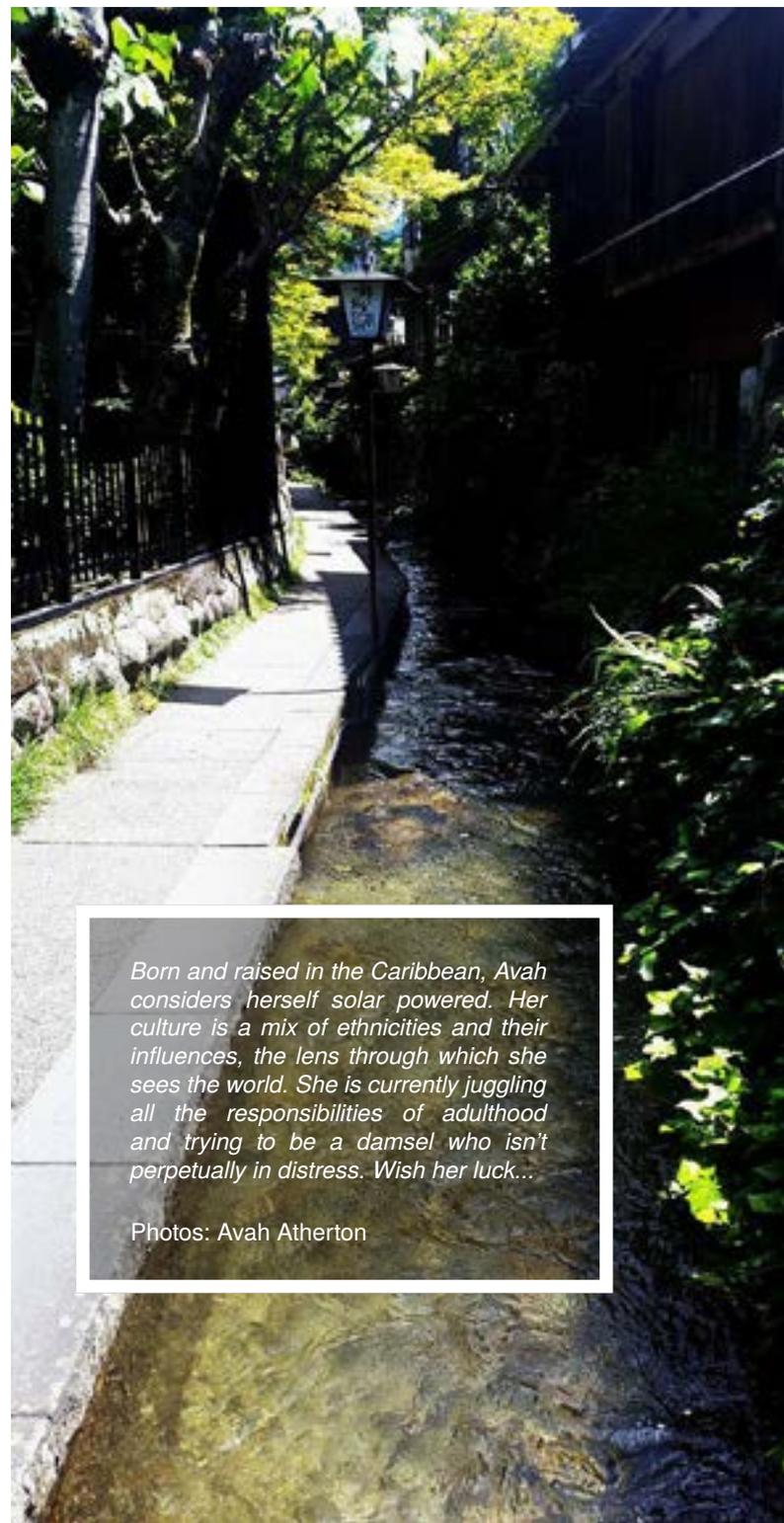
It is one of the biggest traditional dance festivals in Japan, and while just being an onlooker is itself a great privilege, this festival warmly welcomes tourists as participants. And so I was one of the dancers in *yukata* and *geta*, forming the huge, constantly moving oval procession through the town square. I had arrived earlier that day after an almost five-hour local train ride from Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, and after a 10 minute demonstration of the most popular dances at the tourist association, I was certain that I was rhythmically challenged. With *geta* on? I was sure I would be hazardous to someone's health.

With a few hours left before the main event, I toured the town. Permanent storefronts were open for business, further proof that this festival was not just a calendar occurrence but a way of life. Locals gathered around a *geta* shop, selecting straps to match their *yukata* and having it all assembled there before their eyes. Fresh fish was taken straight from the river, rolled in salt, and roasted right alongside the riverbank. In the canals, brightly-coloured koi swam gleefully, kept fat by the locals who would purchase food from unsupervised boxes left nearby.

At the *ryokan*, the service was impeccable; every need seen to before it was even vocalised. After a dinner of fresh seasonal local produce, we were taken to the town square and left to enjoy the festivities. I battled with my nerves and waited for the usual stares and annoyingly repetitive questions, but none came. Just smiles and encouraging nods at my clumsy attempts to follow their movements. Each song was performed by a live band seated atop a moving float; the musicians plucked Japanese instruments

and warbled out each tune for almost twenty minutes. By the end of the song, I was drenched in sweat but I had gotten the moves perfectly by then.

This continued for hours, a perfect symphony of rhythm and ritual. Dancers would fall in and out of line from time to time but with the huge crowd, it was never noticeable and so, on it went. Lanterns hung from the stone walls beside the river, lighting the way and reflecting off of the waters. The festival atmosphere was pervasive; outside of the main area, people did the dances on side streets and in shops, intoxicated by the music and the motions. By the end of the night, the exhilarated smiles on each face, young and old alike, stranger and friend, were identical. As we began our weary trek home, our common humanity, our appreciation for the past and gratitude for life, embodied by the celebration of *obon* all over Japan, linked us together forever that one night under the stars in Gujo-Hachiman.



Born and raised in the Caribbean, Avah considers herself solar powered. Her culture is a mix of ethnicities and their influences, the lens through which she sees the world. She is currently juggling all the responsibilities of adulthood and trying to be a damsel who isn't perpetually in distress. Wish her luck...

Photos: Avah Atherton

ALL ABOARD THE JAPOW HYPE TRAIN

Mike Sosnick (Kobe)

The world ski community speaks reverently about the legend of “Japow.” Japan’s prodigious snow grabs headlines, and the ski magazines follow up that played-out discussion with the run-of-the-mill Japan sensationalism. People line up politely for on-time trains! Sushi comes on a conveyor belt! The toilet seats are warm! People are perpetually in a 30-degree bow!

It’s easy to groan at these headlines, as we all do. As absurd as it seems to us, many foreign skiers really do see the mountains of Hokkaido and Honshu as some twisted anime fairytale buried in endless powder.

In fairness, the last bit is true. With the exception of a terrible season last winter, there is an absurd amount of snow here. The sheer quantity of powder and the famously well-spaced trees are good reasons for international punters to flood Japan’s slopes, and why I was ecstatic to spend a full season here for the first time.

Granted, living in Hyogo Prefecture was a bit of a change from last year’s season pass and four days a week on the hill. Growing up on the American East Coast, if you live in a place where it doesn’t snow then there isn’t any skiing reasonably nearby. But Japan’s microclimates mean Kansai isn’t as terrible a ski base as it would seem. There are (small) hills doable for a day trip on standard JR trains or convenient buses, and real destinations like Nagano’s Hakuba and Shiga Kogen aren’t too far away.

While I chalked up fewer days this season, I lapped up

more snow than I’ve ever had in my life. When it snows here it absolutely pukes, and this winter in particular offered buckets galore. Almost comical amounts of snow (including a one meter-plus day in Gifu that bordered on too much) is the greatest gift a skier can ask for. In that regard, Japan delivers.

But with a whole season under my belt, I’d like to poke some holes in the narrative of Japan as the be-all and end-all skiing paradise. Besides the snow (which renders everything I’m about to say basically moot), Japan is not a great place to ski. Yes, I said the unspeakable. It’s only a matter of time before Ullr or the editors of *Powder* strike me down.

IT'S FLAT

Slopes are pretty important to *downhill* skiing, and even more so to keep any momentum in chest-deep snow. Yet the Japow hype machine conveniently leaves out that the hills in this mountainous archipelago aren’t steep at all. The adage about coming to Japan for the snow, not the terrain, is a little *too* accurate. It’s a bit of a waste of powder to have to straightline entire runs in order not to get stuck. I got used to steep, technical trees in northern Vermont and exposed chutes in the Rockies where I’d drop in thinking that could be where I die. However, there’s no such

adrenaline here. Even ski videos tell a misleading tale of Japanese terrain — when pros come to Japan, they are often filmed at favorable angles that make their lines look much steeper than they are.



RUNS ARE SHORT AND RESORTS ARE SMALL

Japan's mountains are at low altitude. There isn't any skiing above the tree line, except for in a few parts of Nagano. The upside is the tree skiing, but wide-open bowls and tight chutes are scarce. Moreover, the runs are way too short. Sometimes it only takes a few turns to be back at the bottom of the lift, and there are no real leg-burners unless you're running ruts with the mogul-happy local lifers. The ski areas' layouts don't help this problem — many have strange mid-mountain lifts that don't add much vertical to your run but contribute to long lift lines at bottlenecks. It's satisfying that Japan's ski areas are family-owned independent businesses rather than the corporations that dominate North American skiing, but the downside is the resorts are small. Instead of getting a whole mountain in one resort, the hills are instead carved up into three or four smaller areas that limit your choices on a single lift ticket.



