

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

NOVEMBER
2017

Art or obscenity? - Osaka police crack down on local tattoo artists

Tokyo Game Show - The best, the worst, the complete lowdown!

When the going gets rough, time to upgrade your skincare routine!

Most-missed foods from home - your responses!

Ballerina, Ballerino - Finding strength and peace through dance



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

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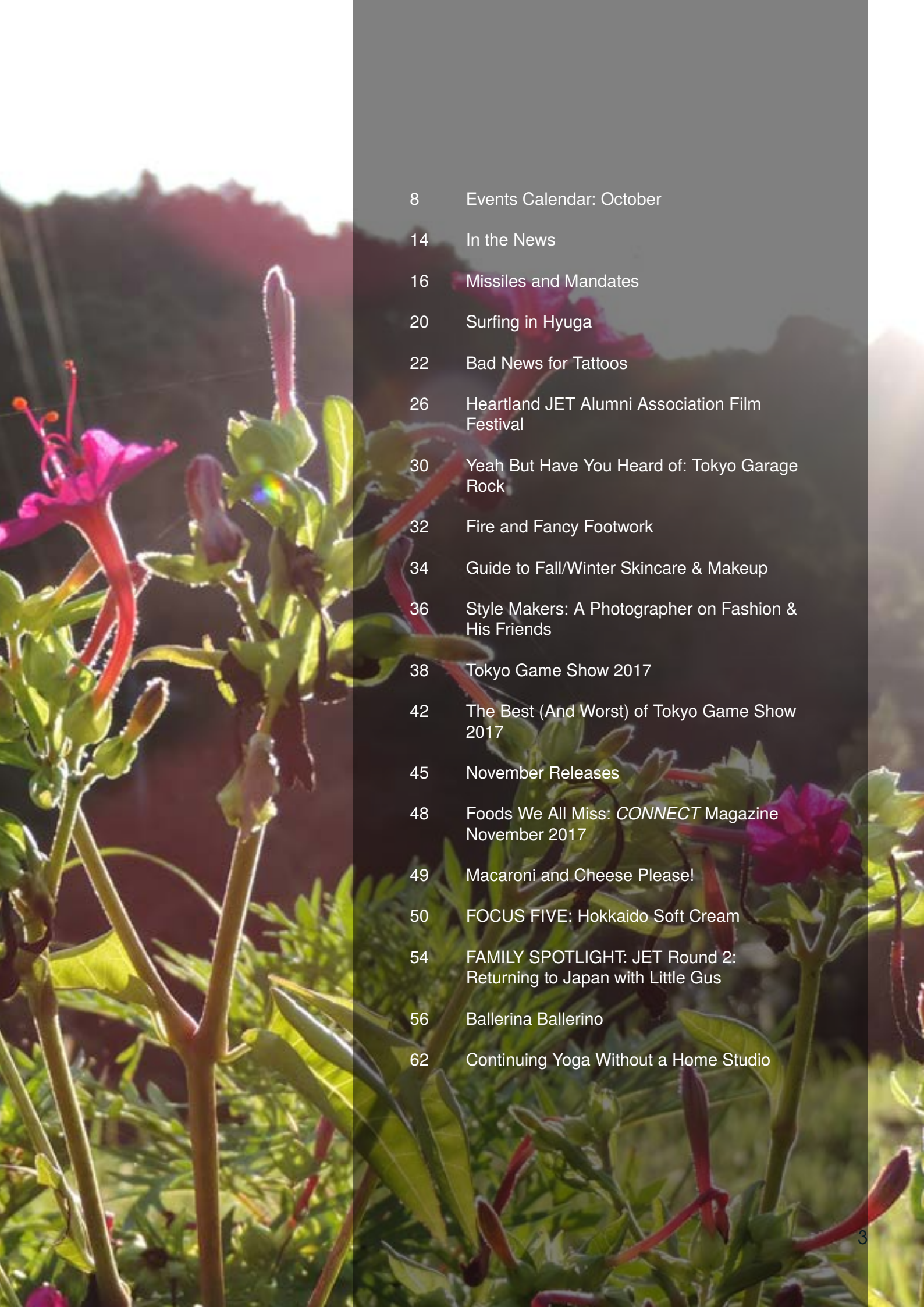
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It's finally November! I don't know about you, but October was really busy for me, and November is starting to fill up quite quickly as well in my planner. I hope with the busy term you find time to take care of yourself this season. Don't forget to carve out some time for yourself in this hectic and flu-y season.

Connect brings you more content this month to snuggle up with for those moments you just don't want to crawl out of your warm bed. Check out the new games for next season that are covered in our TGS special, reminisce on food from home in solidarity, or catch up on what other people are up to in other prefectures in Japan (did you know that Japan's holding its first surfing competition?!).

As always, we've got a little bit of news, a little bit of culture, and a little bit of everything else to entertain you for those times you get to sit and unwind (and maybe stretch out those tight lower back muscles from sitting at your desk for too long; don't worry, we've got an article on that too) or taking a break from NaNoWriMo.

No matter what you do, I hope you enjoy your time along with us! *Minna! Faitingu!*

Lilian Diep
Head Editor
3rd Year Toyama ALT

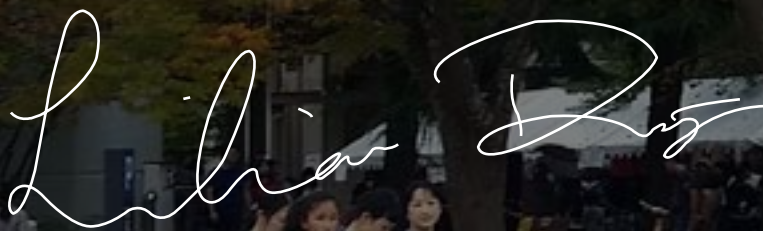


Photo: Jessica Craven



NEWS AND EVENTS

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Tresha Barrett

"I look for inspiration in the shadows of insanity..."

acidschizomunky.com

EVENTS EDITOR

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Bailey Jo Josie

"as the daughter of 8 fathers, i, too, feminism" -

[@runolgarun](https://twitter.com/runolgarun)

Photo: Duncan Cox



Events Calendar:

November

Bailey Jo Josie (Miyazaki)

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

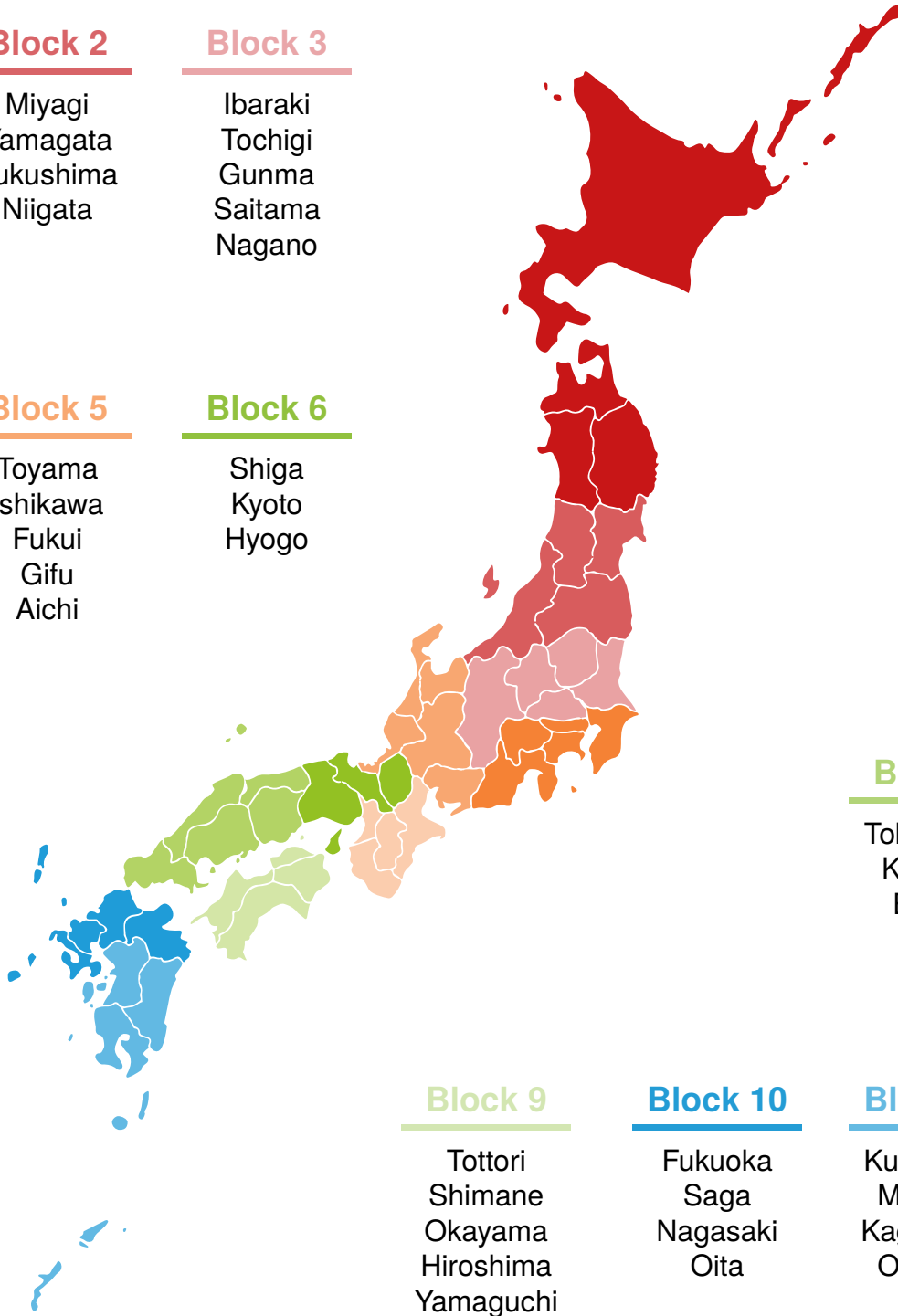
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

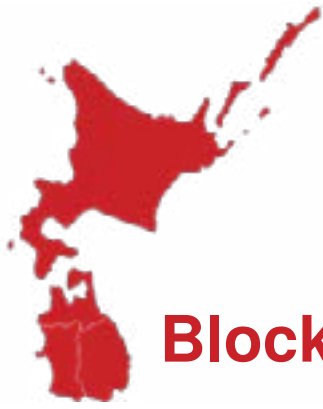
Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa





Block 1

Hirosaki Castle Autumn Festival 2017

20 October – 12 November
Hirosaki Castle, Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website](#)

Fall Fujiwara Festival

01 November – 03 November
Hiraizumi Town, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

Sapporo White Illumination

24 November - 14 March
Various Sites, Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

German Christmas Market

25 November - 24 December
Odori Park, Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 2

Light Up and Night Tour Bus

01 July – 30 November
Aizuwakamatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nanyo Chrysanthemum Festival

13 October – 12 November
Nanyo City Flower Park Special Event Space, Chuo Ward, Nanyo City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Matsushima Kayano Illuminations

28 October – 19 November
Matsushima-Kaigan Station Area, Matsushima Town, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Autumn Leaves Illumination

28 October – 26 November
Akasakayama Park, Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Oguni Hot Pot Stew Festival

05 November
Asmo Shopping Centre West Parking Lot, Oguni Town, Nishiokitama District, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 3

Karuizawa Momiji Festival

23 September – 05 November
Karuizawa Town, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kajika Bridge Red Leaves Illumination

24 October – 19 November
Ikaho Town, Shibukawa City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hannou Matsuri (Float Parade)

04 November - 05 November
Hanno City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

First Displaying of Kissyoten

Ends 30 November
Rinno-ji Temple, Nikko City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)





