

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

SEPTEMBER
2017

Sensei by day, star by night - Who is Gizmo?

Modern-day Naginata Revival - We hear from JETs practising a "lost" tradition

Tastes of Home - Toyama JETs on comfort foods and coveted family recipes

Shikoku through a personal lens - Interview with winners of the Block 8 Photo Contest

Standout Style Cities - A closer look at four of Japan's fashion hotspots



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

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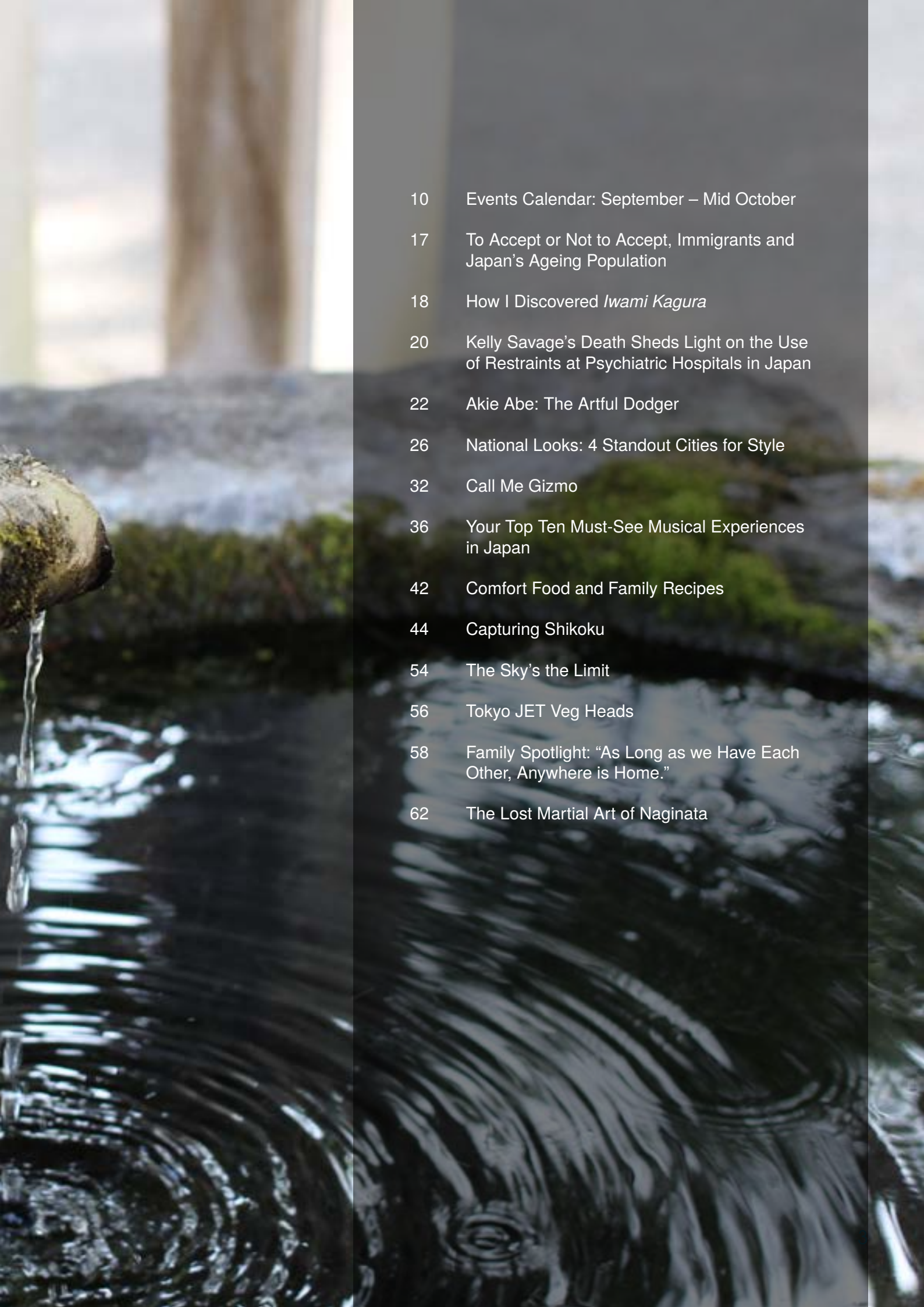
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Has anyone had their life flash before their eyes when they're walking aimlessly and a cicada revives from the ground to jump in front of you? No? Just me? Twice?

I can't wait until the summer (and its humidity) is far behind me because fall is coming. I can hear it. (Yeah, I'm talking to you, you chorus of cicadas; go back to sleep). Summer is fun, though. A time to finally relax while your students aren't in class; days off for when you can finally explore your new home, or the countries surrounding your new home; or doing all the stuff you couldn't do during the busy school year.

Even though the heat and humidity make me lethargic, I always hate seeing the time winding down.

But. September is finally here again. A lot has happened: new JETs, summer trips, festivals, and all sorts of memories made. Why not make more? Japan still has a lot more for me to explore, and the pages within this issue are sure to help you find your next new 'something' to tackle. Whether it be new events, tasty food, or different perspectives on life in Japan, I'm sure there's something for you to ponder next time you're out on a stroll and a random huge bug catches you by surprise.

Lilian Diep
Head Editor
3rd Year Toyama ALT

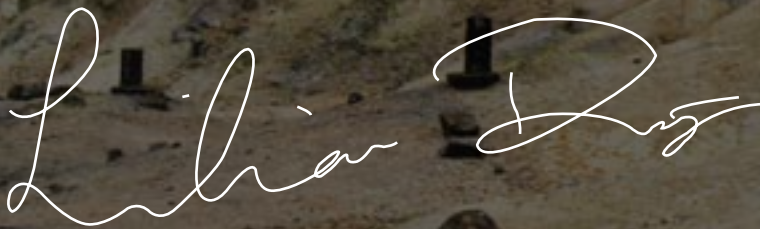


Photo: Duncan Cox



立入禁止

この先は大変危険です。
絶対に入らないようにして下さい

DANGER KEEP OUT

LETTER FROM THE AJET CHAIR



CJ with Teacher

Hello and Welcome to Japan!

My name is CJ Fischer and I am the Chair of the National Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching; also known as National AJET. AJET serves as your connection to our peers all over Japan, as a resource to help you with the challenges you will face while living in Japan, and as your representatives with CLAIR and the three ministries operating the JET Programme.

Our council works to create a sense of national community, both through various events hosted by the block representatives, and AJET's Connect magazine. The SIGs (Special Interest Groups) are a great way to find community as well. We also research resources to help you do

your best in the workplace, study some Japanese, and prepare for what comes after your time on JET. For more details please check out our website AJET.net.

This year our team hopes to ensure JETs are aware of our many offerings and make their voices heard in our surveys. So, please visit our website, join your block's Facebook page, and keep an eye out for upcoming surveys. The information we collect is analyzed and shared with CLAIR at bi-annual opinion exchanges and leads to tangible improvements in the JET Programme.

Finally, please be proactive and stay connected to the JET community. While ESID is definitely true, your peers can suggest the best places to visit for a vacation, their favorite Japanese language book, or offer advice on challenges associated with living in Japan. Our time in Japan is short; let's make the most of it together! がんばりましょう!

CJ Fischer
AJET Chair
3rd Year Okinawa ALT

Carlto J Fischer



NEWS AND EVENTS

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Photo: Vi Phan





Events Calendar:

September

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

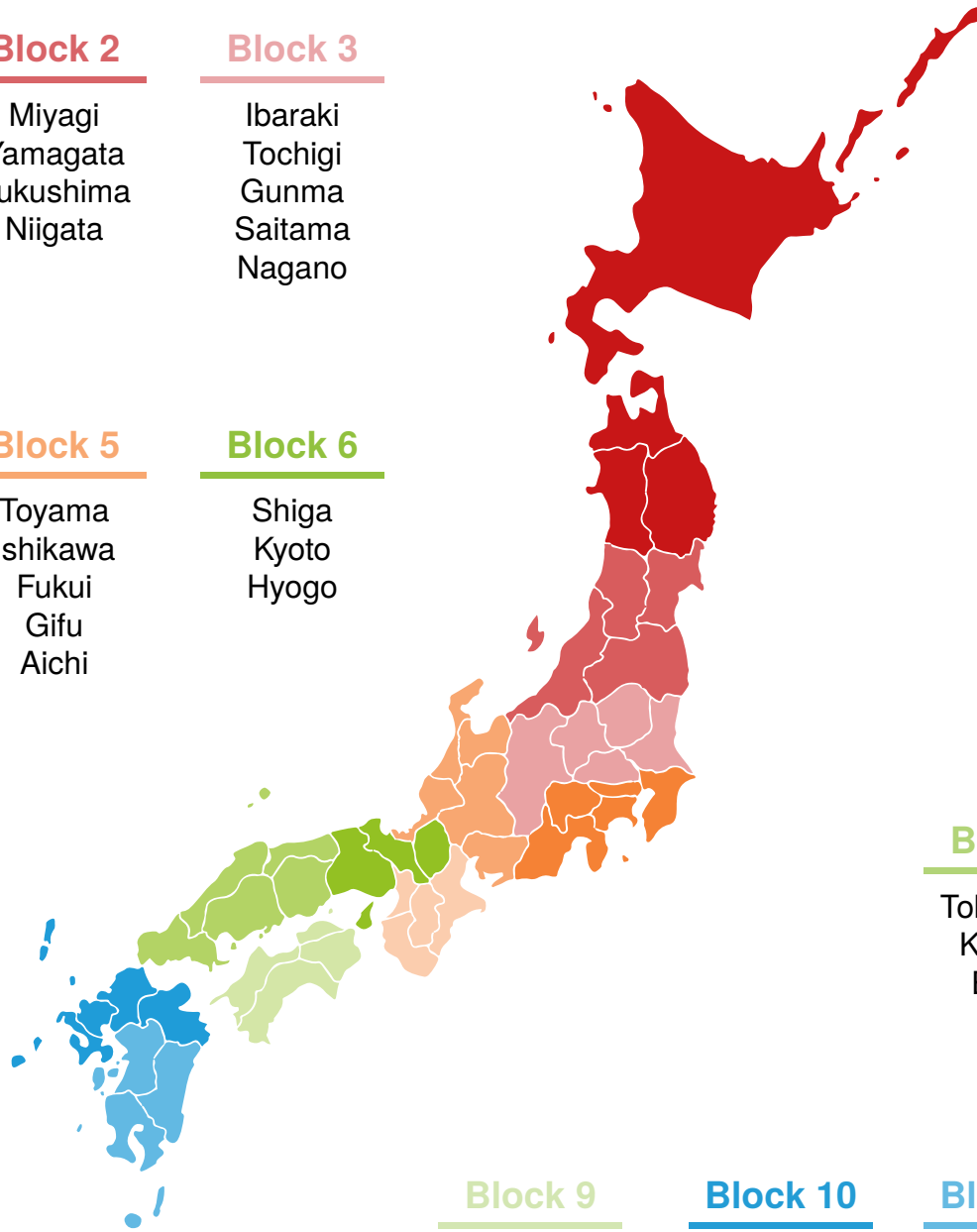
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa





Block 1

Dai Don Den (Street Performance)

16 September - 17 September
Sapporo, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Sapporo Autumn Fest 2017

9 September – 30 September
Sapporo, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hanamaki Matsuri

8 September - 10 September
Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

Odate Kyojinsha Reisai (Shrine Festival)

10 September - 11 September
Odate City, Akita Prefecture

[Website](#)

Morioka Hachiman-gu Reisai & Morioka Aki Matsuri Dashi

14 September - 16 September
Morioka, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

Oirase Momoishi Matsuri (Autumn Festival)