THE BEST BITS WILL GET YOU KICKED OUT

Remember the well-spaced trees I (and everyone else) mentioned? Well, you're not allowed to ski them and that's enforced — *seriously* enforced. I'm not an advocate for ducking ropes willy-nilly because that's how accidents and inbound avalanches can happen. But why

can't Japanese ski areas open up some low-risk, easily accessible glades? It doesn't make sense to criminalize something that is a main driver of Japan's ski tourism, and then enforce it to a T. Patrol *will* pull your pass (especially if you wear a bright neon jacket like me) and that's a surefire way to ruin your holiday. With this mentality, most locals don't venture off-piste, so there's fresh snow to be found almost all winter long and the temptation to taste the forbidden fruit is even greater.

That being said, true backcountry and sidecountry is relatively well supported. Avalanche data and reports are readily available, there are convenient gates at the top of many resorts, and officials are quite helpful. But do not, *do not* go into the backcountry without proper equipment, experience, knowledge, and responsible friends. That should be common sense but unfortunately it isn't.



IT'S DIET JAPAN

Japan's major resorts (Niseko, Hakuba, Myoko Kogen, etc.) are so overrun with foreign tourists that they aren't much like the rest of Japan. I've never been to Australia before, but my time in Niseko felt pretty darn close. For someone living in Japan, this doesn't really matter much. I'll grin and bear being handed an English menu and eating crappy food for a few days for skiing's sake. But to anyone coming from overseas, a ski holiday to the big-name areas is a pretty terrible way to experience Japan. It's the living and breathing equivalent of a California roll: Japan as Westerners imagine it.

Skiing in Japan isn't perfect. Like most things Japanese, the West misses the flaws in the skiing here. It's far from the ski heaven the press makes it out to be, and I'm glad to poke holes in that narrative. But skiing in this country is still pretty amazing. The snow, the trees, the convenience, the price, and the snow (again) are tough to beat.

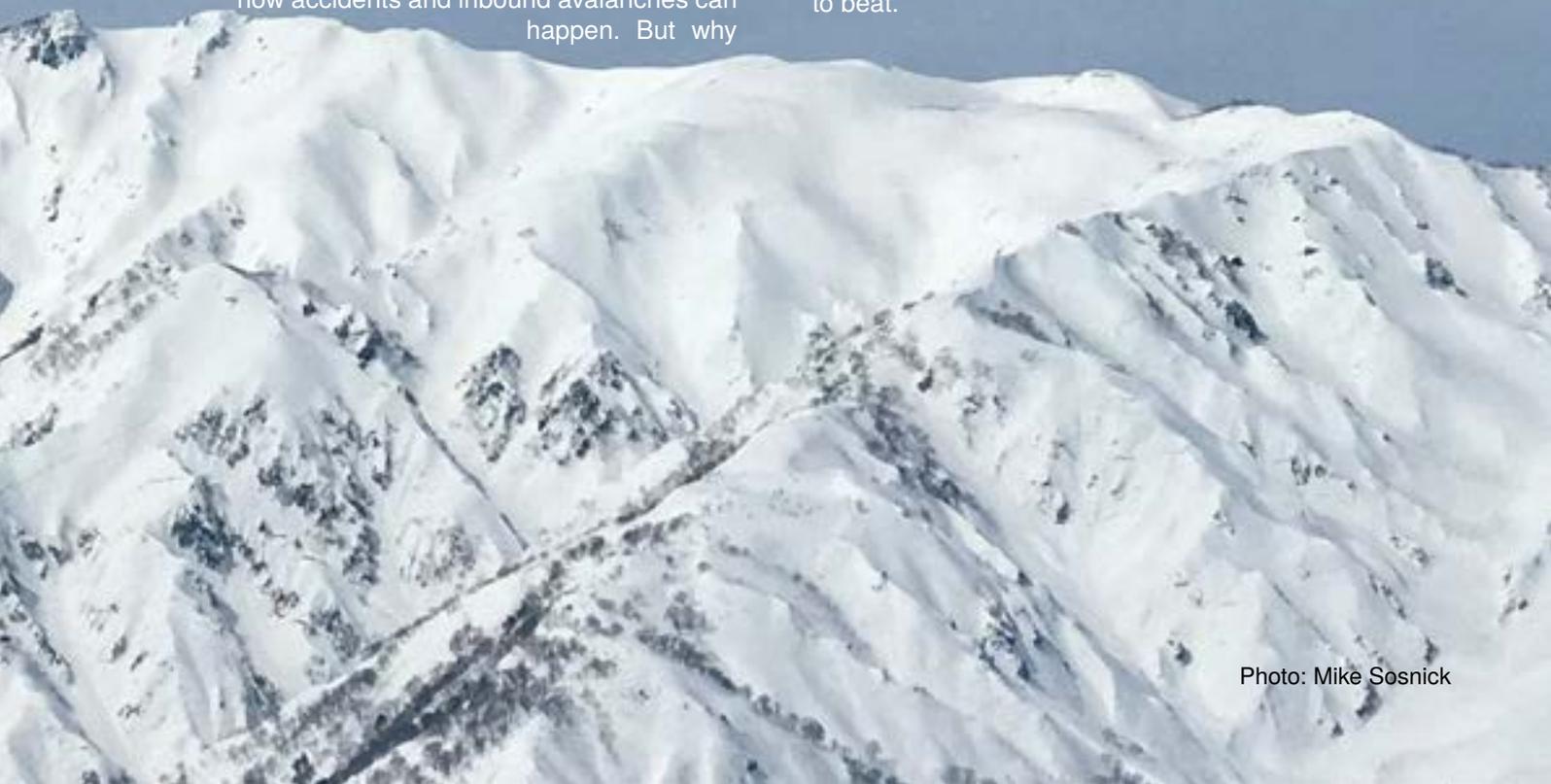
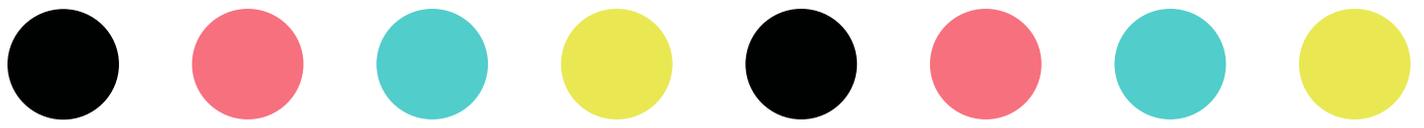


Photo: Mike Sosnick



JAPANESE COMEDIANS

in 100 Words Each

Omri Wallach (Ibaraki)

Atsugiri Jason is long over. Pico Taro is already *owatta*. When it comes to the Japanese comedy scene, there's a couple of things you must know. First, there are millions of comedians. From the brand-new, to the local, to the old-yet-relevant, each corner of Japanese television offers a unique act. Second, public interest in comedians fades as quickly as it sparks. Thankfully, we can find a surprisingly accurate and up-to-date relevancy ranking in the form of LINE stickers. Whichever comedians are topping the sticker charts are also topping the laugh charts and TV airtimes. So, who are the current players? Here's a starter kit to help you speak about Japanese comedians.



Blouson Chiemi (ブルゾンちえみ)



Easily the hottest comedian right now is Blouson Chiemi With B. That's *blue-zon*. Chiemi's act is simple and effective. She's your average-looking, heavily made-up "career woman" flanked by two tall Japanese hunks (that's the *with B*) that cater to her every need. Can't reach something? B is there to help. Valentine's Day? B is begging her for chocolates.

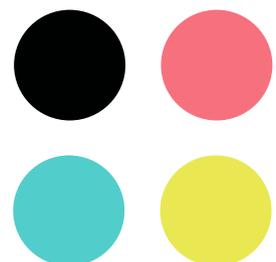
"Being born a woman is the best!" The whole charade is a sexy show of confidence and hilarious punchlines about how a confident woman handles life, and how beautiful men are putty in her hands. I stand at 6'4" and apparently I'm the *with B* to many of my short female teachers.

Sunshine Ikezaki (サンシャイン池崎)



イエーイ! Action! Juuuustice! Honestly, I tried watching his act and I have no idea what's going

on. He's loud. He's high-pitched. He uses random English words. He screams "yay" a million times. Sunshine Ikezaki is probably who all the *genki*, loud students worship. He looks like he just ran in from badminton club, rocking spiky hair, a sports headband, sleeveless jersey, and blue shorts. While more nuanced acts like Blouson Chiemi take a bit of Japanese understanding to appreciate, a quick visit to Ikezaki's LINE stickers will tell you all you need to know. And maybe hurt your ears. Or give you new catchphrases to annoy your friends with.



Pico Taro

(ピコ太郎)



So famous that Justin Bieber hangs out with him in Softbank Commercial High School! If you've been in Japan (or on the planet) over the last year, you've seen the infamous "Pen Pineapple Apple Pen" video, and your students have repeated it ad nauseum. His act can be summed up in three parts: simple (or English) phrases, a giraffe jump-suit with cheetah scarf... thing, and synth music from Crazy Frog's formative years. Apparently, the act is played out and most have moved on to new fads, except for little kids. Should we be happy with his popularity, and how it inspired a generation of children to combine things with pens in English? No. No we shouldn't.

There you have it, a veritable starter kit and *Who's Who* of Japanese comedy. Although many more comedians deserve a mention, at the end of the day, all you need is a few names to show that you're in-the-know. You can find them on YouTube, talk to your friends about them, or ignore them until the next random English catchphrase forces itself into your life.

Omri Wallach is a 2nd Year ALT living in Mito, Ibaraki. Omri is always looking for the next thing in Japan to overreact to, and can't stop watching Hajimete no Otsukai. He enjoys cooking full-balanced meals that remind him of home, but can't afford it, so he eats natto instead.