Block 4



Block 5

Grape Expo 2017

24 August – 12 November
Fuefuki City, Yamanashi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

The Joy of Sake 2017

01 November
TOC Building, West Gotanda District,
Shinagawa, Tokyo Prefecture
[Website](#)

Fuji Kawaguchi-ko Autumn Leaves Festival

01 November – 23 November
Lake Kawaguchi, Yamanashi Prefecture
[Website](#)

The Doraemon Exhibition Tokyo 2017

01 November – 08 January
Mori Arts Centre, Roppongi, Minato Ward, Tokyo Prefecture
[Website](#)

Daidogei World Cup

02 November – 05 November
Various Sites, Shizuoka City,
Shizuoka Prefecture
[Website](#)

Chigasaki Makana Hula Festival

03 November – 05 November
Chigasaki City Gymnasium,
Chigasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Cycle Mode International

03 November — 05 November
Makuhari Messe, Chiba Prefecture
[Website](#)

Asakusa Tori-no-ichi Fair

06 November, 18 November, 30 November
Asakusa Area, Tokyo Prefecture
[Website](#)

Inasa Puppet Play Festival

11 November — 12 November
Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shichiken Morning Market

20 March – 31 December
Ono City, Fukui Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nanto Chrysanthemum Festival

03 November – 12 November
Nanto Botanical Garden, Nanto City,
Toyama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Manmos Flea Market

18 November - 19 November
Nagoya International Exhibition Hall,
Minato Ward, Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hinkoko Matsuri (Puppet Play)

23 November
Oyatajinja Shrine, Mino City, Gifu Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nafune Gojinjo Drum

04 November, 11 November, 18 November, 25 November
Old Wajima Station Area, Kawai Town, Wajima City,, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website](#)



Block 6

Gion Odori (Traditional Dancing)

01 November - 10 November
Gion Hall, Higashiyama, Kyoto
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kobe Illuminage

01 November – 12 February
Kobe Fruit Flower Park, Hyogo,
Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Rakan Village Scarecrow Contest

11 November – 19 November
Hotel Rakan no Sato, Aioi City,
Hyogo Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hikone Dream Illustration

18 November – 03 December
rakurakuen Garden, Hikone City,
Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 7

Hase-dera Momiji Festival

14 October – 03 December
Hase-dera Temple, Sakurai City,
Nara Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Osaka Hikari-Renaissance

12 November – 31 December
Nakanoshima & Midousuji, Osaka
City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website](#)

German Christmas Market

17 November - 25 December
Umeda, Osaka City, Osaka
Prefecture

[Website](#)

Suzuka Balloon Festival

24 November - 26 November
Suzuka Riverside, Suzuka City, Mie
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 8

Awa Odori - Autumn 2017

03 November – 05 November
Asty Tokushima, Tokushima City,
Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Autumn Tobe-Yaki Ware Festival

04 November – 05 November
Near the Tobeyaki Traditional
Industrial Hall, Tobe Town, Iyo
District, Ehime Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tobe Tokaido Porcelain Road Festival

4 November – 5 November
Chuo Public Hall, Culture Center,
Tobeyaki Traditional Industrial Hall,
Tobe Town, Iyo District, Ehime
Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tokushima Yokai Festival

12 November
Various Sites, Miyoshi City,
Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 9

2017 Tottori Hanakairo Salvia Festival

16 September – 05 November
Hanakairo Flower Park, Nambu Town, Saihaku District, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Becchar Matsuri

01 November - 03 November
Ichinomiya Shrine, Onomichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ube Matsuri (Float Parade)

04 November - 05 November
Various Sites, Ube City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Mihara Ukishiro Matsuri

04 November - 05 November
Mihara Station Area, Mihara City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Okayama Handmade Festa

17 November – 19 November
Convex Okayama, Kita Ward, Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Photos:
Duncan Cox
Shantel Dickerson
Illaura Rossiter
Vi Phan



Block 10

East Kyushu Ise-Ebi Festival

02 September – 30 November
Select Restaurants in Saiki City, Oita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hakushu-sai (Boat Parade)

01 November - 03 November
Yanagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Coloured Leaves Viewing

1 November - 4 December
Mt.Mifune, Takeo City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kingdom of Light Illuminations

03 November 2017 - 06 May 2018
Huis Ten Bosch, Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Usuki Takeyoi (Bamboo Lantern Display)

04 November - 05 November
Usuki City, Oita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

November Grand Sumo Tournament

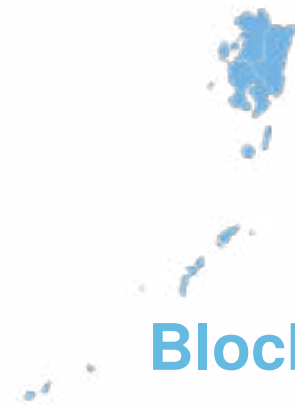
12 November - 26 November
Fukuoka Convention Center, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Chikuraku Matsuri

17 November – 19 November
Taketa City, Oita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 11

East Kyushu Ise-Ebi Festival

02 September – 30 November
Select restaurants in Nobeoka City, Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Minamata Rose Festa

14 October – 05 November
Minamata City, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ohara-Matsuri Festival (Parade & Singing)

02 November - 03 November
Various Sites, Kagoshima City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tour De Okinawa

11 November - 12 November
Nago City, Okinawa Island

[Website](#)







In The News

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)

23 September

With a rise in the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan, geishas are beginning to broaden their communication skills by learning English.

An English seminar for geishas was held at a restaurant in the geisha district of Asakusa in Tokyo. This seminar was a platform for the geishas to learn such English skills as explaining traditional Japanese entertainment culture, and explaining the rules of a traditional game in geisha entertainment. They also practiced how to say “thank you for visiting us,” and take drink orders.

One of the eight local entertainers who was in attendance at the seminar stated that she took part in the workshop because she wanted to be able to communicate with foreign guests without the use of a translator.

This year has seen a record number of foreign tourists to Japan - with an estimated 20 million visitors by mid-September. Furthermore, many of these travellers wish to experience traditional geisha entertainment.

The restaurant that held the seminar said that last year they welcomed about 800 foreign patrons, which was more than twice the amount of people who visited three years ago.

Source:

<http://bit.ly/2fFX5e1>

Photo:
Shantel Dickerson

2 October

A 41-year-old Tokyo resident attempted to call on the powers of the dark arts to curse the unsuspecting school children of a nearby elementary school.

Takeshi Inaba made a straw doll and hung it on a pedestrian bridge where the students would frequently traverse. The menacing doll, which was made of pine needles, had a note attached to it which read, "To all you damn elementary school kids, jump off and die."

Japanese straw dolls "*wara ningyo*" are quite similar to voodoo dolls, and are used for making wishes to either harm or kill others. So, it's safe to say that if the presence of the cursed doll wasn't enough, the note pretty much cemented the fact that Inaba was really unhappy with the students of Edogawa Elementary School.

As it happens, Inaba, an Edogawa Ward resident who lives near the school, has reportedly sent over 30 letters to parents and staff complaining that the students were too noisy and they should better their ability to control them. He has also been suspected as the perpetrator of several threatening graffiti scrawled on a nearby park and railway station.

Inaba has since confessed to officers at the Komatsugawa Police Station that he was the one who inflicted the curse, and was quoted saying, "I did it after becoming irritated by the annoying voices of the children."

Inaba became a person of interest after security camera footage near the bridge was examined. He is now facing charges of criminal intimidation.

Source:

<http://bit.ly/2xUX7ck>

<http://bit.ly/2ykpF03>

6 October

According to the National Police Agency, since 2017, the number of marijuana-related crimes has increased. It was reported that compared to last year's numbers, these crimes have risen by nearly 20 percent over the first half of the year.

From January to June, 1,390 persons were arrested, which is an 18.9 percent increase during the same period last year.

The NPA also states that many of the purchases were done through the internet or dealings at clubs - with persons in their 20s accounting for the largest arrests (557) and persons in their 30s a close second at 457. Those who were under 20 surged by 60 percent to 156, and first-time offenders accounted for over 70 percent of the individuals arrested.

Police have since seized 50.4 kilograms of marijuana in its dried form, 20.2 as resin, and 14,111 plants.

Source:

<http://bit.ly/2yfyUQ9>

Missiles and Mandates

How North Korean Aggression May Be the Key to Abe's Re-election

Ben Baer (Osaka)

Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP, has held nearly unbroken power since 1955. The LDP formed as the result of a merger between Japan's two major post-war conservative parties: The Liberal Party and the Japan Democratic Party. Despite their titles, all three parties have traditionally been renowned for staunch conservatism, hawkish foreign policy, and nationalist ideals.

The LDP, now the country's only major conservative party, has shown vocal support in recent months for amending Japan's post-war constitution. Among proposed changes is a controversial overhaul to Article 9. This article stipulates that "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."

The proposed amendment seeks to reinterpret this clause.

Should a threat present itself to Japan or its allies, the country must be ready to take offensive action, claims LDP

leader and current Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe.

Kim Jong Un's increasingly aggressive behavior has persuaded Prime Minister Abe to call for a dissolution of the Lower House of the Diet in order to hold a snap election on October 22. Originally slated for December 2018, the next general election of the Lower House of the Diet has been pushed forward over a year ahead of schedule.

Abe has stated the reason for the dissolution and subsequent election is to overcome a "national crisis" amidst threats from North Korea. (1)

Abe's steadily increasing approval rate follows his admonishment of Kim Jong Un's actions in September. "North Korea's reckless action of launching a missile that passed over Japan is an unprecedented, serious and grave threat," reported the prime minister late in August. (2)

Abe's call for a general election is considered all but guaranteed to net

him the two-thirds combined Upper and Lower House vote necessary to secure his position as prime minister for one more term. This would make Abe the longest-serving prime minister in Japan's post-war history.

However, this strategy may not be foolproof; the prime minister has been dogged by bad press since earlier this year.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Earlier this March, First Lady, Akie Abe, abdicated her role as honorary principal of an Osaka elementary school amidst criticism that the institution encouraged *jingoism* and embraced a nationalistic curriculum.

The school, being built by the *Moritomo Gakuen* group, ultimately abandoned plans to complete construction altogether after it was revealed that the organization purchased its plot of land from the federal government at a severely discounted price — about one-seventh its estimated value. (3)

Spokesmen on behalf of Prime Minister Abe's party stated that

the severe discount was unrelated to the school's proposed curriculum or his wife's generous donation of one million yen, but rather due to the levels of industrial waste found on the building site.

Abe's approval ratings slipped 10 percent following media coverage of the situation.

Prime Minister Abe's approval ratings continued to weaken into mid-year as further allegations of corruption surfaced.

In July, the prime minister and his aides were accused of fudging protocol to help *Kake Gakuen* gain approval for construction of a new

veterinary college in Imabari, Ehime Prefecture. Several other educational institutions had been vying for the privilege of opening Japan's first new veterinary college in fifty years during this time. These universities claim that proper protocol was not followed in assessing *Kake Gakuen's* level of preparedness before it was awarded funding by the government. (4)

The director of *Kake Gakuen* is Kotaro Kake, a close friend of Prime Minister Abe.

Getting a Handle on Scandal

By holding an early election, claims Abe, the nation can be sure that those in power truly have the country's best interests in mind despite looming economic and political uncertainty.

"I'll demonstrate strong leadership and stand at the forefront to face a national crisis," Abe told reporters this September. (1)

A reshuffling of the cabinet is not entirely unheard of in situations like these.

With the lowest approval rating since his inauguration in 2012, Prime Minister Abe's fortunes have quickly turned around. Following the August 28 missile test over Hokkaido, a newly-energized Abe had some strong words for North Korea which resulted in a sharp increase in approval to 50 percent.