15 September - 17 September
Oirase Town, Aomori Prefecture

[Website](#)

Nippon-no-Furusato Tono Matsuri, Tonogo Hachimangu Shrine and others

16 September - 17 September
Tono, Iwate Prefecture

[Website](#)

Oirase Shimoda Matsuri (Float & Costumed Parade)

23 September - 24 September
Oirase Town, Aomori Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 2

Kokeshi Fest

1 September – 3 September
Narukoonsen, Osaki, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Katakai Matsuri, Asahara-jinja Shuki Reitaisai

8 September - 10 September
Ojiya, Niigata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Yachi Donga Matsuri, Yachi Hachimangu Shrine

16 September – 18 September
Kahoku, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website](#)

Aizu Matsuri (Dance & Parade)

23 September
Aizu-Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 3

Ishioka Festival

17 September - 19 September
Hitachinoguu Soutaisha Shrine, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Ikaho Matsuri

18 September - 20 September
Shibukawa, Gumma Prefecture

[Website](#)

Ritual Event at Hachiman Jinja Shrine

23 September- 24 September
Ikeda, Nagano Prefecture

[Website](#)

Dosojin Festival at Utsukushigahara Onsen

24 September
Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture

[Website](#)

Yassa Matsuri, Wakamiya Hachimangu Shrine

30 September
Minakami-machi, Gunma Prefecture

[Website](#)

Mt. Nasu, Autumn Tints Season

Late September to Early October
Nasu, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 4

Kitazawa Hachiman Shrine Festival

2 September - 3 September
Shimokitazawa, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Oedo Soran Matsuri (Dance Festival)

3 September
Kiba Park, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Kazusa Junisha Matsuri (Hadaka Matsuri), Tamasaki-jinja Shrine, Tsurigasaki Kaigan Beach and others

10 September & 13 September
Ichinomiya-machi, Chiba

[Website](#)

Taito Takigino

5 September
Asakusa Civic Hall, Taito, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Tokyo International Gift Show

6 September - 8 September
Tokyo Big Sight, Ariake Tokyo

[Website](#)

Kichijoji Aki Matsuri, Musashino Hachiman-gu Shrine and others

9 September - 10 September
Musashino, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Dara-Dara Matsuri Festival

11 September - 21 September
Shiba Daijingu Shrine, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Grand Sumo Tournament

11 September - 25 September
The Ryogoku Kokugikan Sumo Arena, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Reitaisai

14 September - 16 September
Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website](#)

Belgian Beer Weekend 2017

14 September - 18 September
Roppongi Hills Arena, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Yabusame, Tsurugaoka Hachimangu

16 September
Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website](#)

Heiwajima Antique Show

15 September - 17 September
Tokyo Ryutsu Center

[Website](#)

Mikoshi & Dashi Parade

15 September - 17 September
Hikawa Jinja, Akasaka, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Misakubo Matsuri

13 September - 14 September
Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Yawatanmachi (Traditional Festival)

16 September - 17 September
Tateyama, Chiba Prefecture

[Website](#)

Nezu-jinja Reitaisai

16 September - 17 September
Nezu-jinja Shrine, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Akagi-jinja Reitaisai

16 September - 17 September
Akagi-jinja Shrine and others, Shijukuku, Tokyo

[Website](#)

Shimada Mage Matsuri (Topknot Hairstyle)

17 September
Shimada, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Menkake Gyoretsu, Goryo-jinja Shrine and others

18 September
Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website](#)

Atami Kaijo Hanabi Taikai (Fireworks Display)

18 September
Atami, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Ohara Hadaka Matsuri, Ohara Hachiman-jinja Shrine, Kashima-jinja Shrine

23 September - 24 September
Ohara, Chiba Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tokyo Game Show 2017

23 September - 25 September
Makuhari Messe, Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tokyo International Book Fair 2017

23 September - 25 September
Tokyo Big Sight

[Website](#)

King of Hill Climb

24 September
Mt. Fuji, Fujinomiya, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Fukuro Matsuri

23 September - 24 September
Ikebukuro Station West Exit area, Toshima-ku, Tokyo

[Website](#)



Block 5

Owara Kaze-no-Bon (Dance Parade Festival)

1 September – 3 September
Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture
[Website](#)

Gujo Odori (Folk Dance Meet)

2 September
Hachiman-cho, Gujo, Gifu Prefecture
[Website](#)

Nagoya Antique Fair

2 September - 4 September
Fukiage Hall, Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website](#)

Tsuruga Matsuri (Mikoshi Parade)

2 September - 5 September
Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture
[Website](#)

Hono no Saiten (Fireworks Festival)

9 September
Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture
[Website](#)

Setomono Matsuri (Sale of Japanese Ceramic)

9 September - 10 September
Seto, Aichi Prefecture
[Website](#)

Jike Kiriko Matsuri (Tower Float)

9 September
Suzu, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website](#)

Jumangoku Matsuri (Large Plate Float)

9 September – 10 September
Kaga, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website](#)

Kanazawa Odori (Traditional Dance)

15 September – 18 September
Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website](#)

Yanagida Taisai

16 September – 17 September
Noto Town, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website](#)

Hoze Matsuri

16 September - 17 September
Hachiman-jinja Shrine and others,
Obama, Fukui Prefecture
[Website](#)

Zentoku-ji Temple

17 September – 18 September
Johana, Nanto, Toyoma Prefecture
[Website](#)

Okuma Kabuto Matsuri

20 September
Nakajima, Nanao City of Noto
Peninsula, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website](#)

Koi-koi Matsuri

22 September – 23 September
Yamanaka Onsen, Kaga, Ishikawa
Prefecture
[Website](#)

Eco Candle Fair

23 September
Ikeda Town, Fukui Prefecture
[Website](#)





Block 6

Belgian Beer Weekend 2017

30 August – 3 September
Meriken Park, Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website](#)

Kutani Zanzaka Odori (Dancing Parade)

15 September
Mikata, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hagi Matsuri

18 September - 24 September
Nashinoki-jinja Shrine, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website](#)

Mizukake Matsuri (Water Battle Festival)

17 September
Awaji, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tsukiji Danjiri Matsuri

16 September - 17 September
Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website](#)

Seimei-jinja Reisai

22 September - 23 September
Seimei-jinja Shrine and others, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website](#)

Kushi Matsuri (Comb Festival)

25 September
Higashiyama, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 7

Waraji Matsuri

18 September
Nakiri-jinja Shrine, Daio-cho, Shima, Mie Prefecture

[Website](#)

Kishiwada Danjiri Festival

16 September – 17 September
Miyamotocho, Kishiwada, Osaka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Jingu Aki-no-Kagura-sai

22 September - 24 September
Ise-jingu Shrine, Naiku, Sansuden Hall, Ise, Mie Prefecture

[Website](#)





Block 8

Local Character Festival

9 September – 10 September
Yamate-machi, Susaki, Kochi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hyoge Matsuri

10 September
Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website](#)

Tokushima Hyoutanjima Suitosai

16 September – 18 September
Aiba-cho, Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 9

SHIN Insect Exhibition

15 July – 24 September
Oda, Shimane Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hassaku Oshi-tsuki

1 September
Tsuma, Oki Island, Shimane Prefecture

[Website](#)

Somen Nagashi

2 September – 30 September
Suijin Park, Nishidera, Ofukuchokami, Mine City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Otokunchi Honou (Parade with Fire)

23 September
Kita-Hiroshima Town, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website](#)

Pocket Marche

30 September – 1 October
Higashihonji-cho, Tottori City, Tottori Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 10

Hojoya Festival

12 September - 18 September
Hakozaki-gu Shrine, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hakamano Menburyu (Mask Dance)

23 September
Takeo City, Saga Prefecture

[Website](#)

Yamanongaku (Ritual Dance Festival)

23 September
Kama, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Goto Island Festival

29 September - 1 October
Fukue, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website](#)





Block 11

Hassaku Matsuri

2 September - 3 September

Yamato Town, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website](#)

Boze God Mask Festival

6 September

Akuseki Island, Tokara Village,

Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website](#)

Fujisaki Hachiman-gu Shu-ki Reitaisai

13 September - 18 September

Fujisaki Hachiman-gu Shrine and others, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website](#)

Eisa Festival

15 September - 17 September

Island-wide festival in Okinawa

Prefecture

[Website](#)

The 37th Fireworks Display of Aya

16 September

Minamimata, Aya-cho,

Higashimorokata-gun, Miyazaki City,

Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website](#)

Ara Odori

24 September

Sangasho Jinja Shrine, Gogase

Town, Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website](#)

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Ilaura Rossiter

Ilaura Rossiter

Micah Briguera

Vi Phan



To Accept or Not to Accept, Immigrants and Japan's Ageing Population

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)

Will Japan be able to survive without the help of immigrants? This question has once again been raised and the answer is looking quite bleak.

Back in 2005, Tokyo Immigration Bureau's then-director, Hidenori Sakanaka, proposed a plan for Japan to accept 10 million immigrants over a 50-year period, but his proposal was not well-received and it was soon abandoned.

Currently, Japan has the most aged population in the world, with around 26 per cent of the nation's population being over 65. As stated in the United Nation's 2015 World Population Ageing Report, 33 per cent were aged 60 years or over, and the population is expected to continue to age, "reaching 37 per cent aged 60 years or over in 2030 and 42 per cent in 2050." (1) Additionally, the birth rate of Japan is at an all-time low.

Because of the ageing population and low fertility, Japan is facing a major challenge since there are fewer workers paying taxes to support the elder population's pensions and healthcare needs.

This year indicates that Japan's labor shortage has hit a 43-year high as companies struggle to fill vacancies left by an ageing workforce, and it is predicted to keep rising in the upcoming years.

Immigration could be seen as an obvious solution to Japan's labor and demographic issues. However, the idea of increasing the number of immigrants in the country does not seem to sit well with the political class.

Today, foreign nationals make up 1.6 per cent of the country's population. And although Japan is the fourth largest donor to the UN Refugee Agency, in 2016, only 28 of the 10,901 refugee applicants were accepted. (2)

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe does not see Japan's declining population as a "burden," but an "incentive," and seeks to encourage more women and senior citizens to join the workforce.

Sources:

(1) <http://bit.ly/1Y2LeF4>

(2) <http://cnn.it/2vh0ido>

Photo: Evashree





How I discovered Iwami Kagura

Pamela Suriyachai (Shimane)

Since it was my first week living alone in Japan, I decided to go out for a walk in hopes of potentially coming across something interesting. To my disappointment, however, it was a peaceful night. The light of the full moon was accompanied by a gentle breeze and in contrast to the lively atmosphere of the city, there was nothing — not a single trace of human activity in sight save for the banging of the drums...

The banging of the drums...?

My ears picked up a faint sound of what seemed to be the rhythmic banging of drums in the wind. It must have been at least five minutes, but the banging was still as strong as ever. So on the pretense that I had no work the following day, I decided to investigate, and followed the sound into the darker path, away from the direction of my apartment, relying solely on the light of the full moon and the sound of the drums to guide me. I eventually managed to find my way to a set of steep stairs made of stone. By now, the drums were accompanied by the high-pitched sound of a flute and cymbals.

The top of the stairs revealed a *torii* (a traditional Japanese gate mostly found at the entrance of Shinto shrines) and a large group of people crowding around dancers clad in bright, traditional Japanese costumes and masks, moving their bodies in accordance to the rhythm of what I realized was the accompanying band. In my curiosity, I tried to skillfully weave my way around the crowd of people to get a better look at the dancers. Suddenly, smoke seeped through the room from behind the curtains, and *one, two, three, four* giant dragon-like creatures rapidly emerged from the curtains towards me. I almost let out an instinctive scream, but was able to hold it in at the last minute.