Photos: Wikicommons

Downtown

(ダウンタウン)

To understand Japanese comedy, you need to understand *manzai*. *Manzai* is a traditional stand-up comedy act consisting of two performers firing off jokes, puns, and misunderstandings at each other. One performer plays the *boke*, the aloof "funny man" that misinterprets and confuses the situation, while the other plays the *tsukkomi*, the impatient "straight man" that corrects and often hits the *boke* on the head. If this act sounds familiar, that's because it is ingrained in Japanese comedic culture, and one of the most well-known duos is Downtown. While other acts fade away into obscurity, Downtown has been a household name for over 30 years. Younger, fickle minds might not pay them much heed, but the older generation certainly does.

Matsuko Deluxe

(マツコ デラックス)



I have a soft spot for Matsuko Deluxe. He is a rather large cross-dresser that's still very famous across Japan, if not for his comedy then for his image and pro-gay status. Children know him, adults know him, and you've probably seen him if you've ever stumbled upon Japanese comedy or donut commercials on YouTube. I love Matsuko Deluxe. Not for his comedy; I don't understand a word he's saying. He just carries himself in such an awesome way. First, we have the name, Deluxe, which is incredibly cool for a big man. Next, we have the character: take Nathan Fillion, drop his voice a couple octaves, give him food, and you have Matsuko. Plus, from a social standpoint, it's helpful to have a comedian who's propelling discussions about sexuality in Japan.

MOST ANTICIPATED GAMES OF SUMMER 2017

Chad Grover (Tokyo)

There's no denying that so far 2017 has been one of the best years of gaming in history. Only four months in, and we've seen the launch of the Nintendo Switch alongside its flagship title, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, and localizations of *Yakuza 0*, and *Persona 5* finally made their way stateside. Guerrilla Games bet the farm on their new baby, *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, and won big time. *Nier: Automata* is a sequel we thought we would never see, yet it captured our hearts and minds with its unique and human story. *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* breathed new life into its titular franchise. The list goes on and on, and we're not even halfway through the year. With the rainy season and summer steadily approaching, I've compiled a list of four games you should be most excited for between now and September. Beat the Japanese heat by staying indoors, cranking up the AC and enjoying one of the following treats.

1 PREY

Genre: Action-adventure

Platform: PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One

Release: May 5, 2017

If you're a fan of old-school PC games, *Prey* deserves to be on your radar. Developed by Arkane Studios (the makers of *Dishonored*) and written by Chris Avellone, *Prey* is set in an alternate timeline where the space program was given enough time and money to flourish. On a space station orbiting the moon, Morgan Yu finds themselves trapped in a struggle for survival against an invading alien contingent known as the Typhon. Players will be able to obtain and utilize various powers employed by their enemies (a la *BioShock*) in addition to soaking in a dark, horror-filled environment set in space (a la *System Shock*). If anything I've said has jumped out at you, give this game a closer look. I have no doubt that, given its pedigree, it will be fondly remembered as one of the hidden gems of this year.



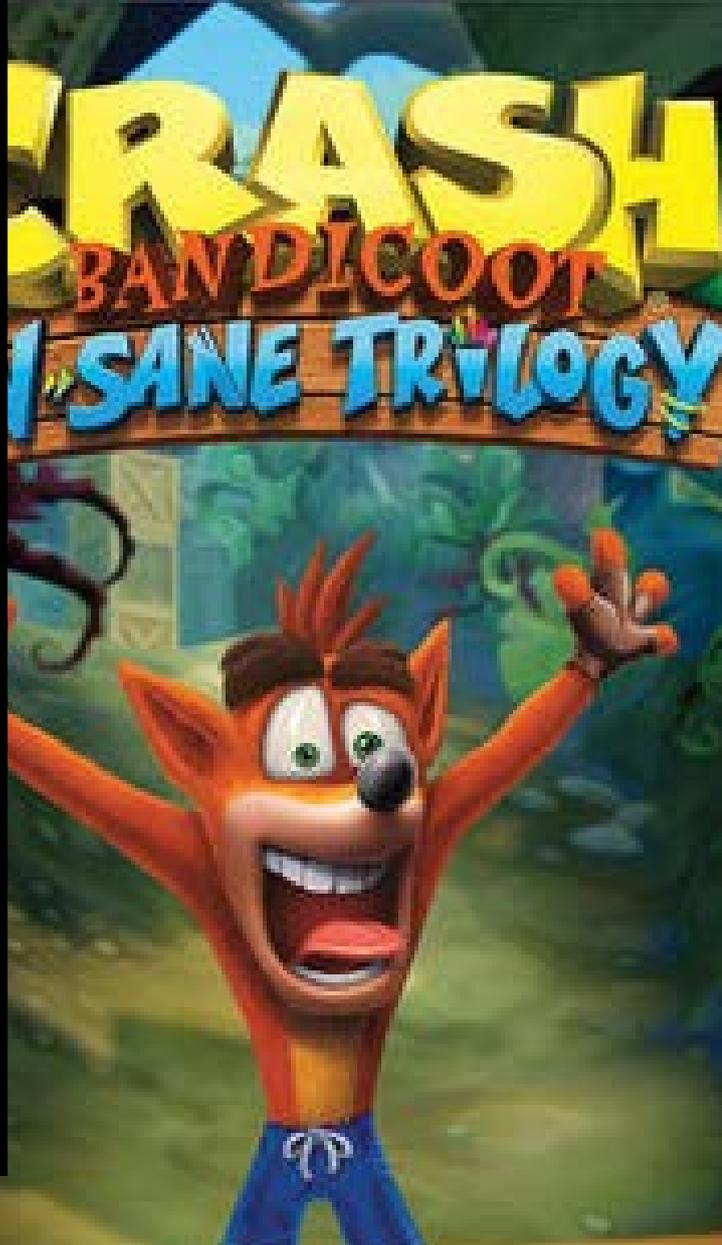
2 FINAL FANTASY XIV: STORMBLOOD

Genre: MMORPG

Platform: PC, PlayStation 4

Release: June 20, 2017

The second expansion of *Final Fantasy XIV* will see players journey beyond the map to the new regions of Ala Mhigo and Doma. Players will also be able to unlock two classic *Final Fantasy* roles: the Red Mage and the Samurai. At first, I was hesitant about putting an expansion to an already massive game on this list, due to an unusually long windup of story missions that players must complete before being able to access the actual content. As a long-time fan of *Final Fantasy XIV*, I'll tell you: it's worth it, and one of the best MMORPG experiences on the market. Why not try the game for yourself? Recently, Square Enix lifted the two week time limit for *Final Fantasy XIV*'s free trial program. Players can now play for as long as they want (although all will have their level capped at 35), and if they enjoy the game enough to purchase it, they keep all of their items, equipment, and progress. If you're on the fence about *Final Fantasy XIV*, give it a try first. Maybe I'll see you online when *Stormblood* launches this summer.



3 CRASH BANDICOOT N. SANE TRILOGY

Genre: Platformer

Platform: PlayStation 4

Release: June 30, 2017

Everyone's favorite PlayStation mascot with attitude is back. Announced during Sony's E3 press conference last year, this collection will include the bandicoot's first three escapades (*Crash Bandicoot*, *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back* and *Crash Bandicoot: Warped*), completely remade from the ground up. Notable features include upgraded graphics in 4K resolution, remastered audio, and an improved checkpoint system. Breaking crates, collecting wumpa fruit, and stomping bosses have never looked or sounded better. If you're feeling nostalgic this summer, or simply wondering where the legendary creators behind *Uncharted* and *The Last of Us* initially made their mark, it's hard to go wrong here. Welcome back, Crash!



4 SPLATOON 2

Genre: Third-person shooter

Platform: Nintendo Switch

Release: July 21, 2017

Splatoon was the best byproduct of the Nintendo Wii U. It wasn't the best-selling game on the system, nor was it the highest-scoring; rather, it birthed a brand-new franchise with a confident style and the sort of innovative gameplay Nintendo is always keen on investing in. Two years later, *Splatoon 2* brings new maps, weapons, gear customization, and a co-operative mode to the table. Nintendo is also ramping up on the game's competitive multiplayer scene, having invested in *Splatoon* eSports tournaments late last year. Furthermore, the nature of the console ensures that the title's multiplayer mode, whether playing locally or online, will be dynamic and flexible. Play with your friends across the world over the Internet, or in the same room using any of the Switch's portable play styles. When you're eventually tired of playing *Zelda*, this is the game you're going to want to pick up.



Summer months usually bring a dry spell in the gaming industry, with most publishers opting to release their heavy-hitting games during the holiday season. However, such is not the case in 2017. While I limited this list only to games with confirmed release dates, at any point more could be announced, heralding in even more fun for the summer. For the first time in recent memory, the summer is full of excitement and known blockbusters, and it's the holiday season games that are the mystery. That's sure to make E3 2017 in June very, very exciting!

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](#).

MAY 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 May!

Movies

- 6 May** *Fairy Tale: Dragon Cry* (Animated Action-Adventure): Written by Hiro Mashima, starring Aoki Yuki, Tetsuya Kakihara, and Makoto Furukawa
- 12 May** *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (Action-Adventure, Sci-Fi): Directed by James Gunn, starring Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, and Vin Diesel
- 13 May** *Manchester by the Sea* (Drama): Starring Casey Affleck, Michelle Williams, and Kyle Chandler
- 19 May** *Hyeong (My Annoying Brother)* (Comedy): Directed by Soo-Kyung Kwon, starring Kyung-soo Do, Jung-suk Jo, and Shin-hye Park

Music

- 3, 27, 29, 30 May** Pentatonix Japan Tour—Fukuoka City, Fukuoka, Tokyo, Nagoya City, Aichi, and Osaka City, Osaka (Acapella)
- 13-14 May** Ayumi Hamasaki National Tour—Yokohama City, Kanagawa (J-Pop)
- 17 May** *HERO*, MONSTA X (K-Pop)
- 29 May** LUNA SEA 25th Anniversary Live—Tokyo (Visual Kei)

Live Theater and Events

- 21 Apr.- 29 May** *The Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate*—Takarazuka City, Hyogo (Musical Theater)
- 4 - 19 May** *A Gentlemen's Guide to Love and Murder*—Osaka City, Osaka, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka, and Aichi City, Aichi (Musical Theater)
- 20 May** Boxing Festival 2017 Triple World Title Match—Tokyo (Boxing World Title Match)

Games

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

Sources

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

LIFESTYLE

A photograph of a night market stall. The stall has a red and white striped awning and a large, illuminated sign of a soft-serve ice cream cone. A man in a dark jacket is standing at the counter, looking towards the camera. The background is dark, with other stalls and lights visible in the distance.