Prime Minister Abe said the government, "was prepared to take all the measures to protect people's lives," following the incident on the 28th. "We have lodged a firm protest to North Korea. We have requested an urgent meeting of the U.N. Security Council," he added. (2)

"It is largely thanks to North Korea that Abe is doing so well at the moment," (5) says Chuo University Professor, Steven Reed.

However, opponents argue that this election's true aim is to capitalize on the LDP's weak and disorganized opposition.

Tokyoites First

Although the LDP has had majority representation in the Diet for half a century, the status quo isn't unshakable. Current Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike announced on September 25 that her Tokyo-based political party, Tokyoites First, may consider running for Diet representation on October 22.

Although not yet a nationally recognized group, Tokyoites First has been garnering media attention for a landslide victory in the Tokyo Assembly this July. Koike's group won 49 of the 127 Tokyo assembly seats, while the LDP secured only 23 seats. This is the fewest seats the LDP has ever held in Tokyo. With such a major loss in the nation's capital, a senior LDP

lawmaker reported that, "the results underscored... not many Tokyo residents thought the LDP was modest and sincere." (6)

The runaway success of Tokyoites First in the Tokyo assembly could be an early warning sign of wavering public support for the LDP. Although Ms. Koike has not announced any plans to officially oppose the LDP in the near future, her party has seen strong encouragement from within Tokyo. Additionally, minor opposition parties to the LDP, such as the Democratic Party, have also expressed interest in abandoning their own parties in favor of joining Koike's. This could bolster what many see as the only potential opposition to Prime Minister Abe's Liberal Democratic Party. (6)

Threats from North Korea, internal scandals, and an overall disorganized stable of players within the Diet could be the perfect storm for Abe's upcoming snap election. With little time to prepare for *any* election, let alone one called a year in advance, Abe's opponents may not have the resources or manpower to pull off a surprise upset.

With October 22 quickly approaching, it looks as though Prime Minister Abe is on track to reclaim the Diet for another three years. However, if the LDP follows its current course, some new and intriguing front page material might be right around the corner.



Sources:

1. <http://cnb.cx/2ga7YFS>
2. <http://nyti.ms/2yo4bz8>
3. <http://bbc.in/2klqfo6>
4. <http://bit.ly/2y0e3OR>
5. <http://bit.ly/2g9lj16>
6. <http://lat.ms/2fLJPod>

Photo1 Source:

Center for Strategic and International Studies

Photo2:

Micah Briguera

Ben is a fourth year ALT from the United States. When he's not wiping chalk stains off his pants, he can be found loitering outside of convenience stores, watching Star Trek with a bowl of cereal, or trying to find a kebab tent at the local matsuri. He can be contacted at fukuiben89@gmail.com.




Surfing in Hyuga:

forty-one
countries come
to Kyushu

Tahirah Newkirk (Miyazaki), Bailey Jo Josie (Miyazaki)





For the opening ceremony, I interpreted instructions for the surfers from Sweden, Switzerland, the US, and Uruguay.

As I guided them through the parade, I was struck by how many different flags were waving in this part of Japan that does not see as much international activity as the bigger cities like Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka.

“The event was part of a bid by Hyuga to host the U.S. surfing team’s pre-Olympic training camp. Thanks to these ALTs’ help in this event, it appears likely that the U.S. surfing team may indeed come to Hyuga to train,” said Clark.

My favorite part of the opening ceremony was when each surfing delegation poured sand from their respective countries into a big tank. It’s so important to emphasize that no matter what differences we may have culturally, there are so many things that all of us have in common as humans.

I was really excited to see my students appreciating the event, but I was disappointed that none of them could name a new country when I asked them about it the following Monday.

I hope that I can successfully convey that to my students during my time as part of the JET Programme. I hope that Hyuga gets the chance to host even more big international events like this one. This is the kind of stuff I live for, and it only further cements in my mind that I need to be working at some kind of international event after my time on the JET Program.

For more information, [click here!](#)

Tahirah is a first year JET who is having a blast as an ALT in sunny Miyazaki. Nothing makes Tahirah happier than quality time with friends, logic puzzles, and awful rom coms.

Photos:
Tahirah Newkirk

As a former Model UN student, I thrive at events where people come from all over the world for a common purpose. When I heard that my semi-inaka city, Hyuga, was hosting the Vissla International Surfing Association (ISA) Junior Surfing Championship, I was chomping at the bit to volunteer. I didn’t even have to seek out where to sign up because an official from the town hall came to my school, and my vice principal basically volunteered me to help with interpreting.


The Vissla ISA Junior Surfing Championship is one of the biggest surfing competitions in the world and, according to Hyuga’s CIR Cameron Clark, this year’s competition set a new participation record. With an opening ceremony on September 23, and the competition running from September 24 to October 1, 306 athletes from 41 countries surfed (up two countries from the previous year’s contestants). It was the first time the championship had ever been held in Asia, a fitting honor for Hyuga and its infamous waves.



BAD NEWS FOR TATTOOS

An Osaka Court
Ruling Threatens
the Future of Ink in
Japan

Ben Baer (Osaka)



Traditional Japanese tattoos date back to the 18th century, where tradesmen, firefighters, fishermen, and merchants would decorate their bodies with elaborate and colorful images related to their craft. This traditional art form of stick-and-poke, or *irezumi* tattooing, was eventually banned during the Meiji period (1868-1912). After opening up her borders to the West, Japan's reformed government sought to ban tattooing on the grounds that it appeared barbaric. The ban was lifted in 1948, but the popularity of tattoos never fully recovered and is now facing prohibition yet again. (1)

COVER YOURSELF UP

Despite becoming increasingly popular with younger generations, tattoos remain taboo. Communal bathhouses, gyms, pools, and even some beaches often decorate the premises with cute and colorful reminders that tattoos are not to be displayed. As any inked individual can attest, the chances of being ejected or outright banned from these facilities are fairly high in certain parts of the country.

While, in much of the West, tattoos have seen a recent explosion in popularity and acceptance, progress in Japan has not moved as quickly. Whether it's a full-body piece stretching from head

to toe or an inconspicuous flower on the collarbone, public facilities often don't see a difference.

Ink in Japan, especially *irezumi*, is largely associated with *yakuza* (gang members).

Ironically, it is because of this association with organized crime that much of Japan's criminal element now shy away from getting tattoos altogether. Given the country's turbulent history with the art form and (perhaps outdated) associations with organized crime, the near future may once again see tattooing outlawed in the land of the rising sun.

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

An Osaka Municipal District Court has put Japan's approximately 3,000 practicing tattoo artists in jeopardy, as they may soon be required to hold medical licenses in order to continue operating. Medical licenses are, of course, only awarded to those who have completed medical school.

Osaka City lawyers are leaning on Japan's 1948 Medical Practitioners' Act to build their case. Article 17 of

the Act states, "No person except a medical practitioner shall engage in medical practice." Osaka court's ruling hinges on the opinion that injecting ink into human skin is one such practice, although this interpretation is not codified anywhere in law — for the time being. (2)

At the center of this dispute is 29 year-old tattoo artist, Taiki Masuda.

PAY UP OR GET OUT

Masuda, like most tattoo artists, is not a doctor.

The Suita-based tattooist was the recipient of an unwelcome house call by prefectural police in 2015. Police alleged that Masuda purchased disinfectants and sterilization equipment from a Nagoya supplier over the internet — which is illegal in Japan. According to Japanese law, commercial sterilization supplies must be purchased face-to-face with a verbal explanation of their use by the supplier. (3)

This visit to Masuda's shop led police to notice that their suspect was,

unfortunately, not a licensed medical practitioner.

Masuda faced two choices: pay the fine or fight the charges. Although the penalty for failing to comply with Japan's antiquated Medical Practitioners' Law is only ¥300,000, or roughly USD \$2,666, Masuda refused to pony up based on principal.

"It's not a huge amount, to be honest," says Masuda. "But I wondered if it's

something I should settle by money. If I admit to the charge, I will no longer be able to see my clients, who have said they are happy with my tattoos. I want what I do for a living to be seen as a respectable profession." (3)

Following his refusal to pay up, Masuda filed to take Osaka Police to court in late 2015, claiming his rights had been violated and no laws broken. In April 2017, his case was finally heard.

SAVE TATTOOING

To support his cause, Masuda and like-minded individuals created Save Tattooing. His advocacy group promotes proper regulation of tattooing in Japan to bring the industry out of the shadows and into legitimacy. Tattoo artists in Japan currently operate in a legal grey area. The advocacy group has already seen success in garnering support, collecting over 23,000 signatures on its petition for proper tattoo regulation. This is more than twice the number of signatures required for consideration by the Diet. (4)



WHAT'S THE VERDICT?

Despite Masuda and his colleagues' efforts, Japan's tattoo industry remains at risk.

Takeshi Mikami, a lawyer for Save Tattooing, explained before Masuda's April trial that, "if the court decides that tattooing requires a medical license, then none of the tattooists will be able to carry on tattooing... it will decide whether the art of tattooing can continue in Japan." (5)

On September 27, Osaka District Court found Masuda guilty of violating the Medical Practitioners' Act. Masuda's lawyers appealed the decision to a higher court that same day.

Presiding judge Takaki Nagase did, however, lower Masuda's fine from ¥300,000 to ¥150,000.

"I do not accept this ruling. I'm practicing art, and tattooing is a part of traditional Japanese culture," states Masuda. (6)

BRAIN DRAIN

Should Masuda's appeal be denied, law enforcement will have precedent to clamp down on all tattoo artists operating in Japan. Masuda and his team continue to raise awareness about the situation, but many Japanese artists have already started packing up their ink and looking for work elsewhere.

American expatriate and Osaka tattoo artist, Horii Benny, explains, "There's been a talent drain out of Japan. All

of the good tattooers are leaving for Europe — they can't afford to, and don't want to deal with this hassle. Why stay here when you're treated like dirt?" (7)

If the ruling against Masuda stands, this problem will only become worse.

"It's like abortion, right? When it's illegal, it's driven to the back alleys," says Benny. (7)

While Masuda's appeal is being reviewed, Osaka tattooists now work cautiously and, for the time being, illegally.

Other prefectures may follow Osaka's example and begin to tighten their own grip on the industry. Conversely, with the Tokyo Olympics right around the corner in 2020, an influx of inked visitors and athletes may bring increased pressure to relax these regulations.

With Osaka's entire inking industry on the chopping block, now may be the best time to get that new tattoo you've wanted before it's too late.


Sources:

1. <http://bit.ly/2kvdQOj>
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Photo Sources:

Osaka artist Horii Benny performing touch-up work on a customer
Taiki Masuda promoting Save Tattooing outside Osaka Castle

Ben is a fourth year ALT from the United States. When he's not wiping chalk stains off his pants, he can be found loitering outside of convenience stores, watching Star Trek with a bowl of cereal, or trying to find a kebab tent at the local matsuri. He can be contacted at Fukuiben89@gmail.com.