That night, I sat next to a girl who had been living here a year prior to me. From her, and later through work, I would learn that those “dragons” were representations of the giant serpent monster in *Orochi*, one of the most popular performances under an even bigger umbrella of traditional performances called Iwami Kagura.

So, what exactly is Iwami Kagura?

Well, it took a few performances and many hours of research at work for me to be able to see it from a holistic point of view, but it essentially is this:

A traditional art passed down over many generations, Kagura is a type of Shinto theatrical performance that originally served ritualistic purposes and often told stories of battles between god and demons, drawing on elements from Japanese mythology. Now, however, it has evolved to include elements of street performances and is thus a popular form of entertainment among the locals at festivals often held annually. One most interesting aspect is that, in Kagura, there are various sub-types depending on the region. For instance, we have Iwami Kagura in the Iwami region (western Shimane), which is known for its fast-paced performances geared more towards the purpose of entertainment. Likewise, in Hiroshima, there is Hiroshima Kagura, and in Izumo (most famous for Izumo Shrine), there is Izumo Kagura which is geared more towards ritualistic functions.

Sounds interesting! When and where can I go see it?

Since Iwami Kagura was originally a dance devoted to the gods for good harvests and good catches of fish, it often takes places in Autumn or at special events such as festivals. Nowadays, however, those interested in Iwami Kagura can see it any time of the year at Sanku Shrine, located in a quaint little city called Hamada. Performances are held every Saturday and start at 7:30PM, but people gather well before to claim seats closest to the stage.

I was never actually a fan of traditional Japanese performances previously, because I was under the impression that they were all slow and anticlimactic, but Iwami Kagura has proven to be none of those. If you're interested in Japanese culture, or even if you're just looking for something fun to do, I would definitely recommend going to see Iwami Kagura.





KELLY SAVAGE'S DEATH SHEDS LIGHT ON THE USE OF RESTRAINTS AT PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS IN JAPAN

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)

The death of Kelly Savage, a second year ALT in Kagoshima Prefecture, has shined a light on the treatment of patients in psychiatric hospitals in Japan — namely in regard to the use of physical restraints.

Kelly, who came to Japan on the JET Programme in August 2015, was hospitalized at Yamato Hospital in Kanagawa for 10 days after he suffered from a manic episode said to be related to bipolar disorder. Then on May 10, his heart stopped, and seven days later, after being transferred to the cardiology unit at another hospital and being left severely brain dead, the 27-year-old New Zealand native died.

Kelly's family believes his death is the result of him being almost continuously restrained at the psychiatric hospital by straps at his waist, wrists, and legs.

According to Kelly's older brother, Pat Savage, who Kelly had been visiting before his hospitalization, the lack of mobility due to the restraints resulted in the formation of deep vein thrombosis (DVT). The blood clot is said to have formed in his leg, then it traveled up his bloodstream and ended up blocking the flow of blood in his lungs, which caused a heart attack.

Savage told *The Japan Times* that the restraints "should never have been used in the first place" and especially not for 10 days.

He stated that he was surprised by the immediate use of restraints when his brother was brought into the hospital even though Kelly had calmed down and was following their orders.

"I was shocked that they suddenly put restraints on him," said Savage. "And I told them I don't think he needed that, but they said he will remain restrained for a while." (1)

During Kelly's stay at the psychiatric hospital, Savage alleges hospital staff asked him to purchase adult diapers for his brother as he would be restrained "for a long time."

An absolute ban on the use of restraint in healthcare settings has been called for by the United Nations special rapporteur on torture. Stating that a threshold of mistreatment that is tantamount to torture or inhumane handling may be crossed under the guise of healthcare policies. (2)

Kelly's family stated that they were not allowed to visit him for more than a week, because of Golden Week, and when they were allowed to see him, he was heavily sedated.

Kelly was said to have even feared for his life, and would beg his family members to help him escape the hospital.

There has been an increasing trend of using restraints at psychiatric hospitals in Japan. According to health ministry statistics, in 2014, patients that had been restrained over the past decade had doubled to 10,682.

Toshio Hasegawa, a professor of health sciences at Kyorin University in Tokyo said that not only is the use of restraints increasing but the duration of their use is inhumanly long. After conducting a study of 11 psychiatric facilities across Japan, Hasegawa found that 245 patients were restrained for 96.2 days on average. Some of those patients were even restrained for more than six months to a year.

In its 2013 report, the United Nations Committee against Torture said that it remains concerned with Japan's psychiatric health care because of "the frequent use of solitary confinement, restraints and forced medication, actions which may amount to inhumane and degrading treatment."

There is currently a campaign underway, headed by Hasegawa, which seeks to have the use of restraints in psychiatric hospitals revised and reduced.

Kelly's family is also a part of this campaign, and they are also trying to gain full access to his medical records which have yet to be released by the hospital.

His mother, Martha Savage, believes that if her son had been treated in New Zealand he would still be with them today.

"It has been horrible and we are terribly sad," she told *The Guardian*. "We want something good to come out of this so other people never have to go through the same thing we did. We want to stop this happening to other people." (3)

Kelly had a history of mental illness and was previously hospitalized in his home country. But he eventually recovered and, after moving to Japan, was enjoying his life as a well-liked and engaging member of the JET community.

Sources:

- (1) <http://bit.ly/2tSt1AD>
- (2) <http://bit.ly/18UCGLQ>
- (3) <http://bit.ly/2uhWlyV>

Photo:

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



Akie Abe: The Artful Dodger How Japan's First Lady Became an Internet Icon

Ben Baer (Osaka)

The Ford Foundation is among the world's largest and most influential charitable organizations. Its outreach programs and financial contributions support everything from economic empowerment and education to the creative arts and Third World development. The foundation naturally attracts high profile donors and activists to its causes. In 2014, for example, the Ford Foundation hosted the R3ADY Asia-Pacific conference. In light of the then-recent Sendai earthquake, Japanese First Lady, Akie Abe, was invited to head the keynote presentation. The [video](#) of Abe's speech has been viewed online approximately 1.4 million times since the event took place. In the video, Mrs. Abe is seen delivering a fourteen minute address. Despite a handful of small fumbles, Mrs. Abe manages to

deliver a thought-provoking speech entirely in English. Considering the nerve-wracking nature of the event and her lack of formal English practice, this feat is all the more impressive. Perhaps most impressive, however, is that United States President Donald Trump seems to believe Japan's First Lady can't speak English at all.

According to Mr. Trump, "She's a terrific woman, but doesn't speak English... like, not 'hello.'" (1) Sitting next to someone for a two hour dinner without conversing must be tense to say the least. However, despite the communication breakdown, Mr. Trump seemed to enjoy himself, saying, "I

enjoyed the evening with her, and she's really a lovely woman... the whole thing was good." (2) Mrs. Abe has not said if the feeling was mutual.

A recent interview between Mr. Trump and the New York Times revealed that Mrs. Abe refrained from speaking even a word of English to the president, instead relying on an interpreter for the evening of the G20 Summit on July 19th. On its surface, the story seems innocuous. Perhaps the First Lady simply didn't feel comfortable conversing in English. Also possible is that Mrs. Abe wished to avoid any potential miscommunication at such a high profile event. Whatever the



Despite a considerable amount of Western interest in Mrs. Abe's decision to remain quiet at the G20 reception, the story has been less covered in the Land of the Rising Sun. Bloggers from Japanese-only message boards such as the infamous 2chan have commented that such a *Kuuki Yomenai* move is unsurprising coming from Mr. Trump. *Kuuki Yomenai* literally translates to "not reading the air." This can be interpreted as "reading the room," or "not being oblivious," in English. Other J-bloggers have noted that Mrs. Abe has actually been seen speaking English at PR and charity events on several occasions, although videos of this are harder to come by.

What does this all mean? Can the First Lady speak English? Was her refusal to converse directly with President Trump a clever ruse? Whatever the answer, Mrs. Abe is being lauded by many for her cool attitude towards America's controversial new President. The recent admiration for Mrs. Abe isn't surprising. After all, there are few among us who don't wish we could simply avoid awkward dinner party conversations from time to time. This small act of defiance is quickly helping the First Lady to attain a level of internet celebrity boarding on memetic. Perhaps the future will reveal the true nature of the First Lady's English ability. But for now, she remains something of an internet anti-hero that this author is excited to see more of.

actual reason for sticking to Japanese, western media outlets were quick to begin speculating.

One popular theory behind this apparent snub came from feminist author Jessica Valenti, who posited that Mrs. Abe, "pretended not to speak English for nearly 2 hrs to avoid talking to Trump." (3)

"Awesome! Akie Abe hates Trump so much she pretended she couldn't speak English. For hours," proclaimed philanthropist Mark Elliot. (4)

"Akie Abe is my new hero," tweeted The Guardian's Sam Thielman. (5)

"(Shinzo Abe's) wife totally knows 'hello,'" said Daily Beast reporter Spencer Ackerman. (6)

Countless similar sentiments are scattered across the web. However, there is very little consensus regarding how much English the First Lady *really* speaks. Some sources (such as Mrs. Abe herself) claim that she can't speak English at all. However, The Japan Times reports that she graduated from the English Department of Sacred Heart Professional Training College in Tokyo and studied English at vocational school before securing a job at Dentsu, Japan's largest advertising agency.

Sources:

- (1) <http://wapo.st/2uEeX2g>
- (2) <http://bit.ly/2vaLCdt>
- (3) <http://bit.ly/2vaLCdt>
- (4) <http://bit.ly/2wj3hj8>
- (5) <http://bit.ly/2finIOE>
- (6) <http://bit.ly/2vDCIhl>

Photo:

<http://nyti.ms/2fngNhY>

Ben is an English teacher from America living in Japan going on four years. When he's not working, he can be found loitering outside of convenience stores or watching reruns of Star Trek and eating cereal.

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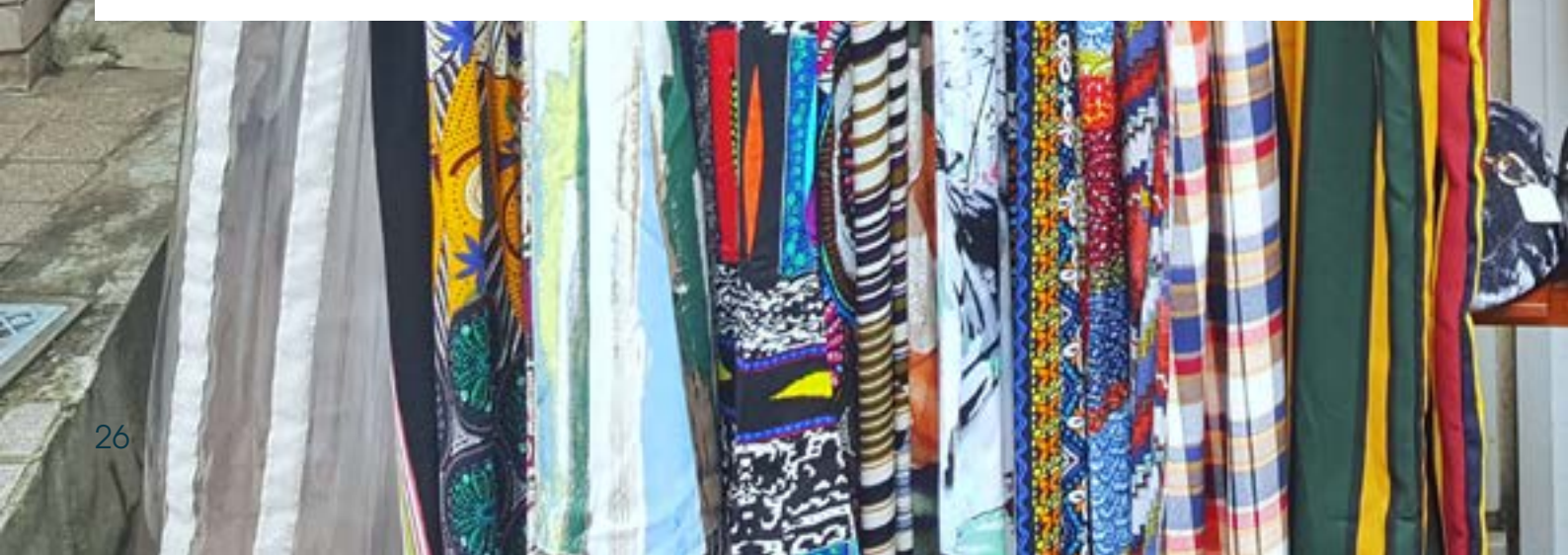
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NATIONAL LOOKS: 4 STANDOUT CITIES FOR STYLE

Zoom out on Japan and you see a cluster of islands, bound together by language, bands of mountains, history, and culture. But zoom in, past the ubiquitous rice paddies and chain stores and salarymen in their black suits, and the country's diversity emerges. Nowhere is this diversity displayed more outwardly than in fashion. This month, we celebrate the fashion specialties and identities of four unique cities, each of which has squarely earned its place on Japan's vibrant style map. What seems at a glance like a national style gives way to an increasingly complex show of local fashion cultures, quirky side streets, and independent attitudes, celebrated as only a city can. Your next sartorial escape might seem a world away — even if it's right next door.