HEALTH & NUTRITION EDITORS

connect.health@ajet.net

Pameline Kang

"I want adventure in the great wide somewhere! I want it more than I can tell!"— Belle

Jessica Williams

*I am so not ready for the bugs of summer *hides until next winter**

TRAVEL EDITORS

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Lara Bigotti

Dawn Wyruchowski

The rice field below my window is party central for raucous adolescent frogs. Goodbye, sleep!

Photo: Giovanni Perez

松屋
田田商店

小松





Health Spotlight

Travel Safe This Golden Week

Pameline Kang (Ishikawa)

From sparkling beaches in Okinawa to mingling with sacred deer in Nara, Golden Week is the best time to take a long getaway overseas or even explore different parts of Japan. Here is our handy-dandy guide to stay healthy and be free from injuries during your travels.

Take care of your feet.

If you are planning to hike up the mountainous terrains of Mt. Fuji or trekking across the mystical forests of Yakushima, proper shoes are a must. Forget about wearing your fashionable 6-inch heels when strolling down Harajuku. With all the walking and running during your travels, practical shoes are a must.

- **Walking Shoes:** Good for long walking distances down the streets.
- **Running Shoes:** Good for long treks on the road, or when you want to squeeze in a bit of a run to keep fit after all that eating.
- **Hiking Boots:** Necessary for exploring the outdoors, hiking on trails or mountains.
- **Comfortable Walking Sandals:** Good for warmer climates, allows feet to cool and air properly.
- **Flip Flops / Slippers:** A must for most travelers. They are essential when staying in hostels and sharing communal showers. These are also great when you're heading to the beach.
- **Ballet Flats / Casual Dress Shoes:** Wear these out on nicer dinners or nights out at the fancy shopping mall.

Even with the right shoes, mishaps such as blisters might occur. Do bring along some plasters to take with you. Read on below to see what to pack in your travel first aid kit.

Road safety

Some drivers can be careless on the road. Fatigue due to jet lag, unfamiliar roads or long travelling times can cause distractions on the road. Always make you to practice road safety precautions when driving. Most importantly, never drink and drive. The Aichi Prefectural site has an informative [illustrated guide](#) on general road safety tips, as well as helpful

emergency notes should you be involved in an accident or witness one during your travels. However, it never hurts to recap the key points of road safety, namely

- Research reputable highway/night bus or car rental companies, with good safety and maintenance records.
- Look to your left and your right, and be aware of traffic patterns before crossing the road.
- Respect pedestrian traffic signs and avoid jaywalking.
- Refrain from using earbuds to listen to music or texting on your mobile phone while walking.
- Do not use mobile devices while driving if you're unfamiliar with the roads. Use a GPS system or have a friend relay the directions beside you as you drive.

Awareness of surroundings

Japan has tons of forests, islands and mountains to explore. However, be sure to keep an eye out of your surroundings. Keep your mobile phone away during your trek and observe the terrain carefully to avoid falling into holes or tripping over things.

Voracious appetite? Eat in moderation.

Soba, okonomiyaki, sushi...yum! Each prefecture is known for their delectable specialty. However, be sure to watch your waistline. The daily average caloric intake for men is 10,500kJ (2,500kcal) , and 8,400kJ (2,000kcal) for women. During your travels, you might find yourself eating out for all 3 meals. Make wise eating decisions and skip that extra box of takoyaki after your heavy shabu-shabu dinner.

Here is a rough caloric guide of common Japanese street food.

- **Takoyaki** (Octopus Ball) 79 calories in a 1 ball (24.9) serving
- **Okonomiyaki** 545 calories per 237g(1 medium slice)
- **Tonkotsu ramen** 552 calories in 1 bowl serving
- **Gyudon** (Japanese Beef Bowl). 657 calories in 1 bowl serving
- **Tempura Udon** 448 calories in 1 bowl serving

Enjoy your day and sleep well at night

Travelling can be exhausting. Waking up early to catch a flight or a train can disrupt your sleep cycle. After a long day of traveling, sometimes your body can be restless and doesn't settle into its temporary bedroom comfortably. If that is the case, try to relax with activities like dimming the lights, playing soothing music, and doing gentle stretches with deep breathing. As your body relaxes, you will be more prepared to fall into a restorative sleep. Do remember to catch at least 7 hours of sleep every night so you will be wide awake and ready for more adventures the next day! If you need to take a short nap or rest in the afternoons, do so. It's better to take it easy than to overdo it and end up too tired to enjoy your trip.

Leave wild birds and animals alone

Japan is home to many wild animals in the forests and migratory birds in their rivers and lakes. Never touch these wild animals or get close to them as they may carry pathogens from overseas, especially birds that can be potential carriers of avian flu. A bite from a wild animal may get infected if no proper medical attention is sought immediately.

Seek medical assistance

When you find yourself injured or sick during your travels, always seek medical assistance immediately. Delaying the trip to the doctor after your return may cause your condition to be aggravated. Here are some warning signs that indicate a medical emergency

- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath.
- Chest or upper abdominal pain or pressure.
- Fainting, sudden dizziness, weakness.
- Changes in vision.
- Confusion or changes in mental status.
- Any sudden or severe pain.
- Uncontrolled bleeding.
- Severe or persistent vomiting or diarrhea.
- Coughing or vomiting blood.
- Difficulty speaking.
- Unusual abdominal pain

Always be alert

Travelling solo can be an exhilarating experience. However, it can also cause unwanted attention. Avoid quiet areas at night and always keep a family member or a friend notified of your travel plans. Always keep your belongings safe with you and never drink too much when out by yourself.

Your best resource for contacting the police, getting directions if you are lost, or for reporting a lost or stolen item, is your nearest *koban* (police box). They can be found in virtually every neighborhood throughout the country. If you are unable to find a police box, ask at your hotel or other local business; most people will know where the nearest one is located in their neighborhood.

First aid kits

Regardless of where you are going or what you are doing, preparing your travel first aid kit is a vital part of your pre-trip planning and packing. There are many commercially available kits to be purchased or you can also assemble one from scratch. Here are a few basics that should be found in every first aid kit:

- Personal medication
- Pain relief / fever reducer (acetaminophen, ibuprofen, paracetamol, etc.)
- Allergy medication (Benadryl, antihistamines, etc.)
- Band-Aids (for small cuts and scrapes, or blisters)
- Electrolyte solution or powder (to rehydrate with traveller's diarrhea)
- Antibiotic ointment (for small cuts and scrapes)
- Sunscreen

Emergency contacts

Sometimes accidents happen even though we try our best to avoid them. Here is a list of emergency contacts. Do also update a family member or a close friend/co-worker on your whereabouts for your safety.

- Crime, accident, or other emergency 110
- Fire/Ambulance 119
- Tokyo English Life Line 03-5774-0992 (Daily 9 a.m.-11 p.m.)

Sources

1. <http://bit.ly/2c1VZWP>
2. <http://bit.ly/2puUN8q>
3. <http://bit.ly/2oqpxYt>
4. <http://bit.ly/1JGHvZj>

Photos: Leia Atkinson

A FAREWELL TO SWEET POTATOES

Alfie Blincowe (Yamaguchi Prefecture)

Summer is coming and soon we will have to say goodbye to the sweet potato.

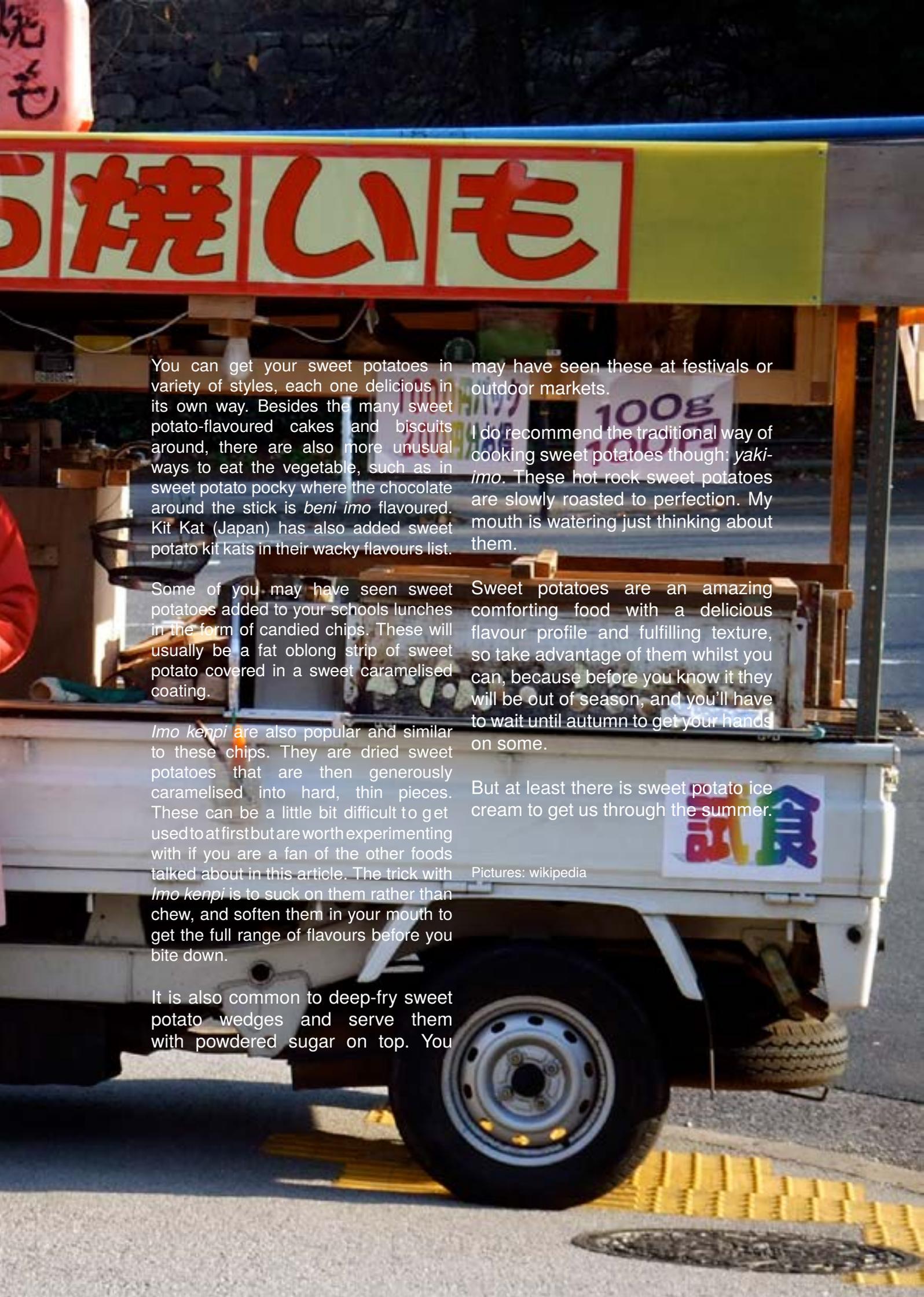
Traditionally the Japanese sweet potato, or *imo*, is the sweet of choice for the winter and autumn seasons. In more recent years, it has become less popular and is now considered to be old fashioned.