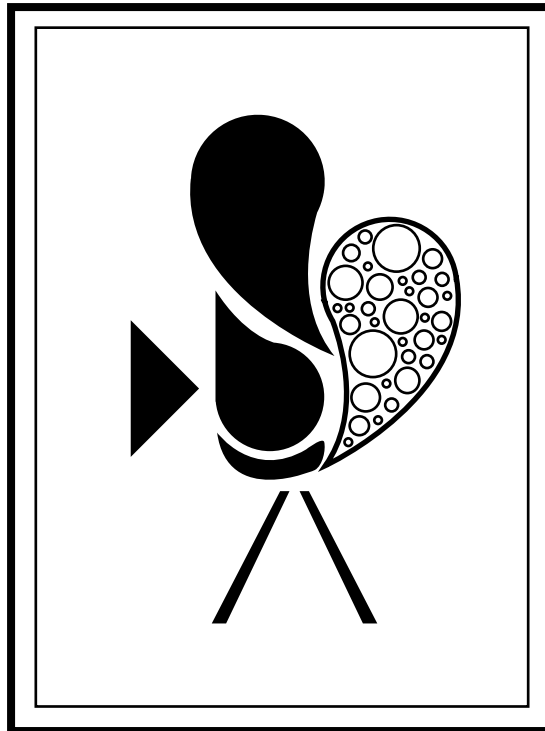
HEARTLAND
JET ALUMNI
ASSOCIATION
FILM FESTIVAL

Dustin Henrich

On March 11, 2011, the Northern part of Japan suffered a disaster that would leave many affected for years to come — an earthquake and tsunami. One American family felt the pain just as deeply when they found out that their daughter, Taylor Anderson, an ALT in the coastal city of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, was the first confirmed American casualty.

Taylor’s family knew how much she loved and cared for her students, so they created a foundation in her name called the “Taylor Anderson Memorial Fund.” The fund helps students, schools, and families in the Ishinomaki area. The family travelled widely, promoting the film “Live Your Dream: The Taylor Anderson Story” to help raise awareness and money.

JET Alumni from all over the world have helped garner support, while in some years Global Giving has matched the figures collected by alumni. The Heartland JET Alumni Association came up with the idea to play Japanese movies at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI), where some of the alumni currently teach. Some years there has been a theme, and others the billing has been split between two anime and two live-action movies. The idea is twofold: to promote Japanese culture in our area, and to raise funds for the Taylor Anderson Memorial Fund.



Over the years, our chapter has seen such growth that it has expanded from KCAI to a small theater at the Nelson Atkins Art Museum. From that point on, we achieved varying success; some films would sell out and others weren’t as popular. Between the financial support from KCAI and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), we were able to move to the Kansas City Alamo

Drafthouse — a stylish cinema theater chain that also serves food to moviegoers.

We’ve received feedback on what movies people liked, didn’t like and would like to see, to the point where it feels like we’ve created a community. Some people tell us that they’ve been coming to the film festival ever since it started and look forward to it every year. Students at KCAI contribute by creating movie posters as portfolio pieces and the funds raised are also given to the memorial fund. We’ve worked with the same professors from KCAI for so long that it feels like a little family

when our two organizations get together to plan for the next film festival.

With the planning committee in full swing for the 2018 KCAI Film Festival, we’re looking at our goals for the future. Last year we sold out two of the anime movies and nearly filled the last two. We’re always looking to stay flexible and raise the bar in support of our overall goal - promoting Japanese culture in our community and keeping Taylor Anderson’s bridge to Japan alive.

Dustin Henrich is a former ALT originally placed in Nose-cho, Osaka and currently lives in Kansas City, Missouri in the United States. He stays involved with JET as president of the Heartland JET Alumni Association, which covers Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Dustin describes here just one way the Heartland JET Alumni Association maintains its connections to Japan.

ARTS AND CULTURE

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Word for the season: kotatsumuri, hiding under your kotatsu so that you look like a snail; a pun on kotatsu and katatsumuri, or snail; AKA, me.

FASHION EDITOR

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Abby Ryder-Huth

Photo: Shantel Dickerson



**Yeah But Have
You Heard Of:**



B. B. Clarke (Tokyo)

Tokyo has one of the best rock and roll scenes on the planet. I mean, I've never lived anywhere but here and the sticks back in the States, but going to shows as often as I go, I get to meet a lot of touring foreign bands--especially those of the downunder persuasion--who almost invariably go on about how great the scene is in Tokyo. Yeah, the tickets are jacked, the beers are pricey, and the venues smokey, but this is the only place you'll get a slimey stand-up bass player, down to his birthday suit, lathered in shampoo that he brought from home, sliding around on the dance floor singing about the aliens who've invaded his noodle (see: Ed Woods).

In his tome on '90s gunk punk, New Bomb Turks frontman Eric Davidson says "Japan is where rock and roll goes to get jumper cables attached to its nipples," and I think the reasoning behind this can be linked to the cultural tendency in Japan where you see a lot of outrageous fashion but relatively cookie-cutter interior design and architecture, especially in terms of residences. Anybody who's lived here can tell you Japanese houses can be kind of boring in terms of aesthetic,

especially those built recently. I think that, for whatever reason this happens to be the prevailing trend, that people try to compensate for it by dressing anywhere from a little gaudy to outright ostentatious. The same goes for music over here, especially rock and roll: mainstream Japanese music is so over-produced, shallow, and inoffensive that there are people out there, craving stimulation, who want something utterly heinous to provide a fast, frenetic jolt that'll bust 'em out of the nine-to-five induced coma.

The heterotopia that is the dingy Tokyo rock club is a sanctuary where people can go bananas away from the prying eyes of society, and for that reason, I very rarely find myself feeling like I got gypped on the ticket. If you find yourself in or heading to the Eastern capital, check out Tokyo Gig Guide for listing on all sorts of different genres, but if you're like me and love mid-century blues, garage, soul, or punk, try checking out UFO Club in Shin-Koenji, Penguin House in Koenji proper, Basement Bar and Three in Shimokitazawa, or Club Heavysick in Hatagaya for an ass-shakin' good time.

**Photo by The Nigmatic
on Unsplash**

B.B. Clarke is an American-born translator, interpreter, and writer. Based in Tokyo, he originally moved over to study literature, but ended up becoming a fake priest and writing a movie about Japanese rock and roll.

FIRE AND FANCY FOOTWORK

Laura Pollacco (Tokyo)



Photo by Ardian Lumi on Unsplash

After finishing work, I run back home to throw a pair of heels in my bag, change into something a bit looser and then head straight off again to catch the train from Zengyo, Kamakura to Roppongi, Tokyo. I am sitting on the train for over an hour, tired, bleary eyed after a rather full on week, so I can get to Hinokicho park to join in a pop-up salsa, kizomba and bachata class. The name of the group is Sukakizz. It was born in Yokosuka, Kanagawa, but these types of gatherings have also been held in Shibuya, Yokohama and other hotspots where people of all nationalities get together to dance and drink.

Salsa is an evolving dance, believed to have started in Cuba. It adopted elements of dance from the African rumba as well as from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Colombia before heading to New York where the name 'salsa' was coined. Firey and passionate salsa is danced throughout Hispanic communities, and seems to be growing popular in Japan with more teachers and salsa clubs popping up in places like Roppongi.

My first encounter with salsa was after a night out in Chinatown, Yokohama. Whilst walking back with a few other JETs I saw some beautiful lights down by the waterfront and went to take some pictures. What I found instead was a group of individuals dancing to latin music. Now, I am one of those people that hears music and my hips just start going, so there I was, standing to the side of the group watching and somewhat prancing around — after doing various forms of dancing most of my life I figure I couldn't have looked that stupid; alas I shall not know.

They caught sight of me, smiled and called over to me to join in, coming over and physically pulling me into the group. I asked them what they are doing and they said that they join together, people from all over the world, to dance salsa, bachata and kizomba. I laughed as they attempted to teach me the steps for kizomba

and tried to push past the awkward fact that it is an exceptionally intimate dance requiring a lot of body contact with someone I had only just met.

After dancing and engaging with the members for some time I enquired as to the price of this class; "it's free," they told me! "Just bring some drinks and some snacks and join in." I ended up dancing the night away (or more precisely till 10:30 when I have to leave to catch the train back), thinking how amazing it is to have just wandered into such a lively and friendly group of people when I originally just went for some Chinese food!

So now, having arrived in Hinokicho park, I await the arrival of the rest of the group hoping to God I got the address right. The park at night is lovely and, surrounded by trees and tall buildings ablaze with light, I felt happy at the fact the group moves around so much, it meant I got to see new places as well. Eventually people started arriving and the organiser, Jiada Shodo, a Chinese national from Shanghai, brought along a large speaker and disco lights as well as more snacks and booze.

Jiada is the one who sets up the events on Meetup and Facebook and has encouraged me to join in, messaging me personally to let me know of the event. After an injury involving a motorbike left him unable to play basketball, Jiada turned to kizomba saying, "so many guys can dance salsa and bachata well. But last year, there were few people who could dance kizomba. So my friend told me it was a chance to be a kizomba star! then I jumped into the kizomba latin dance world and never can get out. I dance kizomba 3 days a week now, I've been dancing kizomba for 1 year and a half since March."

He goes on to add that "[we] don't only dance but chill out,

spending our youthful days with good wine and cheese and dance everywhere, anywhere." Though he did not start the group, his energy and enthusiasm for dance is pulling people together. He rallies the troops and they are a diverse bunch.

Shashank, a researcher from Mumbai, India, has been in Japan for 3 years and has been dancing for roughly a year and a half after being introduced to it by a friend. "They took me to Yoyogi park, and there were so many people. I was so surprised to see like almost 100 people dancing together, exchanging food, beer and wine and I thought 'oh wow, this is a great group.' It's so global and all the Japanese members speak English so well, so for me it was great."

Victoria, an English Teacher from Australia, found that after moving to Tokyo from Nagano Prefecture she needed to make some new friends. "The reason I started to dance was because I felt really lonely. Dancing became an outlet for me to meet new people and enjoy myself."

Many gaijin often face this dilemma: moving to a new country and not knowing anyone. Lots of JETs will have faced similar issues, myself included. This group is a way for so many to reach out, connect and have fun.

Though some seem to think it was a little too much fun: a woman has approached us to shout at us for the music and 'suggestive dancing.' Park security had already been fine with the music being played and many onlookers seemed fascinated at least by what we were doing. After she has moved on we carry on in full swing and I get to meet so many people as more keep arriving every few minutes. I even find an ex-JET from Kanagawa prefecture is a member.

Many believe the origin of the name 'salsa' is that, like the sauce, it has heat and spice and is made up of many different ingredients. I agree. Even though I have yet to meet anyone in this group hailing from the countries salsa originated from, it is such a mix of people. As well as Victoria and Shashank there are members from Sri Lanka, China, Russia, UK and America and those are just the ones I can remember from the top of my head. Although there are a few Japanese nationals in attendance I found that latin dance has become more popular amongst the foreign nationals living here.

At the end of the night I am exhausted, a little tipsy (okay, a lot tipsy) and I am having to leg it to catch the final train home or face being stuck in Tokyo overnight with no sleeping plan. Even though I was tired and sleepy before coming out tonight I find myself feeling glad that I did. It was worth it. Meeting new friends whilst learning something new, all with a bit of booze added to the mix, is an excellent way to integrate oneself into a new community. Salsa, kizomba and bachata are exciting, exuberant dances that force you to engage directly with your partner. It pushes you out of your comfort zone into something fun. I will continue to join in with this group and who knows, you may catch me shaking it up on the dancefloor of one of the many salsa bars in Tokyo in the near future. At that point I hope to return the favour this group did for me and pull you in to join us, dancing the night away.

Laura is a 1st Year JET based in Kanagawa Prefecture. She enjoys martial arts, dancing, photography, singing and drama. She assists not only at schools but at seminars for English teachers from around the prefecture, giving advice on how to make English classes fun and engaging for students. She recently made around 80 teachers dance like penguins in a confidence building exercise.

Guide to Fall/Winter Skincare & Makeup

Idit Greenberg

Winter is coming, and the Japanese fall and winter are not easy on our skin. The weather during fall is fickle, and the flu or a common cold can quickly turn our complexions dull and dry. The windy fall weather doesn't only dry our lips and eyes, but also blows pollution onto our faces. Yet, if you ask me, the biggest trauma my complexion ever faced (no pun intended) was moving from my sunny, humid home town – to the dry dead of winter here in Tokyo. Here are some easy tips and recommended products to help you take care of your skin.

oil
up!