HIROSHIMA

Bianca Sanchez



Standing a few inches taller than most in the middle of Hondori — Hiroshima’s shopping district — I have a vision. It’s straight out of American TV, circa 1960s.

I see bell-bottoms with white Adidas sneakers poking through, cinched in at a high waistline. A tiny mustard yellow top falls off the shoulders — one of which has a dangling, long-strapped white clutch that barely holds anything. The 60s have made a comeback in Japan, finding a true home in Hiroshima, the City of Peace.

Then there’s the *denim*. On the slender and short physique of the average Japanese woman, normal ones just don’t cut it. Even if she’s taller than 5 foot 5 (165 centimeters).

No, here you need pants that are exaggerated, big, wide to the point of looking like giant teepees for tiny feet. It works. The size of these pants appears particularly ginormous on women so small, but it adds to that doll-like quality that the Japanese love. Bell-bottoms here are frayed at the end, some with holes. Most

are seamless, unaltered denim like two elongated cones engulfing your legs. A small, tight-fitting top adds curves, one that’s off the shoulder with short, puffed sleeves adorned with beautiful red, green, and yellow flowers, resembling a traditional hand-embroidered Mexican motif. Outspoken but not loud, a little old-school, but entirely chic. Cherry red lips and a high top bun tie it all together. Plus big, chunky hoop earrings — gold looks best.

The city is industrious and looming, and most of Hiroshima’s cityscape exhibits Japan’s tight and incessant workforce: Steel, glass, and gray. But the wide open streets, parks, and glimmering rivers also speak a “vintage” language. Red, sporty coupes, pastel yellow Fiats, and Mini

Coopers cruise by, including one of those classic VW vans.

Still, the essence of Hiroshima lies in its people, young and old, and their longing for peace. This has created a culture of its own that has seeped into fashion, and a creativity that has captured the heart of one young twenty-something adopted by the city of peace.

Dig it, man.



In a post 3/11 world, googling “Sendai” won’t provide you with much more than tsunami footage. What the internet won’t show you is the resurgence in youth culture that has made Tohoku’s biggest city into a fashion capital rivaling any city down south.



Conveniently by Sendai Station, the Ichibancho shopping arcades get plenty of foot traffic from students eager to snap up yet another embroidered top at high-street stores like Zara or H&M. But veer onto one of the quaint ivy-walled alleys for small boutiques and vintage shops, backdrops which you can find on blogs like Miyagi Street Snap. While American imports still have a lot of clout, Sendai’s mix of idyllic nature and modern buildings inspires a unique type of minimalist, even genderless fashion. The Sendai Mediatheque, a stripped-down glass and concrete art center, is frequented by locals in blacks, whites, and neutrals with strong silhouettes, taking cues from Yohji Yamamoto.

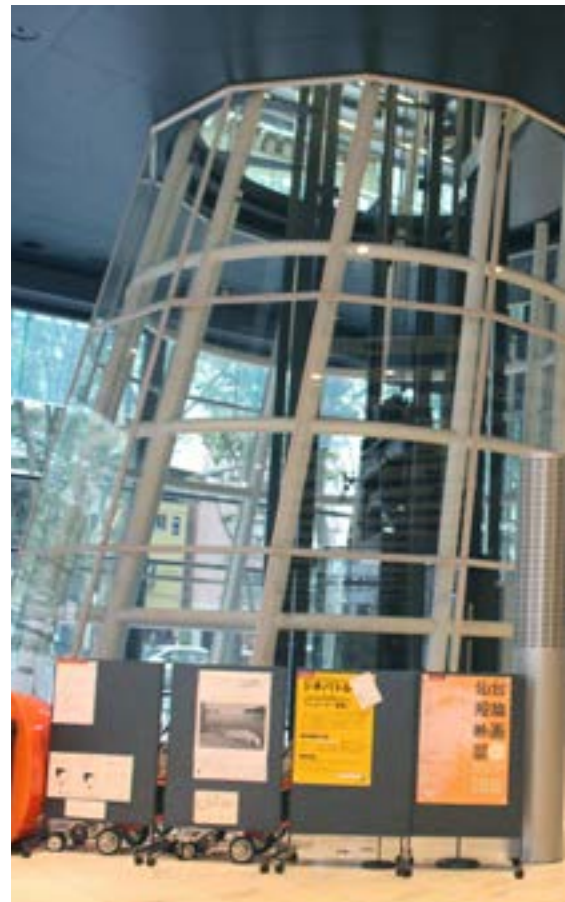
Older folks aren’t exempt from the Sendai fashion scene either. Grey-haired icons [@bonpon511](#) run an Instagram filled with meticulously planned outfits, curated to match their signature palette of blue, white, and red. As Tohoku natives, they travel through the region while documenting their coordinated ensembles along the way. Their daughter May, a resident of Sendai, carries on their fashion legacy, often topping it off with a beret — the ultimate French look.

SENDAI

Sareen Palassian

Sendai is also home to fledgling subcultures with their own sartorial nuances. An intimate community centered around the Bridge Sendai skate shop has brought about a noticeable wave of men’s street style, and a yearly rap and skate-filled Street Festa. An underground music scene also makes its fashion presence known, which you can witness in the Kokubuncho nightlife district. Industrial, punk, and noise circles shake up the usual fast fashion with floor-length pleather trench coats, sky-high Docs and tattoo-baring DIY shredded fabrics.

Sareen Palassian made the move from Los Angeles to Sendai one year ago, and is on her second year of JET. She has had multiple style phases but now is carving her niche within Japanese fashion. Her hobbies include learning languages, embroidery and DJing (whether it be to a crowd, in a radio station, or on the AUX cable in a car). She dreams of becoming a professor and traveling the world.





TOKYO



Kate Montgomery



Tokyo is not necessarily representative of Japan. Generally speaking, it's more cosmopolitan and internationalized. But even by Tokyo standards, Nakano stands out. People say Nakano is the happiest ward in Tokyo, and it's easy to see in the relaxed, unique lives people lead there. And nowhere is it more apparent than in fashion.

In contrast to neighborhoods like Ginza and Omotesando, Nakano seems much more resistant to fashion trends for the sake of trends. I would venture to say there's no particular "Nakano look." You'll see a big range of styles, from students with their comfortable and expressive clothes (think: T-shirts for underground bands, clothes featuring clever slogans), to older counterculture guys with tattoos dressed in muted colors, to women in geometrically innovative dresses.

Home to many thrift stores and upper scale used clothing boutiques, Nakano forgoes the pages of international fashion magazines and encourages

locals to dress for themselves. It's clear looking at the mix of new shoes and slightly battered jackets, well-worn jeans and colorful tote bags that people choose every single item carefully and individually. No one here looks like they stepped straight out of a United Arrows catalog.

In my neighborhood, there's a young Middle Eastern family where the women dress in styles native to their home country, in vibrant pink and orange. Down the street an older woman in light floral patterns often walks her small dog. Further down, there are two young guys who skateboard at night, hanging out in one particular cul-de-sac with their cargo shorts and Vans.

Whoever you are and wherever you come from, Nakano is a place where you can explore your own style. With no pressure to look or behave a certain way, people here choose what they love to suit their personalities. Even in a city as big and diverse as Tokyo, that kind of total freedom is rare and precious.



Christine Cummings

SAPPORO

Up north lies one of Japan's snowiest cities, Sapporo — where urban meets nature and East meets West. This isn't your average metropolitan city. Bursting with art and creativity, Sapporo shares its hipster aesthetic with its sister city of Portland. You can see flannel, flannel everywhere. Buried in snow for most of the year, residents spend their winter months bundled in layers singing "Sweater Weather." However, once the snow thaws, Keen sandals — sometimes socks included — and other outdoorsy clothes aren't an uncommon sight along Nakajima Park.

With its laidback vibe, it's no wonder jazz and 60s rock took root here and grew. The music scene thrives in Sapporo. It's an easy place to catch a live gig, find an old record shop, or spot Jimmy Hendrix plastered on the wall of a bar. For a cool creative space, check out Provo. Owned by a record label owner, the lounge looks like a grunge band's renovated basement — complete with comfy couches, a tennis table, and featured art from local artists.



In little nooks scattered across the city, you can also find cafes repurposed out of industrial warehouses or old homes. One such hidden gem includes the cafe Morihiko. There you can sip a cup of home-roasted coffee while reading a book inside a cozy attic tucked away in one of Maruyama's historic neighborhoods.

Overall, one of Japan's chilliest cities has an equally chill style. Secluded on the northernmost island of Hokkaido, Sapporo has developed its own bizarre microcosm of culture so unique, I wonder if I'm still living in Japan.

Photos:
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Christine Cummings is a modern day Romantic living in Sapporo. You can follow her adventures on Instagram @whimsydearest





CALL ME GIZMO

Jack Richardson (Yamagata)

When I ask if I can use Mikkel's full name in this article, Mikkel responds, "I don't like making my Bruce Wayne identity too discoverable." He may not be Batman, but he's no stranger to multiple identities. An English teacher in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Prefecture by day, Gizmo by night, he's a Trinidadian-American rapper who's lived in Japan for the last six years.

"Some of my students found me, found out I rap and stuff," he tells me with a chuckle, "and every now and again they ask me, 'Hey, rap, Gizmo, rap rap rap!' I'll sometimes do it at the end of the class if they're good. Other than that, I try to keep my superhero lifestyle away from my private lifestyle, you know?" Despite this, he feels he's always been an entertainer and has taken energy from performance, be it in front of a crowd or a classroom.