Whilst there are a wide variety of sweet potatoes to be found around the world, there is none quite like the Japanese kind. There are two types native to Japan: the *satsuma imo* from Kagoshima, and the *beni imo* from Okinawa. The *satsuma imo* is the kind most prevalent in Japan and the kind that holds such a tender place in many hearts of the older Japanese generation.

It used to be a common sight to see vendors working the street, peddling sweet potatoes out of a cart akin to the hotdog carts of New York. They would sing a song or play music from a CD as they sold their street food, with the lyrics “*yaki-imo, ishi-yaki-imo*”.

These street vendors have become a rare sight though, and have largely been replaced by *yaki-imo* stands in supermarkets and other shops such as Don-Quixote. From these stands you can get a sweet potatoes from anywhere between ¥150 to ¥300, whereas from the carts the potatoes could be as much as ¥800. Now that the sweet potatoes are available in many shops around the city for a cheaper price the vendors have gone out of business, and the few who remain survive largely on novelty.





You can get your sweet potatoes in variety of styles, each one delicious in its own way. Besides the many sweet potato-flavoured cakes and biscuits around, there are also more unusual ways to eat the vegetable, such as in sweet potato pocky where the chocolate around the stick is *beni imo* flavoured. Kit Kat (Japan) has also added sweet potato kit kats in their wacky flavours list.

Some of you may have seen sweet potatoes added to your schools lunches in the form of candied chips. These will usually be a fat oblong strip of sweet potato covered in a sweet caramelised coating.

Imo kenpi are also popular and similar to these chips. They are dried sweet potatoes that are then generously caramelised into hard, thin pieces. These can be a little bit difficult to get used to at first but are worth experimenting with if you are a fan of the other foods talked about in this article. The trick with *Imo kenpi* is to suck on them rather than chew, and soften them in your mouth to get the full range of flavours before you bite down.

It is also common to deep-fry sweet potato wedges and serve them with powdered sugar on top. You

may have seen these at festivals or outdoor markets.

I do recommend the traditional way of cooking sweet potatoes though: *yaki-imo*. These hot rock sweet potatoes are slowly roasted to perfection. My mouth is watering just thinking about them.

Sweet potatoes are an amazing comforting food with a delicious flavour profile and fulfilling texture, so take advantage of them whilst you can, because before you know it they will be out of season, and you'll have to wait until autumn to get your hands on some.

But at least there is sweet potato ice cream to get us through the summer.

Pictures: wikipedia

2 Day *Benkyo Hodai*: What I Learned About Fukushima's Recovery and Revitalization on the Fall 2016 Fukushima Study Tour

Steph Airth (Fukushima)

Fukushima's Recovering Agricultural and Tourism Industries

6:30am. I'd planned to sleep on the bus, but the leaves were beginning to change. I spent the ride to Fukushima City watching gold-tipped forests rise and fall into just-harvested rice fields and mountains that were almost tall enough to remind me of home.

Our first stop was a farmer's market in the city. Fukushima Prefecture is known as the Fruit Kingdom of Japan, because it produces fruit year-round, but I was still surprised and delighted by the market's opulence: fragrant nashi as large as my head, more persimmons than I'd ever seen in one place, and a wall of locally-grown herbs. I picked up some persimmons as omiyage for my tutor, some dried basil, and a small package of yuzu miso paste.

We shared fruit and snacks as we climbed into the mountains on a never-ending upward curve. I'm from a pretty rural, forested part of the Greater Vancouver Area, but I currently live in an urbanish part of Iwaki. I miss forests. I popped black huckleberries into my mouth as the forest grew denser and greener and Fukushima's skyscrapers disappeared.

Off the bus and onto the mountain: crisp fall air, a fizzing staircase waterfall, and an emerald pool where a small school of masu salmon moved like silver wind chimes. Doesn't get any better than this, right? But it did, folks. It was time for nagashi somen.

The combination of flavours and senses involved in nagashi somen is basically perfect. You've got cold, clear

river water delivering freshly-cooked somen noodles — really refreshing and cool. Then you dip those noodles, if you can catch them, into a light dashi broth with green onions and wasabi — a bit bitter, a bit salty, a bit sharp. This would already be amazing, but then it was paired with a salted and charcoal-grilled masu (salty! smoky! toasty!), tempura watercress (light and herby), and a hot tonjiru soup (savoury and fatty). That's a full taste profile, on a mountain, beside a waterfall.

Onto the bus again, full of noodles and salmon. There was a lull in conversation as everyone tried their best to digest before the looming apple tabehoudai. When we arrived at Michinoku Fruit Garden, we learned a bit about agricultural radioactive decontamination in the Fruit Kingdom. Here's the Sparknotes version: radiation settles in the top five centimetres of soil, so you can decontaminate an area by removing those five centimetres and replacing them with fresh soil. Then you keep that radioactive topsoil in storage for the duration of its half-life, 30 years, as its radioactivity decreases. All agricultural products in the prefecture then pass rigorous radiation testing before they continue to market.

We made a valiant effort, but our half-hour tabehodai ended up as more of a eat-one-very-delicious-apple-over-half-an-hour-because-you're-really-full-and-this-apple-is-gigantic. I picked a golden apple, tart and crisp, that filled my whole hand.

Fukushima's Movement Towards Green Energies

Buckle in everyone, it's time for some Science. Are you ready? Okay, so nuclear energy is understandably out of vogue in Fukushima. So there's a prefecture-wide push for safe, renewable, and green energies. Currently, about 10% of the prefecture's energy comes from renewable sources — by 2040, they aim to make it 100%. Our last stop on day one of our tour was Tsuchiyu Onsen (土湯温泉), an *onsen* town surrounded by a natural park. What makes Tsuchiyu even cooler than your average *onsen* town (which are, in general, already super cool in that visiting one feels like visiting *Spirited Away* in real life)? If you say binary power generation, you're right!

Tsuchiyu's generator is one example of Fukushima's move toward green energies. It uses hot steam and water from the *onsen* to evaporate n-pentane (C₅H₁₂), which has a very low boiling point. The evaporation drives a turbine within the generator, powering it. Afterwards, cold water from a nearby lake cools the superhot *onsen* water and the pentane. *Onsens* in town use the *onsen* water in their baths, and the pentane is reused.

Binary power generation has a lower impact on the environment because it doesn't

require deep drilling. While conventional geothermal drilling can run as deep as 2000-3000 meters, Tsuchiyu's drill runs only 110 metres into the earth. Because the generator is a closed-loop system and there's no actual chemical reaction, the volume of the pentane remains stable and nothing escapes into the environment.

If you're not interested in binary power generation, though, Tsuchiyu is still amazing. The *onsen's* water is brilliant turquoise because there's sulphur suspended in it, which catches the light (kind of like glacial flour, but with sulphur instead of rock dust). During our visit, we used the superhot steam to bake potatoes; you can also use the hot water to cook *onsen* eggs, which we got to eat during our stay at an *onsen* in town.

The next day it was on to Fukushima's Environmental Creation Centre, where we saw presentations on Fukushima's restoration and revival. The ECC hosts hundreds of elementary and junior high school students each week, mostly from within the prefecture. Students learn about radiation and clean energy, and also perform experiments themselves.

Further Resources on Decontamination

Fukushima Revitalization Station: learn about revitalization efforts, food safety standards, environmental restoration, and information about the reactor

10 Lessons from Fukushima: Reducing Risks and Protecting Communities from Nuclear Disasters.

Visiting Fukushima Prefecture

While the Fukushima study tours are open only to current Fukushima JETs, the places we visited are open to everyone. If you're interested in visiting Fukushima, in addition to the places mentioned in this article I recommend:

- Tsuruga Castle (Aizuwakamatsu-shi). Actually, just like, all of Aizuwakamatsu. It used to be a *samurai* city, has an amazing double-helix temple, and they make a killer deep-fried *manju*. Plus, sauce *katsudon*. That's ICONIC Fukushima cuisine.
- Shioyasaki Lighthouse (Iwaki-shi). This is a bit out of the way if you haven't got a car, but it's (in my opinion) the most gorgeous place in Iwaki, especially in summer. If you're

in Iwaki, make sure you check out our National Treasure, Shiramizu Amidado.