For a good few months after I came to Tokyo during a cold January, I struggled with a new phenomenon on my face: tiny little blemishes all over my forehead, and the occasional zit here and there. I used scrubs, soaps, pore stickers, and even performed extractions on my own (ill advised). But nothing helped! Eventually I realized my skin was overcompensating for the dryness, producing more and more oils that would later become sebum.

Applying oil on the skin got some bad rap over the years for causing acne and blemishes. However, it's only partially true that oil is to blame. Some oils have large molecules (such as coconut or olive oil) which

do not absorb into the skin. Instead, those oils sit on top of the skin and may indeed clog pores and cause acne. Other types of oils, such as rosehip, marula or jojoba oil are very similar in composition to the oils your body naturally produces. Applying them on your face at night will help balance your skin, and actually may help prevent acne.

One of my personal favorite oils to use is Drunk Elephant Virgin Marula Luxury Facial Oil ([available to order from Sephora](#)) or Kiehl's Midnight Recovery Concentrate. But you could also simply order a bottle of pure jojoba or rosehip oil from an online natural store like [iHerb Japan](#).



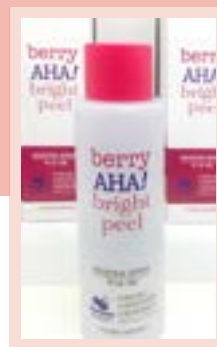
This is something you might already be doing! Winter in Japan is so dry, it's sometimes hard to breathe. Unlike our skin, the feeling of dryness in our mouth is instant. Sleeping with the humidifier on cannot only battle that, but also keep the skin all over your body from getting parched.

humidify

acids are your friend

“Acid”-- another scary word when it comes to our skin. But as a matter fact, most store-bought face washes these days contain some sort of acid at a low percentage, usually salicylic acid to dissolve skin debris. Other commonly used acids are glycolic acid, which brings sebaceous filament to the surface of the skin and dissolves it, and hyaluronic acid, which is not used for cleansing, but for hydrating and plumping. Introducing acid-based cleansers to your routine, even if done only weekly, can help wash away filth and pollution, as well as provide an anti-aging effect. Please note that cleansing acids can make your skin more sensitive to UV. So even though it's winter, be very meticulous about using sunscreen.

One of my favorite acid cleansers is the GENIUS Ultimate Anti-Aging Bi-Phase Peel by Algenist, which is combined with microalgae oil. You can find a more affordable alternative at Etude House with the Berry AHA! Bright Peel Boosting Serum.



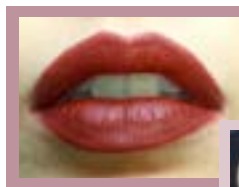
The 2017 fall/ winter collections are already out for the major fashion retailers, and they have the 70's written all over them. Of course the makeup community is not too late to follow. In the eye department, big “Twiggy” lashes and bold cat liner are very popular now. As an accompaniment, try this look out with a simple, single-shade matte shadow , or even on a bare lid. The hot colors of the season are mustard, teal, brown and baby pink. MAC, as always, is on point with their new 6 shade Pro Eye Palettes, bringing matte shadows in the season's hottest colors.

'Tis the season.... for some vampy lips. Dark lip shades are always a good look for the colder weather. Lately, liquid-to-matte lipsticks have become increasingly popular. I won't lie, I hopped on that train fast, and couldn't help myself from sporting my Kat Von D Everlasting Liquid Lipsticks even in July! MAC is still rocking the 70's vibe with their new Retro Matte Liquid Lipcolour.

Finally, natural brows and dewy lids. Tadpole brows are long gone, and bushy, dark, natural brows are back in. One could say they are quite the statement themselves, and you don't need much more around the eye area. Creating a simple, one toned dewy lid look is simple, and can even be done with any lip balm, tinted or not (but I'd stay clear of mentholated lip balms). You can also use a product such as the stunning Rituelle de Fille's Crème Pigments, or any other cream pigment for that matter.

Of course, trends come and go. So take inspiration from them, but just do whatever you're in the mood for and what makes you feel good. Have fun with makeup, play and explore. What never goes out of style, is protecting and taking good care of your skin.

how about some makeup?



Idit Greenberg is an Israeli who has lived in Japan since December 2015. She works as an English tutor but her interests range from fashion and beauty to boxing and Muai Thai. She is a presenter in a series of Youtube videos teaching Hebrew for beginners, and is working on fulfilling her dream of writing for a global magazine. You can follow her on [Instagram](#) at [@iditgreenberg](#).

Style Makers: A Photographer on Fashion & His Friends

Charles Colfer

When me and my friends talk about fashion, we never really mention any particular trends. Not to bash trends— there's absolutely nothing inherently wrong with anything because it's popular. If it's popular it's because it works. Or because people are told that it works.



Most of us are artists whether it be professionally or personally. The things we wear aren't often an obvious or simple reflection of that. Lots of earth tones, simple one or two tone outfits, sleek and form fitting pieces. We draw on all our influences in life. Comics/ animation, video games, music, people we admire, our best friends. We pick things that we think are unique. Things we think that not many other people have. Not for the sake of being able to say what we have is unique or for uniqueness' sake, but to be able to say that we made this decision ourselves. We often won't even think this deeply about it. We find something we feel most comfortable in, even if it's not a typical 'comfortable.'

We have a very tight knit group of friends. We get along with people, we're friendly, sociable; but the kinds of people we strongly associate with or really bond with are people who think for themselves. Whether we share aesthetics or not. We respect and admire free thought and genuine expression.





Norms are boring, and creating your own reality isn't. It's as simple as that. Blacks and earth tones lay down as a base for colors that pop. For smaller accents that make it a little bit more coordinated without the effort.



It's about subtly. We don't hide behind the outfits or these choices. It's more of a highlighted accent to who we are. the useless umbrella in a fancy island cocktail. The drink is still gonna taste the same with or without it.

It's about feeling yourself, and always being nothing but that. Picking something that you think is smart and you. Something that expresses a particular side of you that you think people might not see.



Ultimately, it's an exercise in free will. Learning to make your own decisions for you. Fashion is much less consequential than a lot of life.



Charles Colfer is a photographer and musician based in Massachusetts and Japan. You can find his work at www.charlescolfer.com and on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/charlescolferphotography) at @charlescolferphotography.



TOKYO GAME SHOW 2017

Chad Grover (Tokyo)



Tokyo Game Show 2017 has come and gone. The four-day pow-wow gave fans and journalists alike a chance to get a taste of the future of gaming in 2018 and beyond. Major companies, such as Konami, Capcom, and Bandai Namco arrived in droves to show the world what their teams have been working on. While undoubtedly saving its trump cards until December's PlayStation Experience, Sony still made a number of exciting announcements at their annual press conference, primarily geared towards its Japanese audience. Rival companies Nintendo and Microsoft skipped attending this year's event, as is the norm for both parties, which left Sony with a virtual monopoly on all the hype and attention coming out of the show. Here is the rundown on everything announced during their PlayStation briefing.



Save The Date

The biggest announcement of the show was unquestionably the release date of *Monster Hunter: World*, which, as the name suggests, will be available worldwide on January 26th, 2018. The latest entry in the action role-playing game series, *Monster Hunter: World* was formally unveiled during Sony's E3 2017 press conference earlier this year, making it the first *Monster Hunter* game to launch on a PlayStation platform in over a decade. An international launch is something that has eluded the franchise in the past, as new instalments typically arrive in Japan several months in advance of the rest of the world. This bold, new strategy is, without doubt, an effort to perpetuate the popularity of the game in the West, where the Triple-A franchise

has floundered in terms of sales when compared to other big name Japanese exports (such as *Pokémon* and *Super Mario*). Both eager veterans and curious newcomers will not have to wait patiently for this new game to be translated and can get their hands on it when it launches simultaneously on PC and PS4 early next year.

Sony also announced that a special *Monster Hunter: World Liolaesus Edition* PS4 Pro will launch exclusively in Japan on December 7th, 2017, well over a month before the game's official release. Not to worry, though, because the bundle will include a digital download code to obtain the full game when it drops next year.



NOT JUST ANOTHER FAD

PlayStation aimed to prove that virtual reality is here to stay, showcasing a wide variety of VR-enabled titles during their annual TGS press conference. From speeding through the adrenaline-filled racetrack in *Gran Turismo Sport* to loafing around the cat-hoarding household of *Neko Atsume*, there is something for everyone on PlayStation VR. The most surprising announcement, however, was the remaster of *Anubis: Zone of the Enders* from industry icon Hideo Kojima, coming to PSVR Spring 2018 in Japan. The remastered version will include full 4K support, updated sound design and a number of surprise features. *Anubis: Zone of the Enders* was initially released on the PlayStation 2 in 2003 to positive reviews. Be warned, though: those with motion sickness may find the signature “high-speed robot action” too much to handle in VR.

THE LEGEND RETURNS

Seventeen years ago, Square Enix (formerly known as Squaresoft) released *Final Fantasy IX* at the tail-end of their fabled “Summer of Adventure” promotion. After *Final Fantasy VII* took the franchise in a brave new direction with its dark cyberpunk world and archetype-shattering characters, *Final Fantasy IX* was intended to be a return to the series’ more fantasy-oriented roots. Despite being a throwback, the game quickly amassed its own fan base and is regarded by many as the single best instalment of the *Final Fantasy* series. During Sony’s press briefing, they revealed that a remastered version of *Final Fantasy IX* featuring high-definition visuals, auto-save functionality, debug options and PS4 trophy support will be available via the PlayStation Store, effective immediately. *Final Fantasy IX* marks another in a long list of resurrected gems Square Enix has brought to the platform, including plans to release a 3D remake of the cult classic *Secret of Mana* (1993) next February.

In other *Final Fantasy* related news, Square Enix announced that Noctis, the deadly black-clad prince from *Final Fantasy XV*, is finally joining the roster of their arcade fighter *Dissidia: Final Fantasy NT*. According to

developer Team Ninja, Noctis will use “familiar attacks and [an] arsenal of weapons,” as well as his warp strike ability. They went on to say that making Noctis look and feel exactly how he was in last year’s *Final Fantasy XV* was their main priority.



All-STAR Talent

Square Enix came out of left field with the reveal of *Left Alive*, a brand new survival action shooter for the PS4 set in the well-established *Front Mission* universe. Much like with this year's sleeper hit *NieR: Automata*, the company assembled a star-studded cast to produce this title, including former *Metal Gear Solid* artist Yoji Shinkawa, *Armored Core* director Toshifumi Nabeshima, and esteemed mecha designer Takayuki Yanase. *Kingdom Hearts* co-creator and *Final Fantasy* brand manager Shinji Hashimoto has also signed on as producer. A short teaser trailer for the game showcases a burning city in ruins with momentary glimpses of intense gameplay. While details are still scarce, *Left Alive* was easily the most ambitious announcement of the show and something worth keeping on your radar.



THE CROWN JEWEL

During Sony's press conference, Atlus revealed *Dragon's Crown Pro*, an enhanced version of the PlayStation 3 and PS Vita's *Dragon's Crown*, which will now support a 4K resolution in addition to cross-platform play with older versions of the game. The 2013 hack-and-slash beat-'em-up features a medieval setting where up to

four players can use both sword and magic to crawl through sprawling dungeons in search of a legendary relic. Players can choose from six character classes, and the game boasts gorgeous sprite-based visuals which take inspiration from classic Greek mythology and Renaissance paintings. It received near-universal acclaim at its launch. *Dragon's Crown Pro* for PS4 will launch in Japan on January 25th, 2018.