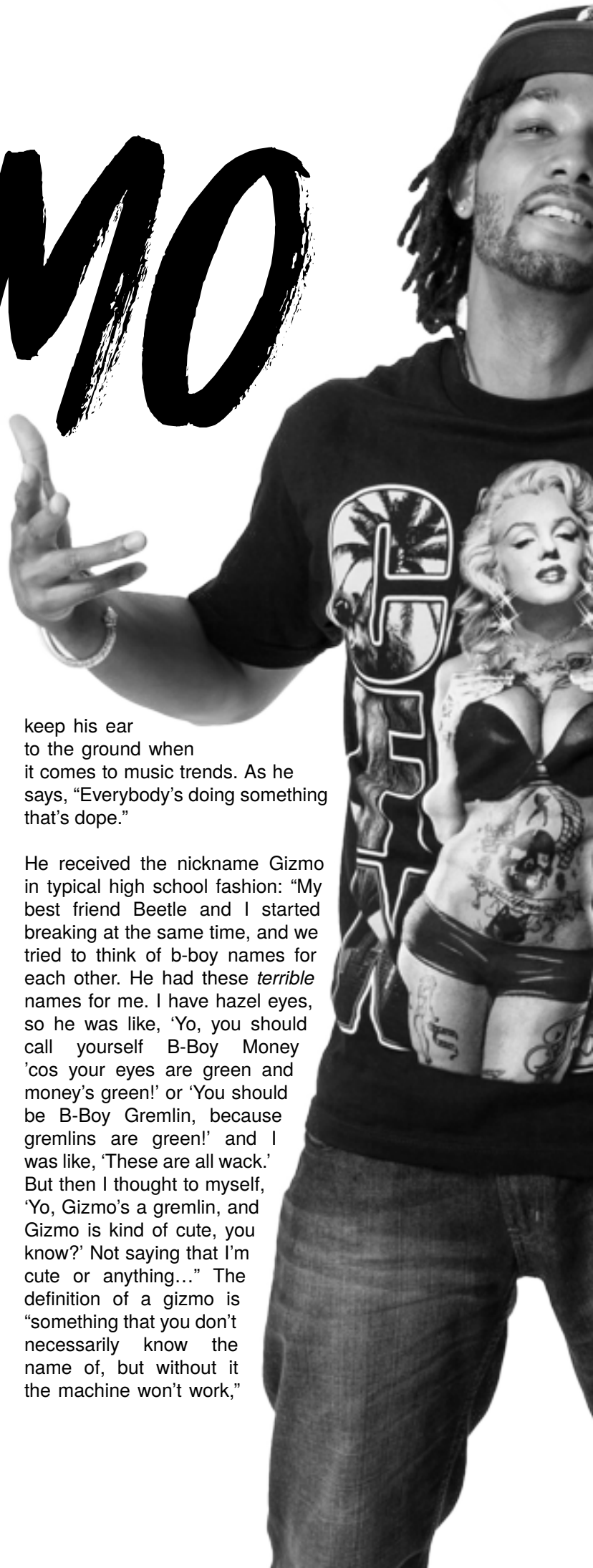
Each stage of Gizmo's life so far seems unpredictable yet fated. As a young boy in Trinidad, he would stay up late with his uncle (who, only five years older than him, was "more like a big brother") on a Saturday night to *maybe* get lucky and see some *anime* on one of the three channels. Kung fu movies were also big at the time, and this further fuelled his love of Asian culture. It was "basic *otaku* stuff," as Gizmo puts it.

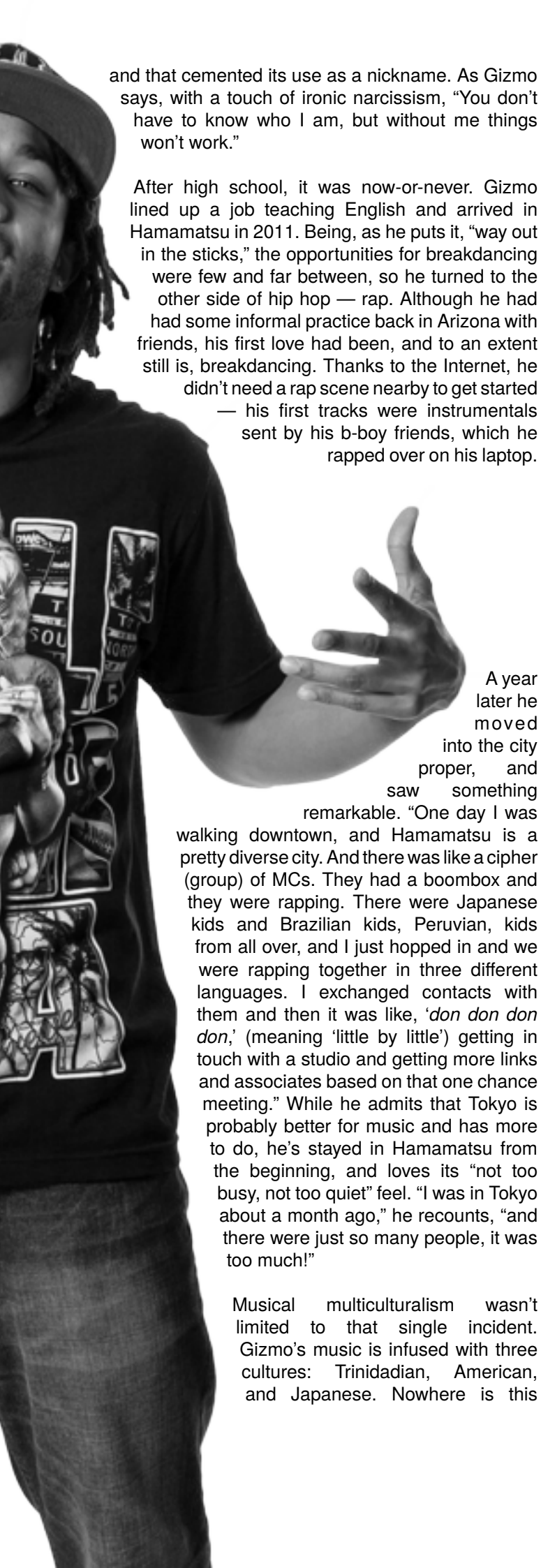
He moved to New York at the age of eight with the same uncle, where he defied being drawn into the burgeoning hip-hop scene of mid-90s New York City. Instead, he stuck to Caribbean reggae and soka music, which still influences Gizmo's sound today — Buju Banton remains one of his favorite artists of all time.

It was in Arizona, where he lived for 16 years, that he fell into the hip-hop scene. In high school he began breakdancing, "playing a lot of funk, some disco, a lot of boom-bap hip-hop style beats." Now, he calls himself a "dusthead" when it comes to music, favoring the '90s sound in his current music tastes. That said, Gizmo tries to

keep his ear to the ground when it comes to music trends. As he says, "Everybody's doing something that's dope."

He received the nickname Gizmo in typical high school fashion: "My best friend Beetle and I started breaking at the same time, and we tried to think of b-boy names for each other. He had these *terrible* names for me. I have hazel eyes, so he was like, 'Yo, you should call yourself B-Boy Money 'cos your eyes are green and money's green!' or 'You should be B-Boy Gremlin, because gremlins are green!' and I was like, 'These are all wack.' But then I thought to myself, 'Yo, Gizmo's a gremlin, and Gizmo is kind of cute, you know?' Not saying that I'm cute or anything..." The definition of a gizmo is "something that you don't necessarily know the name of, but without it the machine won't work,"





and that cemented its use as a nickname. As Gizmo says, with a touch of ironic narcissism, “You don’t have to know who I am, but without me things won’t work.”

After high school, it was now-or-never. Gizmo lined up a job teaching English and arrived in Hamamatsu in 2011. Being, as he puts it, “way out in the sticks,” the opportunities for breakdancing were few and far between, so he turned to the other side of hip hop — rap. Although he had had some informal practice back in Arizona with friends, his first love had been, and to an extent still is, breakdancing. Thanks to the Internet, he didn’t need a rap scene nearby to get started — his first tracks were instrumentals sent by his b-boy friends, which he rapped over on his laptop.

A year later he moved into the city proper, and saw something remarkable. “One day I was walking downtown, and Hamamatsu is a pretty diverse city. And there was like a cipher (group) of MCs. They had a boombox and they were rapping. There were Japanese kids and Brazilian kids, Peruvian, kids from all over, and I just hopped in and we were rapping together in three different languages. I exchanged contacts with them and then it was like, ‘*don don don don*,’ (meaning ‘little by little’) getting in touch with a studio and getting more links and associates based on that one chance meeting.” While he admits that Tokyo is probably better for music and has more to do, he’s stayed in Hamamatsu from the beginning, and loves its “not too busy, not too quiet” feel. “I was in Tokyo about a month ago,” he recounts, “and there were just so many people, it was too much!”

Musical multiculturalism wasn’t limited to that single incident. Gizmo’s music is infused with three cultures: Trinidadian, American, and Japanese. Nowhere is this

more evident than on “Call Me Gizmo,” a track that’s as much *jikoshōkai* as it is chill music. “I think it’s the best representation of all the cultures I’ve experienced,” Gizmo says. Other tracks, too, keep an intensely personal feel as they move between languages and dialects with Gizmo at their center.

When it comes to specific influences, he cites soka and reggae, as well as A Tribe Called Quest, Binary Star and The Wu-Tang Clan. This is to say nothing of the breakdancing tradition. “Coming as a b-boy, I try to be true to hip-hop in what I’m doing,” he explains, “but as for artistic influences, there are a lot of Caribbean influences.”

These three cultures, often mixed in Gizmo’s music, are split in his YouTube videos. We can see Gizmo the American b-boy, Wakatan the Trinidadian, and Taro, Mikkel’s “kind of yakuza Japanese personality.” Despite being comfortable in all three languages, Gizmo is clear on his identity: “I’m not Japanese. I’m a Trinidadian-American who lives in Japan.”

According to Gizmo, today’s Japan, while still not as multicultural as many would like, is nevertheless going in the right direction. “When I first went to Ōsaka back in 2005, and even in such a big city some people were like ‘Wow, it’s a black guy in Japan,’ taking pictures and recording me and stuff. Not everyone, but there were a few instances. And now that doesn’t happen at all. I still get stares sometimes out in the sticks but in Tokyo or Ōsaka, people don’t bat an eye.” With the 2020 Olympics just around the corner, Japan looks likely to continue this trend.

Music crosses boundaries, but it’s also helped Gizmo to improve his Japanese language skills. Having studied Japanese only a little (“I should probably study more”), he became fluent through experience. Writing raps, he says, “puts a certain pressure on me to translate. I’m thinking, ‘How do I say this cooler? How do I flip this word?’ ... [I] learn things when I look it up.” This more dynamic kind of so-called studying works well compared to “silently staring at a book,” he argues.

Apart from the language, Gizmo says that the best thing about living in Japan is the feeling of, “I’m in Japan! It still has a newness to it after six years. I kind of stagnated in Arizona, but even just walking home from work I can take a different route and everything seems brand new again.” Living life in Japan has been Gizmo’s ambition for many years, and this excitement at having achieved it shows through in his music. “Travelling Man” in particular, while autobiographical like “Call Me Gizmo,” blazes with excited energy at the thought of being in “the land of bamboo, *tengu*, and Gundam.”

Ironically, the thing Gizmo misses most about America is Mexican food (“How funny is that?”). Trinidadian food also holds a place in his heart for its robustness, which



"TAKE TIME TO LEARN
YOUR CRAFT."

is unlike Japan's traditionally delicate fare. Meeting MCs in town aside, interactions in America or Trinidad tend to be friendlier and more relaxed, and it's much easier to strike up a conversation with a stranger. "*Ebi tempura* is still great, though," he adds.

Moving back to music (at this point in the interview both our stomachs are rumbling), I ask what Gizmo has planned next. His last major project, *Big in Japan 2*, was only released in July, but he's already started on something new. Gizmo has a tendency to make each project unique, and is perfectly happy to admit that he's still finding his style. "I wanna experiment with different sounds and work with different producers," he says, "and every time I do something with a different producer it creates something new. I just wanna keep flourishing as an artist, keep experimenting and doing different things."