- Taimatsu Akashi (Sukagawa-shi). This is an annual fire festival where people build giant towers and burn them down all at once in a recreation of a *samurai* siege four hundred years ago. It's the coolest thing I've seen since I got here.

There are dozens of other things I could recommend (Goshiki Numa! Ouchi Juku! Soma's Samurai Festival!), but you can find them and other things that are relevant to your interests on any travel site.

Steph Airth lives in Iwaki, Fukushima. Her worktime hobbies include writing deluxe student letter replies and making up bilingual puns with her JTEs. Outside of work, catch her outrunning mosquitos at sunset.

Photos: Steph Airth



COMMUNITY

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Joshua Francis

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

Marissa Beale

SPORTS EDITORS

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Subane Abdi

A new season and new possibilities...Reduced electricity bills, yay!

Emma Riley

Photo: Sarah Pragnell





MURAKAMI TRIATHLON: *SEASON CLIMAX AND THE SEA OF JAPAN*

David Rubenstein

David Rubenstein is an investment analyst and ironman triathlete in Japan. He is a runner in Tokyo's Namban Rengo running club. This is a piece about his experience racing in the Murakami Olympic Triathlon three years ago from his running blog.

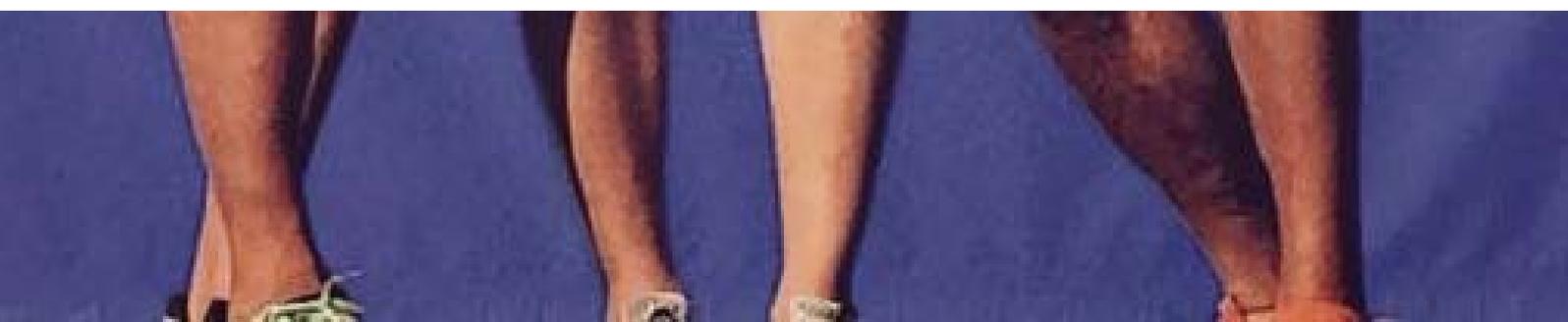
Despite the hand injury last month, I had been feeling rather solid as we boarded the *shinkansen* bound for Niigata, and the final test race of the season, Murakami Olympic Triathlon. I had improved my bike and run times in Shimoda over the summer, crediting several rides down the coast and indoors, a running vacation in Hokkaido in August, as well as better running sessions on the track with the Nanbanners.

PRE-RACE:

Thanks to Danai, we were shackled up five minutes from the swim start at the opulent Haginoya Grand Hotel. It had been several years since my last Murakami race, but these conditions looked enticing.

The last race I did in 2009 was too hot and slow, and the 2008 race was foiled by a canceled swim. Toru had arranged dinner at the local *izakaya* located conveniently down the street from the Haginoya, and we were well fed the night before. Little did we know there was a snowboarder shrine next to the restaurant. More on that later...

Jay, Alex, Ricky, and me were sharing a large room, so everyone pretty much woke up together at 6 AM, ate breakfast, put on body number decals, and rode bikes to the start area. I had my traditional *natto*, egg, rice, *miso* soup meal before the race as I knew the late 10 AM swim start would provide plenty of digestion time. It was super sunny at the swim area so I sat in the shelter as the pros hit the water at 9 AM.



SWIM:

We gathered at the beach 10 minutes before 10 AM. I did not really have a detailed swim strategy this time — just hoped to make it to the first turn without too much bumping. The course is an L-shape. You had to swim out straight to the first buoy/boat, hang a left turn, swim 600 meters parallel to the coast, make a U-turn, swim back to the original boat, hang a right, and you were home. The gun went off suddenly and many of us were not ready. Luckily, I had my goggles on, so I just hit my watch and tried to find a passageway through the coveted left side of the mass start. I made it to the first turn without much trouble, and as things started to open up I spotted Matt's big frame just ahead, accelerated to his massive draft, and coasted behind him for most of the swim. At the turnaround, my watch said 12 minutes, a good sign. A quick calculation — 2×12 plus alpha = 24 minutes and change — meant that I could be on my way to a fast swim and a banner day. I made it to the beach alongside Matt in 25 minutes flat, basically my ETA.

BIKE:

The transition was a bit hairy as it always is without much practice, and by the time I had reached my bike, Hillary Cervelo Swank, it was 28 minutes or so. Slightly dejected, I stepped on the gas and started passing the fast swimmers. The course felt swift and fine. So fine that I wondered if we had a slight tailwind going out. Anyway, it felt good, and I was doing 38-39 kph for the first 10km. After the ride out of town there was a sharp turn, then a large incline and decline which is a bit scary, with Hillary rocketing up to 60 kph at some points. Then it settled down for the next 15km or so to the turnaround point. It was smooth sailing pretty much all the way. I liked this turnaround point as you could see your fast mates ahead and gauge how fast you were. I am usually 6-7 minutes behind Simzee, and on this day I was four minutes or so behind, so all systems were GO. It might have

been my imagination, but the pros lead pack and chasing pack didn't seem as far ahead as usual, so this was an encouraging sign, however real it was. By the 25km point, I got "stuck" in a large pack of 10+ riders. I could not pass these guys even if I wanted to, so I rode with the group for the remaining 15k. It turned out that I was riding with Danai but did not recognise him. He didn't notice me either. We were both ultra-focused!

RUN:

I pulled into T2 with a solid 1:04 bike, close to my fastest split ever, a Personal Best (PB) looking like a strong possibility if I could just nail the run. I came off the bike with a total swim/bike time of 1:31, so I needed a 48-minute run to crack my 2:20 PB. This seemed likely as I was feeling fairly fine. That being said, on the first 1-3k there is that inevitable feeling of death on the run. Your body is telling you to slow down or stop. Your mind says go. On this day, the mind conquered the body. My body shook off the pain and fatigue, and by 5km I knew this was my day. I pulled up to Danai at 2km, chatted briefly, and pulled away. This pass was also encouraging as Danai is usually ahead of me on the track. At the 5km point, I had done 23 minutes or so, and I fantasised about a 2:18 total time, a big PB. I liked how the course was marked every kilometer which gave you some extra motivation every four minutes. My splits were getting better at 6k, 7k, 8k...at 9k, my watch said 2:13:35, and I increased my pace in one final spurt. I crossed the line at 2:17:31.

swim: 25:35
bike: 1:09:09 (includes T1 and T2)
run: 42:47

total: 2:17:31

57th overall
3rd in age-group

David updates his running blog regularly. More of his posts can be found at <http://davidmotozo.blogspot.jp/>

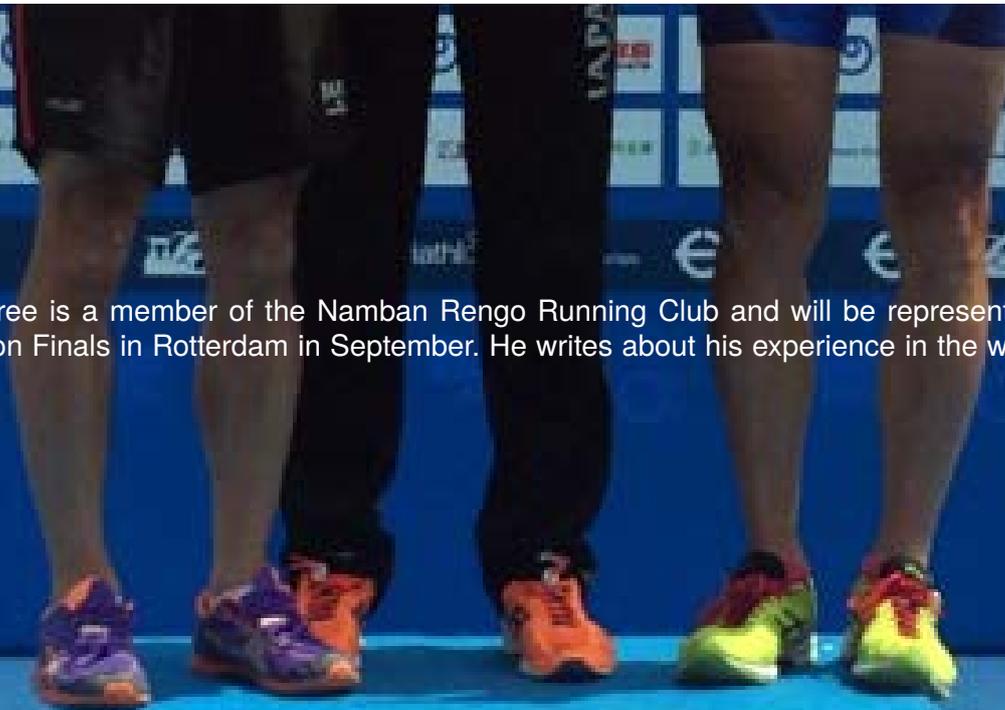
Photo: David Rubenstein



A Crash Course in Triathlon

Mark Shrosbree

Mark Shrosbree is a member of the Namban Rengo Running Club and will be representing Japan in the World Triathlon Finals in Rotterdam in September. He writes about his experience in the world of Japanese Triathlon.