That's a wrap! Looking for hands-on impressions of Tokyo Game Show's hottest games, including *Monster Hunter: World*, *Dragon Ball FighterZ*, and *Earth Defense Force 5*? Keep reading!





THE BEST (AND WORST) OF TOKYO GAME SHOW 2017

Chad Grover (Tokyo), David Wilson (Akita)

DAVID'S TOP PICK – *MONSTER HUNTER: WORLD*

I should begin by saying my experience with this series is extremely limited. After nearly two and a half hours of anticipation, I was finally seated at the demo booth for *Monster Hunter: World*, the latest entry in a series that has taken Japan by storm but gained more than niche status in western markets.

The demo gave the option of three different monsters to hunt, and my fellow hunters and I settled on the medium difficulty monster. Players begin in a small camp where you can further customize your premade character's weapons and gear. For the demo, players were limited to the weapons selected from the start, but the other hunters on my team and I had selected a variety of weapons, all with vastly different play styles. There are options suitable for all kinds of players, thanks to the combination of a huge variety of weapons and a robust character creator. I especially took note of the projectile weapon classes, which drop the brawler action style of gameplay for an over-the-shoulder, third person shooter style. It's clear that this franchise entry's key goal is accessibility.

Exploring the vast zones in *World* is a real treat. For the first time in the series, players have a seamless area to hunt in. Starting out in a large swampy area, a faint green cloud of scout flies emerges to guide characters to the target. Initially, this cloud is incredibly faint, so you and your fellow hunters need to find tracks to increase its intensity in order to be led to your chosen target. This detective phase of the hunt is incredibly satisfying, and special praise needs to go to the game's sound design. There is no background music at all during this phase of the hunt, so you're left with just the ambient sounds of nature around you as you track your target. The sounds of the wilderness fully immerse you, and it is enhanced even further by seeing all the other creatures that are living in the world.

After being led by the scout flies into a large open desert area, you finally lay eyes on your target. When any player finds the target monster, all other players are immediately alerted to its location. Upon initiating combat, the game kicks in with a blood pumping orchestral score that helps set the tone of the fight. Combat in *World* feels very responsive, with your character reacting completely to each button press.

As such, trying to mash out encounters or treating this game like a beat-'em-up will punish you very quickly.

The battles in *World* are no small feat, with this particular hunt going on for about 15 minutes. After wounding the monster sufficiently, it began to flee the zone and the team had no choice but to give chase. While chasing the monster through a deep jungle, it became apparent the team wasn't the only ones tracking the target. Another monster jumped in and ambushed it, plunging the game into a three-way battle. This element really helps the immersion of the world during your hunts. You really get the sense of a living, breathing world, and that the creatures don't exist solely to be hunted.

Another important thing to note is that you have a large arsenal of tools and buffs at your disposal. As you battle the various monsters, your weapons dull and become less effective over time. To remedy this, your character carries a variety of tools such as a whetstone to buff your damage. However, doing this takes time and leaves your character completely vulnerable to attack. This is where some of the teamwork elements in *World* really shine. It's up to the other hunters on your team to keep the target occupied, while you slip back from the frontline of the battle to make use of all the tools at your disposal.

Eventually, the target gave up the fight and began limping away, and it was clear that the hunt was drawing to a close. For the first time in the series, players no longer have to rely solely on visual animation cues to know the status of their target monster. Players can now use a heart rate monitor and new damage numbers, which pop up around enemies as you attack. It's these small changes that help the title all the more accessible to newcomers to the series. Before I knew it, our thirty minutes had passed. There were so many different gameplay elements jampacked into this short demo, yet I felt as though I barely scratched the surface of the game's most rewarding elements. Still, it is clear that this is a very polished, gratifying experience that I can't wait to jump back into. *Monster Hunter: World* is shaping up to be a great entry point for newcomers to the series, and I'm itching with anticipation for all the hunts to come in January of next year.

CHAD'S TOP PICK – DRAGON BALL FIGHTERZ

Dragon Ball FighterZ is an upcoming 2.5D fighting game from Arc System Works, whose pedigree includes the *Guilty Gear* and *BlazBlue* franchises. Adapting one of the most beloved anime and manga series in the world is a difficult task, but Arc System Works took their thirty years of experience and applied it to this title. Dave and I were given the chance to play one versus match against each other, and after a quick round of rock-paper-scissors to raffle off who would be selecting Goku, we were ready to choose our characters.

FighterZ is a joy to play — combos and special attacks are simple and intuitive, even for a beginner, and the game's unique cel-shading flawlessly mimics the visual

style of the animated series. Players can charge their *ki* to build their special meter, which unlocks super and ultra finishing moves taken directly from the series. Long-time fans will be happy to know that there are throwbacks aplenty, including Goku's Super Saiyan 3 transformation, Gohan's Father-Son Kamehameha and Vegeta's Final Flash. Within mere minutes our time with *FighterZ* was over, and we shuffled away after being handed some free swag. Its star burned fast, but it shone brightly. Anyone who considers themselves to be a fan of *Dragon Ball* need not hesitate to pick this one up when it launches next February.



THE WORST: EARTH FORCE DEFENCE 5

Developed by Sandlot, *Earth Force Defense 5* is the latest entry in the longstanding series. These games have always been something of a guilty pleasure due to their lack of quality control: as an example, the trailer shown for *EDF 5* during Sony's press conference featured clipping 3D models, framerate slowdown, and screen tearing. This sentiment was present during my time with the game as well, with English-translated menus and HUD elements riddled with spelling errors.

For those unfamiliar with the series, *EDF* puts you in the shoes of a planetary defense soldier serving in the midst of an alien invasion, taking cues from the cult-classic film *Starship Troopers* (1997). We were given twenty minutes to demo *EDF* and were free to choose from a variety of playable characters and missions. Vehicles are also back this time around, but the continued lack of satisfying controls permeates the experience when using them.

Before getting to sink my teeth into the second level, the booth attendant tapped me on the shoulder to let me know that my time was up. Much like my time demoing the game, *EDF* felt premature and unfinished; and I can give no reason why anyone (except diehard fans) should be inclined to pay full price for this game when it releases in December.

Dave Wilson is a 5th year ALT living in Akita. He likes RPGs and Japanese PowerPoint games. You can follow his misadventures on [Twitter](#).

Chad Grover is a 4th year ALT based in Tokyo. His hobbies include video games, professional wrestling, and getting told he looks like Seth Rogen a lot. You can ask him which brand of canned coffee he's currently addicted to on [Twitter](#).

Photos:
Chad Grover
David Wilson

NOVEMBER RELEASES

Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)

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

MOVIES

3 Nov. *It* (Horror): Starring Bill Skarsgard, Finn Wolfhard

3 Nov. *Thor: Ragnarok* (Action-Adventure, Sci-Fi): Starring Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston, Cate Blanchett

11 Nov. *Neruda* (Biography, True Crime): Directed by Pablo Larraín, starring Gael García Bernal, Mercedes Morán

17 Nov. *Godzilla: Monster Planter* (Sci-Fi): Written by Gen Urobuchi, starring Mamoru Miyano, Daisuke Ono

23 Nov. *Justice League* (Action-Adventure, Fantasy): Directed by Zack Snyder, starring Ben Affleck, Gal Gadot, Jason Momoa

GAMES

17 Nov. *Pokemon: Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon* on Nintendo 3DS (Collection Platformer)

MUSIC

8 Nov. *Finally*, Namie Amuro (J-Pop, Multi-Genre)

10 Nov. *Reputation*, Taylor Swift (Pop)

17-20 Nov. *Porno Graffiti National Tour* — Saitama City, Saitama, with future shows across Japan (J-Rock)

18-19, 23 Nov.-23 Dec. *BIG BANG 2017 Tour* — Fukuoka City, Fukuoka, and Osaka City, Osaka (K-Pop)

STAGE

28 Oct.-25 Nov. *The Addams Family* — Kanagawa City, Kanagawa, Toyonaka City, Osaka, and Toyama City, Toyama (Musical Comedy)

3-5 Nov. *West Japan Figure Skating Championship* — Fukuoka City, Fukuoka (National figure skating competition)

12-26 Nov. *Grand Sumo Tournament* — Fukuoka City, Fukuoka (Traditional Japanese wrestling)

Sources:

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

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna

LIFESTYLE



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Jasmin Hayward

*"Quotation is a serviceable substitute for wit" —
Oscar Wilde/Me, not being able to find a decent quote
this month*

Photo: Illaura Rossiter



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Foods We All Miss:

CONNECT Magazine

November 2017

Nicole Antkiewicz (Oita), JETFood

Japan's a new and exciting place for most of us: from the culture, to the friends, to the co-workers, to the delicious and authentic Japanese cuisine. However, it's normal for us to miss things about where we came from and what we used to eat.

We all miss cheese: the authenticity, the quantity, the quality. We all miss food from our home countries, whether it be phở, ketchup chips, or a Jamaican cheese patty. We all miss cheap and readily available fruits, and beautiful

restaurant salads. We all miss white and rye bread that doesn't have sugar piled on top for flavor, and mom's homemade baked goods. We may have come from all over the world, and now live all over Japan, but one thing's shared between us all: our love and appreciation for different foods!

CONNECT took to the JETfood Facebook group to discover what food the JET community all over Japan has been hungering for, and here are the responses.

TOP FIVE CATEGORIES:

1. Cheese
2. Cultural food
3. Fruit
4. Baked goods
(Cookies, cake, brownies, pie, doughnuts)
5. Bread

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

bacon
peanut butter
roast dinners
yogurt

SPECIAL MENTIONS:

swede (vegetable)
oxtail and beans
weird ice cream flavors at the grocery store
select cereals

THE RESULTS

Brand names and Cultural food:

Chick Fil-A, Chinese food 2, Dim sum, Greek food, Hamburger Helper, Indonesian food, Jamaican cheese patty, Jerk pork, Ketchup chips, Mexican food 10, Panera, Persian food, Poutine, Russian food, Thai food, Vietnamese food 3, Yum Cha

Produce:

Baby carrots, Baked potatoes 2, Brussel sprouts, Cheap/variety of fruit 9, Cilantro, Fresh basil, Habanero peppers, Mushrooms, Parsnips 2, Peas 2, Romaine lettuce/salads 3, Spinach that isn't bitter, Swede (vegetable), Vegan/Vegetarian food 2

Meats, dairy and pantry:

Biscuits 3, Bread 7, Butter, Catfish, Cheese 14, Chicken patties and thighs, Coffee, Crispy bacon 4, Lamb Milk, Rice, long grain 3, Porridge 2, Select cereals, Sour cream, Tilapia, Yogurt 3

Special dishes

Baked goods 8, Barbi-fried chicken, Beans on toast, Big burgers, Brunch, Cheap pizza 2, Crab bisque, Home cooked stew, Lasagna, Oxtail and beans 2, Pea soup, Roast dinners 3

Sweets and indulgences:

Barista coffee 2, Coconut milk, Craft beer, Granola bars 2, Gravy 3, Hummus, Mars Bars, Milkshakes, Mint chocolate, Peanut Butter (Chunky) 3, Pop-tarts 2, Reese's cups, Strawberry Laces, Weird ice cream flavors at the grocery store

Photo:
Helena Yankovska on Unsplash

Macaroni and Cheese Please!

Alyssa Rossi (Taketa City)

To be quite honest, one of the things I enjoy most since arriving in Japan has been eating! Curry Rice, Omurice, Udon, Tempura, sushi, onigiri...(the list doesn't really ever end). I have spent so many evenings after school frequenting the local supermarkets. Over the last few weeks, I have cultivated many Japanese ingredients I never even thought of purchasing.