As for the next project, he won't give the name. He does, however, tell me that he's leaving the chill boom-bap feel of *Big in Japan* behind in favour of a more bassy sound. Of course, it'll involve American, Japanese and Trinidadian cultures, but in a "sonically different" way.

Gizmo has worked hard to get where he is, and even now it isn't always easy. His advice to newcomers to

Japan reflects this. "Fundamentally you have to make sure you're comfortable with being by yourself. You left home, your family, and all your friends to be here, and while you have Skype, if you're in the sticks like I was, you're going to be alone a lot of the time. Don't squander your time binge-watching *Game of Thrones*. Take time to learn your craft. Use your extra time to study. Even one *kanji* a day is 365 kanji a year. You can learn Japanese; it's not that hard. And stay out of the *gaijin* bubble! If you only speak English every weekend and don't talk to Japanese people, you deprive yourself of truly enjoying Japan and its fine culture."

It appears Gizmo has followed his own advice. His music is polished and its inception was forced by his year in the countryside, and could only have been made by someone adept at switching cultures, codes and languages. Despite his nickname, Gizmo remains humble and committed to his craft, even if he now has the distractions of a city to contend with. "Hopefully," he says, "I'll just make something great one day."

You can hear Gizmo's work on his [site](#) and [Soundcloud](#) or visit his [Youtube channel](#).



**"HOPEFULLY...I'LL JUST
MAKE SOMETHING
GREAT ONE DAY."**

Your Top Ten Must-See Musical Experiences in Japan

Cheyenne Fayant-McLeod (Hokkaido)

I knew there was a finite number of things I would be able to accomplish while living in Japan. I've read lists of the "must-see" sights, "must-do" experiences, and "must-eat" foods, but when all's said and done, those don't connect me with the community or people around me. I field questions from acquaintances and co-workers alike: *Oh, you haven't climbed Mt. Fuji? Never been to the Fire Festival? You haven't visited Nagoya? Are you even interested in Japanese culture? What have you been **doing** this whole time?*

The answer is, connecting with Japan in a different way!

To me, the usual tourism experiences make me feel like I'm just passing through, taking pictures and knowing full well that it won't come home with me. I fell out of love with that type of tourism real fast, so I started this year with the goal of seeing 30 shows. It seemed intimidating but before February ended, I was broke and booked up until summer. By late April I had 33 shows scheduled. By August, I'd seen 27 shows, and there is no doubt I'll be far past 30 by December.

The Japanese music scene is an intense, dynamic, and fascinating place, and an often overlooked and underrated aspect of our host country. I've used my experiences this year to create my own "Must-See" list.



See a Pop-Diva from the 80's

If you've lived in Japan for any amount of time, you're probably at least familiar with Idol culture. Why not get better acquainted with the classics? Go see an Idol predecessor in all their intact glory! You have not lived until you've seen a 55-year-old pop singer sell out a huge venue and ascend from the stage on a neon unicorn.

2 See a 70s Rocker

The 70s are alive and well in Japan and their musicians are in *far* better shape than most of my dear North American rockers. I have been *shocked* by how perfect these old guys still sound and how *hard* it is to get tickets due to their still-current popularity! Wow yourself, pick a rocker, and go!

3 See a Visual Kei or Post-Visual Kei Act

You *will* want to see Japan's take on punk, goth, and glam rock. These guys combine amazing stage shows, shocking aesthetics, and hard rock with emotional classic sounds. I don't care who you are, put on your blackest black and live a little by letting a rock group sing to you about death. Some of the forefathers of this genre don't do the elaborate bits anymore, but who cares when the music rocks this hard?

4 See a K-Pop Group

I had barely heard of K-Pop until I moved to Japan. And yes, it's not *strictly* "Japanese culture," but talk to some of your students and you'll find out just how unavoidable it is. These shows are intense and amazingly choreographed. Go see how these idols have charmed their way into the hearts of millions of people worldwide.





5 See a Johnny's Group

Just do it! Get out of your comfort zone, put your music purism behind you, and surround yourself with 10,000 devoted fans that will hype you up whether you want it or not. You will need a friend with a fan club membership to get tickets, but I suggest you find one and go see what all the fuss is about. You won't be disappointed if you like big spectacles! Warning: you *will* fall in love regardless of gender or sexuality, but you can always shake it off afterwards.

6 See a Chart-Topping Star

You can argue all you like about the validity and problems of the Oricon charts, but you have to admit, those top stars know what they're doing. There is no room for the average and everyday here; you're seeing the top of the top. These are the shows where you'll want to learn the lyrics beforehand because I'll bet you even your co-workers who aren't that into insert-artist-name-here will still know all the words.

7 See Something Modern

Of course you should pay homage to the elder statesmen of the Japanese music industry, but it's far too easy to get caught up in the past as you're getting your musical education. Don't forget to give the new kids a chance. I think you will be pleasantly surprised with what Japan has to offer in all genres.

8 See a Musical

Listen, you have no excuse not to see a live musical in Japan because they have *everything* to choose from. Don't like traditional musicals? No problem, see an anime musical. No? Then try a video game musical. Still not your style? Check out the 100-year old Takarazuka Revue with their all-female cast and get a glimpse of some Japanese living history that you won't see anywhere else in the world.

9

See Something Traditional

You should make an effort to see at least one traditional Japanese form of music performance. This could be anything from *enka* and *minyou* (folk music) to *shamisen* and *taiko*. You can see this at your local community center, or you can shell out for some big-name tickets and probably be the only person in the audience under 60 years old!



10 See a Local Show

If you live in the countryside this will be a lot easier, but find out who the local musicians are. Look for posters or just ask around. Support their shows and give them some love. Not only will this connect you with your community in a tangible way, but you'll make real friends, get a real look at the bare bones of Japan and music, and, of course, see a great show that isn't going to break the bank. Who knows? Maybe they'll make it big one day and you can get the hipster bragging rights: *I knew them before they were famous!*



So that's my list of the top ten music experiences you should try during your stay in Japan. Maybe they can't compare to the top of Mt. Fuji but you'll probably get just as sweaty. Take my advice and use this list and the Japanese music scene to connect to the people around you. You'll be amazed how many doors will open, how many friends you'll make, and how you'll find yourself suddenly part of the community in a very real way, something specifically difficult to do as a mere tourist.

Cheyenne Fayant-McLeod is a Hokkaido-based JET who travels all over Japan to reach their show goal for 2017. Read more about the 30+ shows and [their life in Japan on their blog](#).

Photos:
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Comfort Food and Family

Lilian Diep (Toyama)

Food plays a big role in my family. No, we didn't have cookbooks lining the shelves, or the Food Channel on 24/7, or even the fridge stocked most of the time. We did, though, know how to throw feasts.

Both sides of my parents' families are Chinese-Vietnamese, so Chinese New Years always had an abundance of food comparable to American Christmas or Thanksgiving dinners. It was a time when my extended family would visit each grandparents' home for the night or weekend and we'd have a large meal full of dishes that we normally wouldn't eat throughout the year. Think: sautéed lobster, "special" chicken, braised fatty pork, *joong* (glutinous rice bundles), Uncle's vermicelli noodles, Uncle's vermicelli noodles sans mushrooms for me, and other dishes in Chinese.

Since living in Japan for the past two years, going on three, it's difficult getting these dishes over here. It's especially difficult come times around the year when I know my family would gather and eat these foods. Video calls would turn into my grandparents teasing, saying they'd ship my favorite morsels over to me. So, I asked my new home, my Toyama community, what they missed most from their homes, and what their comfort foods were in their times of reminiscence.

Joan Conte (2nd year)

Pepperoni rolls which are kind of like pizza in a biscuit. Ravioli and pasta sauce. When I have pepperoni rolls, I feel like I've gone to the gas station back home with my friends. The smell of ravioli reminds me of my mom's cooking.

Rebecca Gingrich (4th year)

Macaroni and Cheese is so comforting to me because it was basically the only food my dad could cook without messing it up. Also, I love lasagna. It's special because it takes so long to make and my mom would only ever make it for special occasions.

Vicki Liu (1st year)

I love my parents' curry and paratha! They make it all from scratch and my mom's paratha is so good when it's fresh, warm and crispy! It's like 3 simple ingredients. The curry is usually with potatoes and meat (beef, chicken, or goat) and I've recently been loving a crispy fried egg with it too. I would put the





Recipes

curry in the paratha and make it a burrito, haha. My brother and I have been eating it since we were little and it always brings the family together. It also reminds me of where my family is from (India) and just in general how my parents are just always cooking or planning the next meal.

Samantha Cosentino (2nd year)

Chicken cutlets with apple sauce, macaroni and cheese, and asparagus with lemon/bread crumbs on the side! My mother rarely cooked but she always makes this meal for my brother and me on special occasions. Oh, and medium rare bloody steak with my mom's special sauce (some mix of A1 and Worcester sauce and some other seasoning).

Christopher Brown (5th year)

My pops and I used to go fishing and our extended family is stupid big. So a thing for a long time was a fish fry on Friday or Saturday. Fried fish (trout or catfish, sometimes flounder or *sac au lait*, depending on where we were and what we caught that day). Any flakey white fish will do. Soak your fillets in cold water before shaking them in a paper bag containing corn meal and corn flour. This isn't a double breading so you don't really need to season the flour too much, but you could (and we would). In which case you'd want salt, black and red pepper, onion and garlic powder. Heat some peanut oil up, and fry until golden brown. Let cool a bit over paper towels to manage the oil. Season to taste with salt and a squeeze of lemon. You feeling zesty, feel free to garnish with parsley and serve with tartar sauce (make your own with chopped pickles and minced white onion, mayonnaise, salt, and pepper). Mind the pin-bones.

My mom used to make a hyper dense almond flavored cake for my birthday. I don't know the recipe well enough to approximate it, but it was heavy, double layered, filled with raspberry preserves, coated in whip-cream, and garnished with coulis. Better the second day and third day, though it never lasted beyond that.

Samantha McGuire (2nd year)

Grandma Vanderdonk Pork Chops. So my grandmother's maiden name was Vandemark but my grandpa didn't like his in-laws and would call them the Vanderdonks because...fight the power(?). Anyway, my grandma's family were very stoic, Midwest farmers who would only show their love for their family members through cooking. It's just floured and pan fried pork chops my mom would serve with applesauce. Very simple, but it was always a favorite of mine growing up as a kid. I think my mom enjoys making it because it reminds her of being a kid and I would hear more stories about my mom's side of the family whenever she would make this.

Patrick Finn (ex-Unicorn)

Persimmon-mayo, the Best Worst Combo
For some, family isn't blood, but the friends you make. While in Japan, and to this day, a handful of us bonded over our love of food and general tendency to be weird. Naturally, when I was told at work that having persimmons with mayonnaise as some sort of salad was a thing, I had to try it. What fun is trying something that tempting alone though? I proposed that my good friend (who also doubles as my spirit mother, sister, or grandmother — I can't keep track) try it with me, she unexpectedly agreed! Long story short, persimmon-mayo might have been a prank that went too far, but I most certainly ate two whole pieces of the fruit smothered in the stuff. The look on my friend's face when she bit into a piece was something along the lines of, "Dear god, why would anyone do this to me?!" From then on, she has never let me live it down and continues to question my judgement. Although awful, that "recipe" will always stay with me.

As for me, my comfort food is Spam (SPAM?), eggs, and *jook* (rice porridge, also known as *okayu* in Japanese). It was something simple, easy, and filling whenever I was sick growing up. My mom made it without fail whenever someone was sick in my house, or the go-to breakfast meal with pickled vegetables (breakfast...isn't a thing in my family). It equated to making me always feeling better and also something I can make in the morning that'll last me the whole day as I recovered.