It all started with a crash. I had been out for a day of mountain biking in the Tanzawa mountains, 60 km west of Tokyo, and was returning home to Tsurumaki-Onsen on a familiar, well-worn path. My friend, John, was breathing down my neck on his full-suspension bike, so I was flying to keep ahead of him. Suddenly, I was lying in a heap on the ground, feeling that something was very wrong. It was. I had dislocated my shoulder, broken some ribs, and my sternum had detached from my collar bone. My right arm was effectively hanging free.

Cyclists, especially mountain bikers, are used to crashes, but this was a nasty one. Despite a successful operation to put all the pieces back together, and two years of tedious physio and exercises, I still couldn't raise my arm properly or throw a ball. I tried swimming to increase the movement, but found I could only get as far as 100 metres. Then another friend, Chris, suggested we do a triathlon together, and my life took a new direction.

Race day. I am standing at the back of a big group of people in a grassy field in Kamaishi, Ibaraki. Once again I look apprehensively at the line of buoys stretching 750 metres out from the beach. The end buoy looks unfeasibly far away. Ten minutes to go. The mayor finishes his rousing speech, and 400 hundred fists punch the air with a united "*gambarimasu*". Laughter and excited chatting give way to nervous silence. Five minutes to go. There is much stretching of arms and shaking of ankles — anything to take minds off the fast-approaching moment when all hell will break loose. "*Ju-byo-mae.*" My world disappears to that tiny moment. The klaxon breaks the silence and I am running, bumping off other wetsuit-clad figures, into the surf.

For many, the thought of swimming 1.5 km in the sea in a huge pack of thrashing people is enough to put them off even considering triathlon. While minor running races regularly attract several thousand entrants, and the Mt. Fuji cycle hill climb is now up to 8,500 contestants, many triathlons in remote corners of Japan struggle to attract even a few hundred people. My first race in Kamaishi reflected this, as the organisers of this "International Triathlon" had actually paid for our entry fees and travel so they could have some foreign names on the start list. While the swim leg is undoubtedly tough, it is also what turns many races into

unique, memorable events. In my second race in Ishigaki, a large island in Okinawa, I shared the swim with countless brightly coloured fish. In Hiwasa, on the island of Shikoku, I swam in a beautiful nature reserve where turtles go each year to lay their eggs. Most memorable of all, I was blessed by priests in Itsukushima Shrine, before swimming out through the iconic "floating *torii*" on Miyajima, and then two-and-a-half kilometres across the strait to the mainland.

Back in Kamaishi, I'm struggling through the swim. My goggles are fogged up and my breathing is laboured. I get hit on the legs, so pull harder to get ahead. I run out of breath, my chest tightens, and panic wells up. I raise my head out of the water, and see a line of swimmers stretching far into the distance. I need to find a rhythm that suits me. It is my first race, but I am learning fast. The swim is only the start of a long race, so it is important to find your own rhythm, however slow, rather than trying to keep up with the dolphins ahead. I reach the final buoy and turn back to the beach. I'm past halfway: I can do it. I start to think ahead to the next leg on the bike, something I am more comfortable with. I will get out of the water, undo my wetsuit, and peel it off while running to transition. I must locate my bike, hanging by its saddle on a rack, put on my helmet and cycle shoes, and find my way out of transition. After all this, riding a 40-kilometre loop through rural Ibaraki would be a breeze.

While a beautiful swim can really add something to the experience of triathlons, it is the bike course that really makes it for me. Japan is not always ideal for cycling. Roads are narrow and crowded, traffic lights disrupt your progress, and drivers pass disturbingly close. In a triathlon, roads are closed, traffic lights turned off, and for a while you get to feel what the world would be like without cars. In Yokohama, we ride along the Bayside cheered on by the crowds lining Yamashita-koen. At Kujukuri on the east coast of Chiba, we have the curious experience of riding along a motorway which is closed for the event. Even stranger is the bike course at Nanki-Shirahama in Wakayama, which starts on a scenic coast road, and finishes on the runway of the old airport. My personal favourite is Nojiriko in Nagano Prefecture, where you ride on a climbing, twisting, swooping road which winds through the forests surrounding the lake.

On the bike. One by one I'm catching the swimmers who had stretched ahead of me earlier. They are mostly crouched precariously over their handlebars on aerodynamic time trial bikes. I am pedalling furiously on my ancient steel Bottecchia which really needs a new coat of paint. Despite my retro equipment, I have the edge thanks to years of riding. I rest my hands on the hoods of the brakes, bend my elbows and lower myself into a praying mantis shape. Lastly, I shrug and lower my head into my shoulders. These aerodynamic tricks let me squeeze through the strong headwind.

We're approaching the end of the bike course. Local people cheer us on — schoolchildren waving, elderly people sitting in front of houses, smiling, a group of *taiko* drummers. The transition area rushes towards me, I pull on my brakes and jump off before the dismount line. I run back to my numbered spot, hook the saddle on the rack, and change into running shoes. Now the real problems start. Four days earlier I had strained my Achilles on a final training run. I rub in some liniment, pull on a calf support, and head out on the final leg — two laps of a hilly course. Despite the discomfort, it feels great to be part of the race. All around me people are waging their own struggle to get to the end, helped along by shouts of "fight" and "*gambatte*". My Achilles starts to throb, and then burn, and finally to scream at me to stop. A kilometre from the end, I make a sharp turn and see Chris catching me fast. 500 metres to go and my Achilles explodes, just as Chris arrives. I limp and hop to the finish with him encouraging me all the way. I stagger over the line and collapse in a heap.

Seven years later. Once again, I am looking out over the sea at a line of buoys stretching out past a pile of tetrapods. A power station chimney dominates the murky-looking bay. There are no other buildings around, and few people to watch us. I am in Miyagi to win my age group to secure the 14 points on offer for my Japan Triathlon Union (JTU) national ranking. No longer do I stand at the back of the pack, hoping to survive the swim. These days I start at the front and try to stay

with the faster swimmers. My vintage bicycle has been retired, and now I ride on a carbon fibre time-trial bike whose wheels alone cost more than my previous bicycle. The run has become my forte, as I have learned to block out the pain of running 10 kilometres at full speed, when already exhausted from a tough swim and bike. In between the three events, I have learned to change equipment quickly and get straight on to the next event.

Despite these changes, I still feel just the same about triathlon. It has opened up a completely new side of Japan to me. Apart from the beautiful, remote places that I would never think of visiting, I get to meet the local people who support the races and volunteer to help. Parts of Japan suffer terribly from rural depopulation, so triathlons are often held to encourage people into the area, and invigorate the local economy. Triathletes arrive in large groups, fill up hotels, phone for taxis, and dine at restaurants. In return, we always receive the warmest welcome imaginable. The best races soon become favourites, so we return time and time again. I am now in a team, Triathlon in Tokyo, which means I train on weekends and travel to races with team friends. Our annual get-together is at the wonderful Murakami Triathlon which features a scenic ride along the coast, and a run around the old town centre.

My race in Miyagi ended with a good time and the full 14 points. I had secured first place in the national age group ranking, which meant the JTU will sponsor me to compete in the World Championships in Holland this September. Eight years ago, I had literally fallen into triathlon, but somehow I have ended up in the national amateur team. This has taken me all over Japan, and given me more experiences than any one person really deserves to have.

Pictures by Mark Shrosbree

1. Everyone comes out to support the race
2. Swimmers at Hatsukaichi in Hiroshima



JAPAN'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH RUNNING



It doesn't take long to be in Japan before appreciating how deeply ingrained in society running is here. A visit to the infamous perimeter of the Imperial Palace or the various loops within Yoyogi Park in Tokyo reveals a whole spectrum of running types – from casual joggers to elite athletes and everything in between.

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I've been living in Tokyo for just shy of two months. The offer of a 6–12 month work assignment for a Japanese company was presented to me back in November and despite being utterly terrified (yes, even at the grand old age of 37 that can still happen!) I knew I couldn't turn it down. I had visited Tokyo last year to participate in the Tokyo marathon and loved that experience for so many reasons, one of which being the obvious appreciation for all things running that Japan has. I'm a passionately keen — some would say (mainly my mother) obsessive — runner. Definitely not gifted with natural athleticism, I first started running when I started working as a junior lawyer in London nearly 15 years ago. After doing the London marathon a year later, I was hooked and since then have more or less been constantly involved with triathlons, and more recently, pure running in one form or another.

I was interested to see what living in Japan and getting involved in the running community would be like. Given the Tokyo marathon's status as one of the big six marathon majors, I was a little skeptical (I'm English — I can't help it) that the amazing experience of taking part in that race was simply because of its scale. The crowds were huge and so enthusiastic, the entertainment varied and the race organisation seamlessly perfect.

Before I arrived two months ago, I signed up to two races — the Tohoku Food Half Marathon (yes — as its name suggests it was all themed around the local food!) in Miyagi Prefecture and the Nagano Marathon the following month. This revealed perhaps the only downside of competing in running races in Japan — as a non-Japanese speaker, it can be really difficult to navigate entry procedures since many of the race websites and entry portals are in Japanese. I entered the two races I did mainly because they had English websites. The good news is that more and more races are providing

English pages to assist with that process. The other issue is that many races have strict entry periods which close sometimes as much as 3-6 months before a race, so you have to be organised!