Although it has been an adventure, there has been many times when I just miss eating food from home. The comfort of eating something, well, not Japanese. I found myself attempting to make American fare, but it always tasted different than how it tasted back in America. From Pasta to Tacos, to Pizza and Fried Chicken, everything missed the mark. Finally, I was able to find a very simple and easy dish to make that brought me back to feelings of home. Macaroni and Cheese! For this recipe, I used a shredded cheese blend that I purchased from Don Quijote, but feel free to experiment with what you can find around your local area!

Macaroni and Cheese Recipe

INGREDIENTS

500 g (About 16 oz) elbow macaroni
50 ml (Approx 1/4 cup) butter
50 ml (Approx 1/4 cup) flour
Salt (to taste)
Garlic Powder (a few dashes)
Black Pepper (To Taste)
Dried Parsley (To Sprinkle on top)
500 ml (About 2 Cups) milk
400 g (About 2 Cups) of shredded cheese of choice
Parmesan Cheese (Optional to sprinkle on top)

DIRECTIONS

1. Cook macaroni according to package directions.
2. In medium saucepan, melt butter over medium heat; stir in flour, and cook for 3-5 minutes to form a roux; add salt, garlic powder and pepper; slowly add milk, stirring well after each addition.
3. Cook and stir until bubbly.
4. Stir in cheese a small amount at a time until fully melted.
5. Drain macaroni; add to cheese sauce; stir to coat. Serve topped with parmesan cheese and parsley sprinkled on top!

Source: Wikicommons

Soft Creams in a Hard World

Duncan Cox (Hokkaido)

“*So futokuriimu, so futokuriimu... foot cream?*” I turned to my fellow newcomer JET, utterly confused. “How in the hell are there so many foot cream stores?”

Of course, those of you who aren't jetlagged, bad at Japanese, and dreadful at sounding out Katakana, know exactly what I was seeing. ソフトクリーム (*sofuto kuriimu*), or “soft cream,” is what folks over here in Japan call soft serve ice cream. Soft cream: a perfect, decadent spiral of melt in your mouth, milky goodness. Cool in the summer, cheaper than a cup of coffee, and absolutely everywhere. What more could you ask for? As I soon found out, the Japanese have been asking for more for a while now.

On the northern island of Hokkaido, soft cream is a strange, gimmicky thing. Towns across the island create unique flavors of the stuff, typically after that particular town's main export. People will travel hundreds of kilometers just to try a new one. Some of these flavors: well, they're a bit more unique than others. Here's a list of five of the strangest Hokkaido soft cream flavors I've heard of.

5 **LAVENDER, Farm Tomita, Furano**

The only flavor on this list not suggested by ALTs, but I have to include it. Every time a lunchtime discussion with my students heads into the realm of soft cream (which is frequently), it's always mentioned.

Nestled in the hills of Furano, Farm Tomita is famous for its beautiful flower fields. With more than a dozen fields blooming in spring, summer, and fall, it's a sight you don't want to miss. But for my students, the flowers might as well not exist; lavender soft cream is king.

“I love it!” says one first year student, who makes a point of eating lavender soft cream whenever she visits Furano; “It tastes like a flower!”

4 **MOUNTAIN GRAPE AND CARROT, Urunuma Michi no Eki, Urausu**

Perhaps the oddest combination of soft cream flavors in existence, the Urunuma Michi no Eki's Mountain Grape and Carrot soft cream is a must-have.

“It blew me away when I finally got to try it,” says Peter Lennox, an ALT in Kitami. “The carrot is sweet, like the ones I used to pull from my grandmother's garden; the grape is tart — and they combine to create a symphony of flavour in your mouth, both complex and slightly odd. This will be a flavour you will either love or hate, but it is certainly deserving of your time!”

FOCUS FIVE: *Hokkaido*



TOMATO, Pikata no Mori Ice Factory, Mori

If you haven't visited Oshima subprefecture, I'd highly suggest it. The ever present, stark peak of Mt. Komagatake spiking into the sky, the sweeping views of Uchiura Bay, and relatively temperate weather makes this region of Hokkaido a real gem.

At the base of Mt. Komagatake lies Piata no Mori, a dairy/ ice cream extravaganza. They serve roll cakes, fresh milk, and over a dozen flavors of gelato — all of impeccable quality. Their soft cream is no exception and at this place, tomato soft cream shines.

"It was super creamy," said Samuel Hong, an ALT in Niki. "It just had a hint of tomato, mostly the sweet part of the tomato-taste instead of the sour part, if that makes any sense."

SUNFLOWER, Michi no Eki Sunflower, Hokuryu

Home to the one of the biggest sunflower fields in Japan, Hokuryu is famous for — you guessed it — sunflowers. Travelers from all across Hokkaido visit the town in late summer to view the massive expanse of the sunflowers. Situated near the field is Michi no Eki Sunflower, home to one of the tastiest soft cream flavors out there: sunflower, of course!

"Oh man, it's so delicious!" says Emily Schuster, Prefectural Advisor for Hokkaido and a former ALT in the area. "I am a huge fan of soft serve, but honestly I think my favorite part is the cone. The Hokuryu sunflower soft serve is perfect, because the ice cream actually tastes like the cone! It's flavorful and has a nutty taste, but it's still light and far too easy to eat."

GREEN BELL PEPPER, Michi no Eki Thoroughbred Road, Niikappu

It may be a little self-serving to put my own town as number one, but trust me, this is by far the most intense flavor out there. Situated along the southern coast of Hokkaido, in Hidaka subprefecture, Niikappu experiences cool summers and mild, relatively snowless winters. This creates the perfect climate for breeding horses as well as growing bell peppers, or piman, as the locals call them. Horses and piman are absolutely everywhere.

On my first day in Niikappu, my predecessor took me to the Michi no Eki at the base of the Record Museum (don't ask, I just live here), our town's largest building. He'd previously mentioned the piman soft cream in a Facebook message, so I'd been expecting to try it; But damn, was I caught off guard. One small lick and I was assaulted by the overwhelming, astringent flavor of piman. As the vegetal acridness of the soft cream spread throughout my tongue, I was reminded of queso, then quickly remembered that queso should be salty, not sweet. I finished the soft cream, and I haven't been the same since.

As I continue to explore Hokkaido, I'm reminded of how lucky I am to have been placed here. I could eat a new flavor of soft cream every day for a year and not even be close to tasting them all. But hey, what's the harm in trying?

Hokkaido Soft Cream

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*No sunlight.
Just rain and window
pain.*

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Photo: Shantel Dickerson





*FAMILY
SPOTLIGHT*

JET Round 2: Returning to Japan with little Gus

Stacey Rock (Okayama)

My husband Jeff and I haven't often taken the conventional route. Despite growing up 100 kilometers from each other in Minnesota, we had to come all the way to Japan to meet. So when it came time to raise our little boy, Gus, it only made sense that we'd have to come all the way back to Japan to do that, too!

Jeff and I were JET ALTs from 2008 to 2010 in Okayama prefecture. When we returned home to the States, we soon got married and welcomed Gus to our family in 2014. Soon enough, however, our wanderlust caught up with us, and my husband reapplied for a second term with JET. Because we knew the program well, JET afforded us the chance for adventure

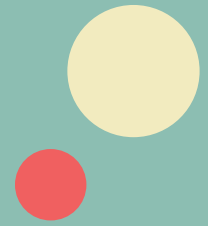
abroad while also helping us to feel comfortable and supported during the enormous task of moving one's family overseas.

When we decided to return to Japan, this time with Gus, our first priority became getting him involved in the community in a way that would make acclimating to the culture and learning a new language as easy and quick as possible. Despite having never attended daycare in the States, we decided Gus was resilient enough to be thrown into the deep end, so to speak, and attend a half day Japanese preschool, or *youchien*. I felt like I was in the deep end myself, however, and had no idea how to begin the enrollment process.



As with most of our questions this time around, I went straight to the [JET Programme Couples and Families](#) Facebook group. This group is incredibly supportive for ex-pat parents in Japan, and hearing about so many different people's experiences can really help to put all these new cultural hurdles into context. As per their suggestions, we enlisted the help of one of my husband's cooperating teachers, and this very kind person became instrumental in our ability to enroll our son. Together, we toured our first choice school on the same Wednesday afternoon that Jeff had asked for help, and the school informed us they had an opening as soon as the next Monday. We jumped on it, and the lists of supplies and required uniform accessories began pouring in!

Our biggest challenge by far at the youchien is the language barrier. Gus' teacher makes a valiant effort relaying all the details and dates to us. Unfortunately, after returning to the States, I didn't maintain the admittedly limited Japanese that I had picked up during my JET tenure, and I sometimes feel like I'm starting over with Japanese. We are therefore extremely lucky that several mothers, whose children attend the school, speak fluent English and can help with any information that falls through the many, many cracks.



The highlight so far at Gus' school has certainly been Sports Day! Jeff and I both participated in Sports Day as JETs, and I know it is an important and formative day in the school life of Japanese people as they grow up. I never would have guessed I would be watching it again from the parents' tent! Beyond the sense of welcome we felt, whole classes of three-year-olds dressed as onigiri for their obstacle race was absolutely adorable!

Our lives in Japan are different this time around, and we couldn't be happier. We travel less, and when we do get out to explore, we pack a lot more snacks, but I have never felt more a part of a community in Japan than I do now as a family at the youchien. Nine years ago, we didn't let a weekend go by without a trip around the prefecture or beyond, but this time those weekends have been filled with Sports Day, playdates, Halloween parties, and true connection with the people in our own community.

Stacey Rock lives in Tsuyama with her husband Jeff and their three year old son Augustus. She works part-time at Connect Eikaiwa English School.

Photo:
Stacey Rock



Ballerina

Ballerina

**Pirrouetting
my way
through
gender
dysphoria**

Kat Joplin (Oita)



“Squeeze your buttcheeks together. Lift your cores. Keep your shoulders down — yes, yes, beautiful!”

The tiny ballet studio is filled to overflowing. There are nine of us, seven Japanese people and two Americans. Eight women and one, uh, question mark. Three expert level dancers, four intermediates, and two noobs. I’m one of the noobs.

Sensei pounces, leaning down to examine my knee. We’re doing arabesque, or “dancer’s pose” in yoga: standing on the ball of one foot with the left held high and straight behind us, our chests popped forward, arms in an elongated fourth position. I have a nasty habit of bending my supporting leg, developed from years of martial arts, and Sensei has caught onto my tricks.

“Stretch your knee,” she says in Japanese, while I strain and go up higher on the ball of my foot, gaining half an inch.

“And squeeze those butts together!” She claps her hands to her cheeks to illustrate, puckering her mouth like a kiss. “Squeeze em good!”

I erupt in a fit of giggles. I love this class.

At the end of class we sprawl out on the floor in the

corner, slipping out of our canvas slippers and pulling t-shirts on over our leotards. After-class banter is my favorite time, when I feel less like the class straggler and more like the member of a geeky dancer gang, trading tips and complaining about the ever elusive pirouette. I’ve been working my way towards a straddle split — I spread my legs as far as I can and pancake my chest down to demonstrate. Sensei pushes my back to help, pressing me closer to the floor than I could on my own.

“I give up! I give up!” I laugh, inner thighs burning. “*Genkai desu! Genkai!!*” That’s my limit!

“*Genkai?!*” Sensei exclaims, while the others explode. “Just how do they know a word like *genkai*?”

But, she doesn’t use the word “they”. What she actually says is *kanojo*, a gendered pronoun best translated as “she”. In my head, like I always do, I change it to a unisex term. It’s a defense mechanism I’ve built up over the years — an internal filter. Those words come like light pattering rain —she, her, Ms., woman—and I roll them into balls and flick them away — she into they, her into them, Ms. into Mx., woman into person. If words were marbles I’d be a master player. It’s particularly easy to rewrite the world when I hear it in Japanese first.