Photo:
[wikicommons](#)

Capturing *Shikoku*

Amon Bradshaw
(Ex-ALT, Kōchi)

Earlier this year, starting just before Spring Break and finishing after Golden Week, JETs around *Shikoku* participated in the newly revived Block 8 Photography Contest. A large number of mobile and camera photos were submitted in each category but after the votes came in four clear winners came out on top. Following the competition I interviewed the four winners about their photographs, experiences on JET, lives living in *Shikoku* and why they think the smallest of Japan's main islands is well worth the visit.



Matthew McLean
BEST CAMERA PHOTO

The Photo

Shinto Shrine (Kuroshio, Kochi). This is a Shinto shrine I pass daily. I took this picture because I like the way the light passes through the trees along the path.

Where are you located in Shikoku?

I'm a Canadian ALT in *Kuroshio Town, Kochi*. I'm in my fifth year.

What's your most distinct memory from JET so far?

Oceanside karaoke and fireworks at one of *Kuroshio Town's* local neighbourhood festivals is something I don't think I'll ever forget. When I thought of karaoke before coming to Japan I thought it was only done in a small booth with a couple of friends. I never imagined performing in front of a couple hundred people on a small hill in a harbour. It was amazing!

What's your favorite place/thing to photograph on Shikoku?

I like to take my camera when I go cycling and photograph random stuff I see as I ride so most of my photos right now are of various things in *Kuroshio Town* and *Shimanto City*. I also like taking outdoor sports photos.

Shikoku Top 5

- *Katsuo no tataki*, it's my favorite Japanese food. *Shio-tataki*, the salt variant, is my personal favorite!
- *Kashiwajima*, it has great beaches, great hikes and good snorkelling. It's a must see destination.
- *The Shimanami Kaido* in *Ehime* is a beautiful place to go cycling. I've been across it once on a trip with some Japanese teachers and it was the highlight of the trip.
- Hiking *Mt. Ishizuchi* is one of my favorite

things I've done these past five years. It's a long journey but it's definitely worth it!

- The *Ashizuri Cape* in *Tosashimizu* has a number of cool places for example, the *Jon Manjiro* museum.

What are your "Top 5" places/food/experiences in the area you live?

- Dancing in the local *Yosakoi* team, the *Hata Bujin*, in *Kochi's Yosakoi* festival is definitely one of my favorite experiences and memories of Japan. The months of training leading up to the festival was tough but worth it.
- Making *Katsuo no Tataki* at the *Saga Ichibankan* in *Kuroshio* is a really cool thing.
- Learning how to surf at the *Hata Surf Dojo* near *Irina Beach* in *Kuroshio*.
- Forging a knife from a block of metal by heating and hammering it at the *Kurogane Workshop* near *Nishitosa* in *Shimanto City*! Highly recommended!
- There are a number of great hills in *Kuroshio/Shimanto City* and the surrounding area and hiking all of them has been a great experience! In particular I like the views at the top of *Mt. Hatcho* (八丁山) and *Mt. Ishimiji* (石見寺山).

What is one thing (fact, person, place, food) most people don't know about your area?

The sea-salt ice cream at the *Nabura Michi-no-Eki* in *Kuroshio*, is amazing!

If a person could only visit one place/try one thing on Shikoku, what should it be?

If you like big festivals/cities, I'd recommend the *Yosakoi* festival in *Kochi City*. If nature's your thing, check out *Kashiwajima*!



Anthony Mardirosian

BEST NATURE
PHOTO

The Photo

This photo was taken in 西海観光船 (*Ainan, Ehime*). I've always had an admiration for sunsets. Seeing the sunset gives a sense of accomplishment for the day and a drive to strive towards the best the following day.

Where are you located in Shikoku?

Ainan-cho, Ehime prefecture. I have been a JET for about 10 months now.

What's your most distinct memory from JET so far?

What has stood out the most was definitely our summer sports event at my Junior High School. At that time, I had only been in Japan for a few months and was still familiarizing myself with the students and teachers. The sports event allowed me to see a different side of all the students and teachers and help me connect with them. Passion and pride definitely went hand in hand on that day.

What's your favorite place/thing to photograph on Shikoku?

Sunsets, by far. This area is famous for the *Daruma* sunset, but I have yet to capture a good picture of it. It can only be photographed in the wintertime when the cool air is over the warm ocean. As my luck would have it, every time I attempted to get a good shot, there would inevitably be a cloud, or clouds, in the way.

Shikoku Top 5

- *Michi no Eki (Sukumo City, Kochi Prefecture)* is by far an absolute must location to visit. There is an art gallery set up where anyone can enjoy “*Daruma*” (sunset) photography and more.
- *Dogo Onsen (Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture)*, as no surprise, is an obvious location to visit in *Ehime* prefecture. For any Studio *Ghibli* fans out there, this is the place to go.
- *Emifuru (Iyo City, Ehime Prefecture)* is the largest shopping center in Western Japan, and serves as a growing hub in *Shikoku*.
- *Kotohiragu (Nakatado, Kagawa Prefecture)* AKA, *Konpira-san!* Time to break out those walking shoes and start climbing steps. Namely, over 1,000 steps!
- *Kyumanhonpo (Nakatodo, Kagawa Prefecture)* is located in the shopping district prior to walking up *Konpira-san*. This is a go-to place for some of the most delicious and cheaply priced *udon* in *Kagawa* prefecture. Hot or cold, with or without sides, everything is made in house.

What are your “Top 5” places/food/experiences in the area you live?

- *Naniwa*. This is an excellent restaurant to visit. It offers fresh seafood, traditional Japanese cooking, and much more. Outside they have a large tank where you can see the fish that you can enjoy for lunch or dinner.
- *Shotbar Rain*. This may sound like an

odd one, but the owner is extremely interesting and nice and he speaks quite a bit of English to boot. A lot of local people frequent this place too.

- *Komo-Cape*. People throughout *Shikoku* come to *Ainan* to visit this amazing location, be it by car, bike, bicycle, or by foot. Here you can enjoy a breathtaking view of the ocean including some secluded islands in the distance.
- *Dai 40 Banfudasho Narayama Yakushiin Kanjizai Temple*. One of the 88 temples that can be visited throughout *Shikoku*, this is one attraction that brings many pilgrims to this area. An obvious choice to visit if you are in *Ainan*.
- *Mt. Sasayama*. Situated between *Ehime* prefecture and *Kochi* prefecture, it is an ideal location for an afternoon hike. There is also a hot spring and a small café that can be visited on the northern side of the mountain.

What is one thing (fact, person, place, food) most people don't know about your area?

Ainan has 10 mascots representing different things available in this region. This includes characters representing *Tai*, *Katsuo*, and *Buri* (fish); Oysters; and Pearls. The characters were all conceived by elementary school children in *Ainan*, and then re-designed into their current form.

If a person could only visit one place/try one thing on Shikoku, what should it be?

The oceanfront in southern *Shikoku* from *Ainan* to *Kochi* prefecture. Not only is the water clear, it has a vast array of corals, and is famous for scuba diving.

The Photo

Pilgrimages at 天養山 観音院 宝寿寺 (*Saijo*, *Ehime*). Temple #62 of the famous 88 on *Shikoku*.

Where are you located in Shikoku?

I'm in *Niihama* city in *Ehime* prefecture. This is my first year on JET.

What's your most distinct memory from JET so far?

The final day of *Niihama's* 2016 *Taiko Matsuri*. Hundreds of people were running through the streets of central *Niihama*, following two *Taikodai*. They were essentially trying to make them fight. The police attempted to physically block the fight with their cars but eventually the *Taikodai* made contact. Thousands of pounds of wood, metal, and drunk *matsuri* men crashed into each other in the most thunderous and bone-chilling sounds you've ever heard with your own ears.

What's your favorite place/thing to photograph on Shikoku?

Festivals are always the easiest places to get great shots since so many things are happening. Otherwise I like just walking around trying to remember how I felt the first time I arrived in Japan.

Shikoku Top 5

- *Kuu* (空鷄) in *Matsuyama* for delicious *yakitori*
- *Naoshima* (直島) if you're into art, architecture, and *Tadao Ando*
- *Shiudeyama* (紫雲出山) in *Kagawa* for Cherry Blossoms
- *Dogo Onsen* (道後温泉) in *Matsuyama*

What are your "Top 5" places/food/experiences in the area you live?

- *Niihama* has some pretty good South Asian curry restaurants.
- *Okonomiyaki Bote Suke* (お好み焼きぼてすけ) in *Niihama* for the best *Okonomiyaki* you'll ever have
- *Rapport Bakery* in *Saijo*
- *Iwaoka Shrine* (石岡神社) in *Saijo*
- *Ramen Jun* (らう麺純) in *Niihama*
- *Niihama Taiko Matsuri*, particularly on *Yamane Park day*.

If a person could only visit one place/try one thing on Shikoku, what should it be?

The *Seto Inland Sea*, particularly the islands just off of *Takamatsu* port, has something for everyone. If you're into art and architecture, there really isn't anything in the world quite like *Naoshima*, especially the *Chichu Art Museum*. And if you're lucky and are in Japan until the *Triennale Celebration* (2019), you can experience a lot of the otherwise unavailable exhibits.

Vincent Ta

BEST MAN MADE ENVIRONMENT OR CULTURE PHOTO



The Photo

Iyo-Monogatari at *Shimonada* station (*Ehime*). Though I live in the mountains, during my free time I often drive to the ocean to see the *Seto-nai-kai*.

Where are you located in Shikoku?

I live in *Ehime* Prefecture in a town called *Kumakogen-cho*. I have been a JET for 2 years.

What's your most distinct memory from JET so far?

I would have to say the school's *Undoukai!* It is always a big event in which the students practice for weeks to be able to compete with their friends, show off their hard work, and just enjoy themselves.

What's your favorite place/thing to photograph on Shikoku?

As far as my "favorite", I would have to say the *Seto Inland Sea*. I have always loved the ocean and the *Seto-nai-kai* always has a picturesque view.

Shikoku Top 5

- *Awa Odori, Tokushima*. Everyone is a fool, so dance! One of Japan's biggest festivals.
- *Matsuyama Castle, Ehime*. One of Japan's remaining original castles. It is surrounded by a beautiful garden and can be a nice hike if you skip the cable cars.
- *Katsuo Tataki, Kochi*. Delicious seared bonito, I can never get enough.
- *Ritsurin Garden, Kagawa*. One of Japan's most famous gardens and a great place to just relax and take a nice stroll.
- *Yusuhara-cho, Kochi*. A quaint little village in *Kochi* Prefecture, this town has beautiful architecture mixing traditional and modern styles and even a traditional

Kabuki theatre. The main street is lined with beautiful lanterns making it even more beautiful in the evening and when covered in snow.

What are your "Top 5" places/food/experiences in the area you live?

- *Kumakogen Goyoboko Matsuri*. One of the biggest events in *Kuma*; teams race logs throughout town.
- *Tobe Yaki*. Pottery famous throughout Japan for its simple white and blue elegance. In *Tobe-cho* there are places where you can even paint your own.
- *Dogo onsen*. Japan's oldest hot spring, and the inspiration for the bathhouse in *Spirited Away*. Outside the bathhouse there is a mechanical clock that goes off every hour and showcases scenes from *Natsume Soseki's "Bocchan"*.
- *Omogo Kei*. I always enjoy just parking my car and taking a nice stroll through *Omogo-kei*. It is full of lush nature and blue water out of a storybook.
- Skiing/Snowboarding. My town of *Kumakogen* is one place in *Shikoku* where it is guaranteed to snow every year and, as such, skiing and snowboarding are favorite pastimes there.