Having said that, my more recent experience of racing in Japan is proof that it is totally worth every effort to gain entry. The race organisers are so hospitable and welcoming. Volunteers are incredibly willing to help if anything is unclear. Despite the fact that neither race I did was particularly famous, I was utterly gobsmacked at the level of support and cheering along the courses. It was almost constant so there was little chance to get bored. couldn't help compare those experiences to running in similarly sized races in Australia where I was living until recently, and where despite the fact that there's a large actively sporty community, enthusiastic race support is not big on the agenda. The other really wonderful thing is that running in Japan is definitely not a pursuit exclusively retained by the talented (of which there are many) athletes. The range of abilities is comforting and everyone is equal, whatever your speed.

Even outside of the race forum, there are plenty of ways to get involved with running in Japan. I've joined a super friendly running club called Namban Rengo in Tokyo which trains every Wednesday night at an athletics track and has various other more informal weekly training sessions. There's a mixture of local and international runners, so it's a great way to meet people from all cultures. I'm also lucky enough to be working for a company that has a running group which meets twice a month for a casual run/jog after work. It's enabled me to meet various co-workers I would never have had the chance to unless I had got involved in the group.

So all in all I cannot speak highly enough of running in Japan. It's intoxicating and inclusive and for me has been the best way of exploring this beautiful country and meeting its beautifully supportive people. My biggest stress now is to work out how I am going to manage to tick off as many of the overwhelmingly numerous races there are to take part in!

Photo: Faith Geraghty

Judaism

in Japan

I grew up in the United States of America and was raised a Protestant Christian. After graduating college, I began attending a small Messianic Synagogue with my husband-to-be. (Messianic Judaism accepts the “New Testament” but still holds to Jewish customs.) My husband was trying to reconnect with the Jewish roots his family lost fleeing Europe during World War II, while I was trying to find a more honest expression of my faith. The changes we had to make in our lives were gradual, like attending services Saturday instead of Sunday, or learning about kosher laws and holidays. Seven years later, I was more or less comfortably a Jewess, and getting ready to go to Japan for the exciting new work of being an ALT abroad. In America, we had access to kosher certified food easily. Not so in Japan. At first, my husband and

I tried to be vegetarians, but this stuck us in an emergency room with dietary issues. B-Vitamins, it would seem, are rather necessary. Our rabbi recommended just going for organic as best we could. Otherwise, the biggest culture shock I had to deal with was not being able to do something as simple as read. Much of my free time in those first months was spent staring at food labels at the grocery store, juggling a grocery basket and obscurely-labeled-jar-number-googolplex in one hand, while trying to type my vague understanding of *kanji* into the Google Translate app. This is how I met Harumi Saeki, a Japanese woman who teaches music in my neighborhood alongside her husband. The Saekis share a love of English and classic rock, and we became fast friends. So much so that they invited us to spend Christmas with them...

“Ready?”

“1, 2, 3...”

My husband Richard and I ring the doorbell and start singing.

“Deck the halls with boughs of holly...”

Somewhere between the refrains of “Fa la la,” a voice called, “Hai!”

Anyone who knows us would probably be wondering, “What are those two Jews doing, standing on the doorstep of the house of two Buddhists, singing Christmas carols?”

I’ll get to that in a moment.

The door opens. Harumi, the lady of the house, blinks at us in exaggerated surprise. Then she laughs.

“Aren’t you cold? Come in, come in!”

Her husband, Jiro, appears in the doorway next, ducking out of the music room. The bass guitar, still slung over his head and shoulder, suggests he was in the middle of tuning.

“Come in!” he echoes. He bellows of course, as befits a good host.

Richard and I hesitate on the porch.

“Well, maybe we should...,” I begin, stepping forward.

“That’s not the tradition,” my husband tries to explain, catching my sleeve insistently. “First we sing for our supper.”

Bemused but undeterred by our exchange, Harumi laughs delightedly. “We have instruments in here. You can sing better when you are warm!” she insists. “But then it’s not caroling,” my husband sighs in dismay.

Harumi’s widening smile at the prospect of feeding people will not be denied. Soon we are herded inside like wandering chicks, forced to give up our coats and scarves and exchange our winter shoes for wool-lined slippers.

“Do you know *kamonabe*?” Harumi asks Richard.

I watch him mentally search his limited inventory of Japanese food names. “Duck... hot pot?”

“Mm!” she says happily, and herds us further into the warm house, through the living room and into the cozy dining area. “It’s good for health!”

This last saying is one of her favorite expressions. We haven’t had the heart to correct it, and I’ve half a mind to think she says it on purpose anyway.

Finally, we laugh and sit down in the dining area. Since the entryway, Richard has been trying to explain to Jiro about our strange actions on the front porch. By the table, I unload a pair of menorah from the bag over my arm, listening to him get derailed as Jiro asks after the origins of wassailing and the meaning of “figgy pudding.” In this last exploit, a smartphone and a Google image search are employed, specifically to explain the fact that it’s set on fire before consumption.

Jiro fetches his glasses and then peers at the phone. “Ah,” he says sagely. “I think I wanna try that someday. Mm... but maybe not today.” He laughs. He turns to me, having noticed the candleholders.

“Ah, what’s this?” he asks me.

“These are our Hanukkah candleholders,” I explain. “Do you mind if we light them?” Richard asks. “The candles burn for about half an hour.”

“Yes, yes!” Harumi chimes. She hurries to her kitchen to pull out a bit of newspaper to lay beneath them. “This is for Candle Festival?”

“Yes,” Richard confirms. We spoke briefly about it on the phone. “We call it ‘Hanukkah.’”

“Hanu...?”

“Hanukkah,” Richard provides again.

“Merry Hannukah?” Jiro suggests with a sideways glance.

“Happy Hanukkah,” Richard clarifies.

“Happy Hanukkah!” Jiro and Harumi say together.

I dig into the bag again and carefully lift out a tupperware container wrapped in a cotton *furoshiki*. It is only a five-minute walk to their house from our apartment, and the parcel is still warm.

“And these...,” I announce, “are latkes.”

“Ah, you told me! Fried potatoes!” Harumi recalls. She is at the window between the kitchen and the dining room. She reaches across to us. “Here, here!”

I pass them through. As a matter of course she must arrange them properly on the stoneware dishes she’s stacked at the ready. Presentation is, after all, important for digestion.

“I think,” says Jiro, a twinkle in his eye. “I think,” he re-emphasizes, “that these latkes will go very nice with... shochu!”

“I think so too,” Richard agrees with enthusiasm.

(Note: At the Saeki’s house, everything goes well with *shochu*. It really, really does.)

We set up and light the candles, pass the plates and prepare to eat. Conversation turns to work, family, and the odd Google Image search for one word or another.

As the candles die down, I turn down a fourth helping from the *nabe* at the center of the table, then Richard says, “This is always my favorite part, watching the last lights.”

Harumi perks up immediately. “Oh, I’ll turn off the lamp, yes?”

Richard nods and half-bows. “Hai!”

“Ha—i!” she says with a smile, and hurries to a switch on the wall. She flicks it quickly and then sits down again—carefully, lest the moving air snuff the candles out.

For a few quiet minutes, we watch the small candles burning in their small, bronze cups, until they shrink against their blackened wicks to soft, liquid blue dewdrops.

“Last one,” Richard whispers at the end, as one bead of light lingers in the dark.

Jiro carefully puts his palms together and bows towards the lights. “Arigatou, Okami-sama...” he prays softly, genuinely, the joy of the moment shining like the lights in the dark.

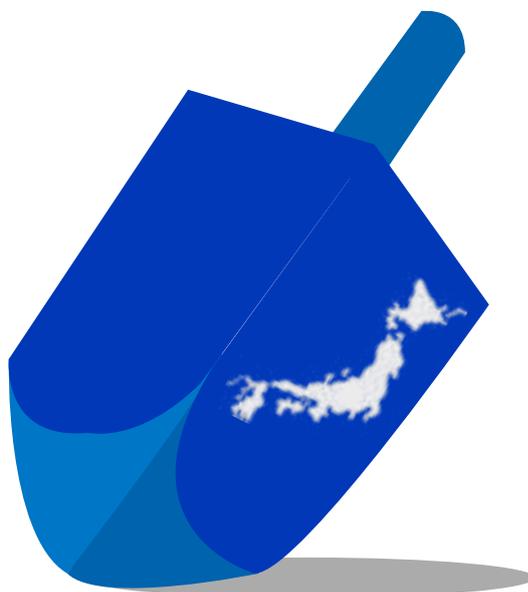
A single, simple moment passes. We all hold our breath. Then the final light winks out, leaving a quick twist of glowing white smoke.

Harumi shimmies out of her chair again to get the lights.

“Happy Hanukkah!” she says.

Jiro claps his hands again. “And Merry Christmas!” he adds.

“Happy Hanukkahmas,” says Richard, just to start another conversation over dessert.





Visual

Diaries

Art & Music Unplugged

MAY 21, 2017

KANAZAWA CITIZEN'S ART CENTER

PIT 5 ART WORKSHOP 1-1 DAIWAMACHI, KANAZAWA
ISHIKAWA PREFECTURE, 920-0046 - ARTVILLAGE.GR.JP

TIME

15:00 - 20:00

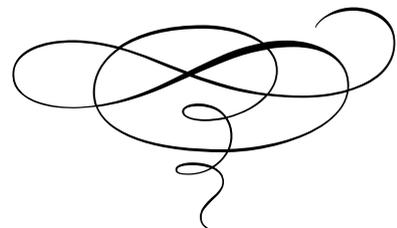
VIEWING OF ARTWORK

16:00 - 18:30

LIVE MUSIC & POETRY

Visual Diaries showcases the mosaic medium and artistic prowess of some of the most talented ALTs living in Ishikawa prefecture, Japan. The main objectives of this exhibition is to encourage cultural exchange through the arts whilst providing a creative outlet for foreigners living in Japan.

FREE EVENT





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CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

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

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

ARTICLES

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

SPOTLIGHT

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

COMMENTS

Let us know what you think. 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.



CONNECT WITH US

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

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