I am what you call genderqueer. The way I describe it for those in the dark: genderqueer is like standing at Platform Nine and Three Quarters of the gender spectrum. You've got your familiar stops—your Platform Men and your Platform Women — and then somewhere in between your genderqueer people are hovering. As someone who is genderqueer, I do not identify with the sex I was born with, rather as something in between: a wandering platform that shifts around the center line. Genderqueer identities — including such terms as two-spirit, genderfluid, demiboy and demigirl — are generally included under the trans umbrella, an identity I fully embrace. My internal sense of self does not match with the sex I was assigned at birth.

Living in Japan, my relationship with my gender has felt like the best of times and the worst of times. Last August, during my prefecture's JET orientation, I came out as trans and as an LGBTQ resource to my fellow JETs, and was met with love and support — something I can't imagine experiencing at most job functions in the states. Moreover, in Japan I have felt physically safer than I ever did in America; hate crimes against LGBTQ people are rare, especially out in the *inaka* (countryside), and I've rarely felt at risk for being killed or attacked over my gender identity or sexuality, as I have in the States.


That said, there are tensions to living here as well. In Japan, where I am not out at my workplace and wake up every day and pretend I'm someone I'm not, my transition to a more masculine identity is effectively on hold. When coworkers refer to me as "miss" or as a woman, I smile and I take it; when I use the bathroom or the public bath, I smile and I use the women's side; when friends compliment my body — my curves, my small size, my other perceived-feminine attributes — I smile and I thank them because I know they mean well, but inside I crumple at how trapped I feel in my own skin, how alien and foreign those attributes seem some days, how I long to be taller, stronger, more androgynous.

It's been many years since I accepted and acknowledged my trans identity, and I've developed coping mechanisms for my day-to-day life — for example, the "brain filter." Other days, these tiny annoyances build up like plaque, and at the end of the week all I want to do is wiggle into a chest binder and go into "guy mode" for a bit. Other LGBTQ friends I'm in contact with on social media are my greatest treasure at times like this — we write and commiserate about our everyday difficulties. Finally, there have been times when I've reached incredibly low points — the stress

of gender dysphoria, misgendering, and anxiety about coming out or being found out, mingling with the daily pressures of living in a foreign country and having a tenuous grasp on the spoken language.

It was a crisis like this that brought me to ballet seven months ago. I've admired ballet my entire life — I loved going to performances with my grandparents, watching the dancer's bodies twist, weave, leap, at times seemingly defying gravity. The reason I delayed joining ballet so long, though, was my own perfectionism and self-consciousness: after quitting as a child (a choice I regret), I'd be entering the class late, very late. The thought of being a young adult in a class of brilliant dancers who'd been practicing since they were in diapers embarrassed me.

But, I wanted an extracurricular to distract myself from my dysphoric struggles, and ballet appealed to me both because of the beauty of the dance and because — if I'm being honest — I was envious of the slim, gamine figures most long-term ballet dancers possess. Sierra, another ALT in my town (herself a magnificent ballerina who's been dancing over twenty years!) convinced



"I've found dance
therapeutic to my
dysphoric mind."

me to give it a try, together with a friend who was also just starting out. With Sierra guiding us, we derped through the opening classes together, all shaking ankles and cracking knees, amusement holding our embarrassment in check. At some point — perhaps a month or two in — we hit our stride, the basic exercises began to feel more natural, and we nurtured some minor ambition in our waltzes and turns. This was the point when ballet started to feel fun and, later, like an escape.

I've found dance therapeutic to my dysphoric mind. Between the endorphin release and the semiweekly routine, ballet helps me manage depression and keeps me socially active. Particularly for a beginner, the work of remembering dance move sequences, form, breathing, and translating words in and out of Japanese keeps my mind constantly engaged, and prevents it from wandering to darker thoughts. And as many veteran ballet dancers can tell you, dancing is a special kinesthetic way of connecting to music. Enjoying music and feeling that music move throughout your body is its own kind of endorphin rush.

I've noticed dancing has caused a significant shift in my relationship with my body. When you've spent months of your life feeling completely disconnected from your body, like a brain in a jar, spending a few hours a week acutely aware of your body can feel like flipping a switch in your head. The time is brief but it's glorious. It's like rubbing circulation back into a numb leg, and it's a way of reclaiming your body as your own.

I also realized that, due to my dysphoria, I had begun to think of my body as an enemy — as the one obstacle to my happiness, as the one thing keeping me from being seen the way I want to be seen. I recall when I first began ballet, I disliked my body so much I wouldn't look at myself in the mirror, not even to check my form. And yet, after many months, ballet has fundamentally changed that relationship by forcing my body and me to work as a team. The rigorous moves and exercises of ballet — jumping, balancing, stretching, sometimes standing on the ball of one foot for extended periods — put me in a position where I have to rely on my body and work with it, body and mind together. Eventually, seeing my limits and seeing how I could push and change those limits over time gave me a sense of pride in my body that I had not felt for a very long time. It was like finding an old friend again.

"...it's a story about metamorphosis."



My latest obsession is Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*. It's a modern reinterpretation of the classic, featuring a cast of all-male swans, but like the original it's a story about metamorphosis. In this version, the prince wants to become a swan — to be free. His *pas de deux* with the lead swan are intimate, emotional, and endearing. To him, the swan men are the pinnacle of masculine beauty: bare chests, angular leaps, sweeping arms and legs.

Friends sometimes ask me if I want to dress up like a ballerina when I'm ready to perform. I do like tutus, and point shoes, and the flowing, delicate pirouettes of classical ballet. But in my dreams I'm a swan in Bourne's production. Metamorphosing into something taller, stronger, graceful. One with the music, more fluid than solid, more idea than definition. Creating something beautiful, and becoming beautiful myself. Whole. Complete. Untouchable.



Kat is a third year ALT in Nakatsu, Oita, a city best known for its fried chicken. Nakatsu JETs are contractually obliged to like fried chicken. Kat really likes fried chicken. They also enjoy cycling, gaming, and watching horror movies with friends, but mostly fried chicken. Kat's dream is to be a novelist, and to eat more fried chicken.

Photos:
Kat Joplin
Mike Wilson on Unsplash
Gaelle Marcel on Unsplash

CONTINUING YOGA



WITHOUT A HOME STUDIO

Kirsty Broderick (Saitama)

Before I came to Japan in July 2017, I had an active, regular yoga practice. I had my home studio, where I practiced at least five times a week, usually more. It felt like my second home. I was comfortable there. I belonged.

I began practicing yoga to gain more peace in my mind. To relax and gain balance in my life. I achieved all this, transforming from a tightly wound ball of anxiety to someone who could roll with what was thrown at me, letting things wash over me rather than building up inside.

I also became much stronger, mentally and physically. My flexibility improved. I felt comfortable and confident in myself, despite being a bigger, curvy girl and not looking like the typical yoga girl.

It was important to me to keep my practice when I moved to Japan. I knew it would help me deal with all the stress and feelings that were bound to come up as I found my feet. As soon as I found my placement information I began researching studios in the area, intending to find a new home as soon as possible. I found the membership fees to be twice what I was paying in New

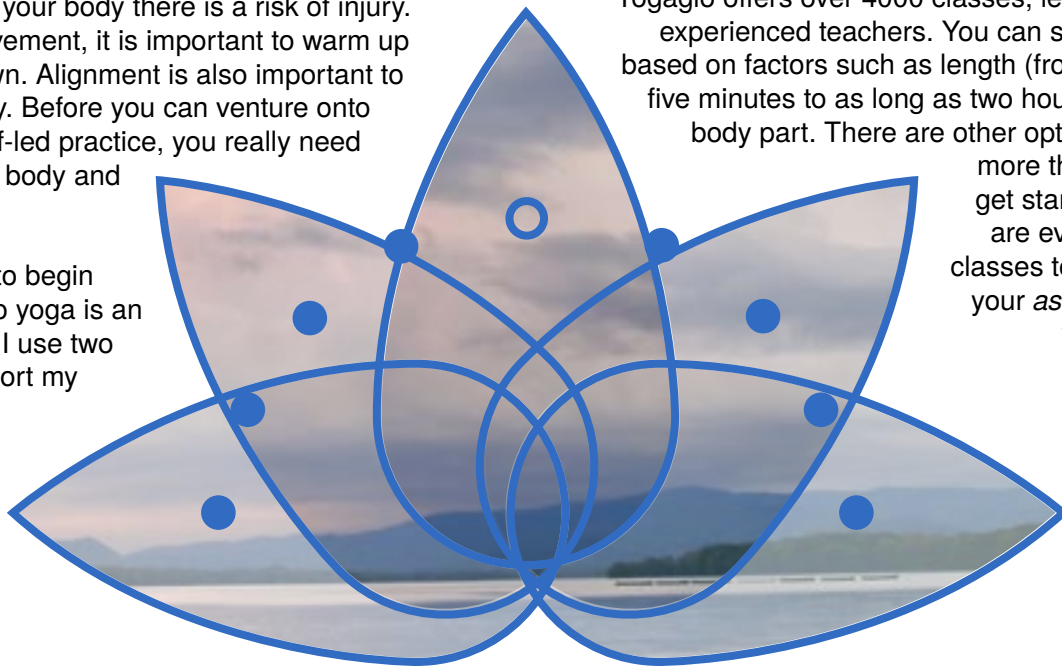
Zealand. I just couldn't justify that expense when I wanted to travel as much as possible.

I jumped into the world of home yoga practices.

Home yoga is also perfect for the upcoming cold, dark, wet winter months when the last thing you want to do is leave your apartment when you don't have to.

I have enough understanding to create my own routines and sequences, however, I would not recommend someone new to yoga do this. Although people think of yoga as a very gentle and moderate way to move your body there is a risk of injury. Like any movement, it is important to warm up and cool down. Alignment is also important to prevent injury. Before you can venture onto your own self-led practice, you really need to know your body and your limits.

A great way to begin and ease into yoga is an online class. I use two apps to support my practice.



YOGAGLO

[Yogaglo Link](#)

Free 15 day trial
Then: \$18 per month

Yogaglo is available online from your laptop, or there is an [Apple](#) and [Android](#) app.

Yogaglo offers over 4000 classes, led by qualified, experienced teachers. You can search classes based on factors such as length (from as short as five minutes to as long as two hours), level, and body part. There are other options but that's

more than enough to get started on! There are even meditation classes to complement your *asana* (postural) yoga practice.

CODYAPP

[Codyapp Link](#)

Codyapp is available online from your laptop, as well as an [Apple](#) and [Android](#) app.

Codyapp has a strong yoga focus though it is not solely a yoga app, including offerings such as cardio and HIIT, pilates, and weightlifting. This is not a subscription based service like Yogaglo; rather, you pay for individual programmes. A programme consists of several classes on a theme such as 'beginner yoga flows', 'desk therapy', or 'core control'. You then have lifetime access to the programme. From what I have

seen costs range from about \$15 to about \$80 so there is something for every budget!

I truly believe a yoga practice can bring so much goodness to people's lives. I would encourage anyone with an interest to try it out. You do not need to be thin, you do not need to be strong (yoga will make you strong), and you do not need to be flexible (yoga will make you flexible).

Photos: Duncan Cox

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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*, Lilian Diep, 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, Ashley Hirasuna, at ashley.hirasuna@ajet.net.

HAIKU

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

COMICS

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



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Interested in contributing to *CONNECT*? Want to stay up-to-date on interview opportunities, photo requests, and *CONNECT* announcements? Get involved with the *CONNECT* by contacting our current *CONNECT* staff and reading about the possible positions [here](#).

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