What is one thing (fact, person, place, food) most people don't know about your area?

Often just literally translated as "Love Princess" the actual meaning of *Ehime* is "Cute/Lovely Princess."

If a person could only visit one place/try one thing on Shikoku, what should it be?

It may be cheating, but I would say the 88 Temple Pilgrimage, that way you would get to experience the 'all' of the island.

Richard Landsford

BEST MOBILE PHOTO



Shikoku, the least visited of Japan's 4 major islands, is a place of hidden treasures, off the beaten track towns, beaches, restaurants, roads and outdoor pursuits. If you've got an itch for adventure, grab some friends, rent a car and come check out the beauty of Block 8 on your next JET break!

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The Sky's the Limit

*Mt. Zao Sky Race
to Fundraise for
Suicide Prevention*

Jay Kraemer-Jones (Yamagata)



On September 10th, I will be “running” in the Mt. Zao Sky Race — a gruelling 21km race up and down Northern Honshu’s most active volcano, Mt. Zao. By taking on this challenge, I hope to raise awareness of mental health issues in Japan and fundraise for the NPO “Befrienders,” who go above and beyond in helping people who are contemplating suicide. No doubt this will be a tough physical challenge for me (did I mention I was a smoker until last year?), but I think emotional pain can sometimes hurt a lot worse than physical pain.

I went through a stressful period in my life, where I was not only in a new environment and far from my friends and family, but I had no obvious support system. I was a third year in university and had just arrived in Japan to study abroad. I had studied the language before I came, I knew a fair bit about Japanese culture, and there were plenty of exchange students on the same program. I had been so excited to finally come to Japan. Yet somehow, I felt overwhelmed, stressed, and alone. It wasn’t my first time living away from home, or starting fresh in a new environment, and I

had always thought of myself as independent. I had a hard time admitting that I was struggling — especially when everyone else seemed to be having the time of their lives. Without realising it, I withdrew from the people around me, found excuses not to go to events, and for a while I didn’t leave my room unless I had to. At the time, I thought it was my fault for feeling this way. I didn’t think I could ask for help, that anyone would want to help, or that anyone would even understand. Even if I had wanted to reach out, I didn’t know where to go or to whom to speak.

In contrast, on the JET program in general, and in the Yamagata JET community in particular, I think there’s a great deal of support to help all of us settle into an unfamiliar environment and cope with any challenges we may face while here. I have found everyone to be incredibly kind, welcoming, and happy to lend an ear. On an organisational level, I feel there is an amazing support system and a high level of awareness on mental health issues, culture shock, etc.

At the same time, however, I do think this level of support is extraordinary and probably not available to the majority of Japanese people, or people coming to Japan outside of the JET program. Whether you come to an unfamiliar country, or even just an unfamiliar place within your own country, I think that everyone deals with stress and loneliness sometimes. Some suffer from depression or anxiety. There is

still little awareness and support around these issues in Japan — a country with one of the highest suicide rates in the world.

As such, I decided to try and raise awareness about mental health in general, and, in good-old British fashion, to raise funds for charity by joining the Zao Sky Race. In particular, I chose to support the NPO “Befrienders,” where volunteers are trained to listen and provide face-to-face support to individuals who either don’t have any close relations in their current situation or feel they cannot talk about their issues. Most organisations addressing this issue provide support via a hotline, so I think this group is unique in their direct approach and the amount of time and effort each Befriender puts into helping individuals they don’t know personally. You can find out more about the [Befrienders here](#).

It’s important to raise awareness of the mental struggles people around us may face, and for people struggling to know it’s OK to ask for help. It is not a sign of weakness or failure. So, if you could think about whether there’s anyone in your life you maybe haven’t heard from in a while, who maybe blows off invitations for no obvious reason, perhaps drinks more than usual, and could give them a ring, invite them to another event, or simply let them know that you are there, that would mean the world to me! As I said, I think the JET community is already incredible at this, so this goes out to people in your life beyond the JET community.

Jay Kraemer-Jones is a second year JET in Nanyo-city, Yamagata prefecture who has created a [fundraising page](#) for those interested in supporting mental health crises in Japan and around the world. If you would like to join him in the Sky Race, [click here](#) for details.



Photos:
Ashley Hirasuna
Jay Kraemer-Jones



Tokyo JET Veg Heads

Meatless Meal Meetups!

Shantel Dickerson (Oita)

Kaci Lewis is a third year JET from the United States. She created the **Tokyo JET Veg Heads** group for vegans, vegetarians, pescatarians, and meat eaters who would like to explore vegan restaurants and events while making new friends in the greater Tokyo area.



What was the purpose behind setting up Tokyo JET Veg Heads?

Kaci: I wanted other Tokyo JETs who don't eat meat to have their own community and support system. There are a ton of interest groups in Tokyo for JETs, but I realized there wasn't one specifically for non-meat eaters, even though there are so many non-meat eaters in Tokyo. VegJET, the main vegan/vegetarian group for JETs, is based in Kansai. I saw that they often did meet-ups, events, and classes (usually in Kyoto), and it looked fun, so I decided to make a group for those of us in Kanto. Being the only non-meat eater in a group of people can be really isolating and exhausting in my own experience, so I really wanted to create a group where others like myself could come together and have a relaxed meal once in awhile. It's also way more fun to try out different restaurants with like-minded people than not.

What is different about veganism in Japan?

Kaci: One of the biggest differences I see here in Japan is the idea around not eating animals or using animal products. Veganism in Japan seemed to start off as a health and beauty trend. Vegetable-only restaurants were geared almost exclusively toward women trying to thin down and "become more beautiful." However, in the last few years that I've been here, I have seen the ideas and marketing around this dietary lifestyle change, and it continues to change with time. That is to say, Japanese veganism is becoming more comparable to western veganism. The Japanese vegan scene is becoming larger and more legitimate. The number of people who promote veganism as a lifestyle that is kind to all living creatures is increasing, and this idea is becoming more understood throughout Japan, especially in major cities like Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya.

I'm sure the increase in globalization has contributed to this and I personally welcome this change in attitude concerning veganism. As veganism becomes more understood, the word "vegan" can be seen in many restaurants, and more options become available for vegans who live in Japan. More vegan food festivals pop up every year and more cruelty free products become available. Japan still has a long way to go before it can compare to the West in terms of vegan accessibility, but change is certain and steady.

Kaci created Tokyo JET Veg Heads in May of this year, and currently has about 30 members. Once a month, Veg Heads have lunch at a vegan restaurant somewhere in Tokyo. In time, Veg Heads may also offer meet-ups for vegan cooking classes and events throughout the year. In the meantime, for where to find recipes and cooking classes, and for where to buy vegan ingredients, check out [Tokyo Vegan/Vegetarian Friends Club](#) and [Vegan Supermarket Finds in Japan](#) on Facebook.

Photos:
Kaci Lewis
Shantel Dickerson



FAMILY SPOTLIGHT:

"AS LONG AS WE HAVE
EACH OTHER, ANYWHERE
IS HOME."

*A reflection on one couple's
transition to life in Japan.*

Andrea and Shane Cunningham (Kyoto)



Andrea

Our experience on JET has been the epitome of “ESID” and we’re just closing in on our first year. Shane (my non-JET husband) and I began our journey with the same mix of excitement and trepidation as all the other fresh incomers as we eagerly awaited my placement. We were hoping to get a placement in the middle of what a Midwesterner and a Californian were used to climate-wise, as well as one of those elusive contracting organizations that would permit pets, since we have a small dog in our family. When I received my placement, I scoured the internet to find out everything I could about our city. Up until this point, our story is no different than yours.

When my predecessor (pred) contacted me in June, they confirmed that Shane was in the clear, since we’d already gone through the proper paperwork to ensure my new employer knew he was coming with me to Japan. Our dog, Gatsby, was another

story. I began searching for the perfect place that would accept pets. If we didn’t find a place, it wasn’t going to be because I didn’t do my due diligence. The response was surprising.

My supervisor gave me the option of taking over my pred’s (non-pet-friendly) place or of renting my own choice. I responded with links to my chosen apartment as well as the contact info of the agent I was speaking with. I had gotten as far as filling out the application, and the housing company was ready to be passed on to my guarantor. Despite being brand new to her post and having no precedent for what I was asking for, my supervisor was an absolute champ. She shouldered the last of the paperwork. It was done. The stars had aligned, and Shane and I said goodbye in July.

It was three months and a birthday before Shane and I were finally reunited. We were no strangers to long-distance. For our first two years together, he had been in California, I had been in Indiana, and MSN Messenger had tied us together. Still, it was hard. After a few months of finding my footing in Japan, he came home.

Shane

My eyes were tired and weary as I flew over the clouds covering Osaka bay. I strained to take it all in as the plane approached the man-made island that is KIX airport. Giddy with anticipation, I made my way through the customs line. I'd seen airports before, but I had never seen another country. I most looked forward to being reunited with my darling wife. Andrea was waiting for me, her face covered by what I would discover to be a flu-mask. I had known that, as soon as I left the airport, I would be entering a whole new chapter in my life. I watched the buildings pass by in a blur, my eyes trying to pick apart another culture from afar. Everything changed when I came to Japan.

Click. My wife beckons me inside. The apartment is both small and large by American standards. The wheels of my luggage are scraped and battered from the stone road. I eye over the space, mentally laying out blueprints for our new life here. To my surprise, the apartment was largely unfurnished, despite Andrea having already lived in it for three months.

Click. I check the viewfinder. Level. My status as a househusband has given me a chance to live out the artistic freedoms I've dreamed of, at first on Instagram, then YouTube. All my life I'd wanted a grand adventure in the country that gave me so much inspiration. I knew that this would be the chance I was given. Japan has been many things for me, but above all, it's been a place of discovery — both of the wonderful country and all it holds, and also of myself, thousands of miles from home. I feel like I've barely awoken in my journey, and the sun is still rising.

Photos:
Andrea and Shane Cunningham

Almost one year later in April, I boarded the plane to bring our last family member home. Finally. Gatsby rode next to me in his carrier the whole way and, despite my concerns about flying United, it was a long but uneventful journey.

Living in Japan with two dependents has been an eye-opening experience. With a spouse, I get access to a whole new part of Japan that isn't open to single foreigners. Sometimes my husband gets invited to company enkai and he's often the topic of conversation for curious students. He's a rock for me when things get tough, and we both get to experience everyday life in Japan, from the mundane to the downright odd.

Being a pet owner in Japan affords its own unique experience as well. Gatsby is an effortless bridge to random conversations with neighbors who otherwise might be too shy to talk to us. We bring Gatsby on the public transportation and people are always eager to ask questions about him, which turn into questions about us. I've learned a lot about animal welfare in Japan and have made close friends with our veterinarian, who had never interacted with a foreigner before I walked through his door.

It's not all fun, obviously. There are challenges we have that single people don't. With a dependent, budgeting becomes a higher priority, and sometimes you have to leave your partner behind to pursue work relationships at parties they aren't invited to. Having a furry dependent means your travel options are heavily restricted. You can't just skip town to go sightseeing without making sure your pet is taken care of. Sometimes you're just really jealous that your spouse and pet are still sleeping at 6:30 am while you're stumbling about getting ready. But we're family. The benefits outweigh any downsides, and as long as we have each other, anywhere is home.

Andrea

THE LOST MARTIAL ART OF NAGINATA

A CONVERSATION WITH
JET NAGINATAKAS
AURIAN EGHBALIAN
AND YETI MALLAVI

Kirsty Broderick (Saitama)



NAGINATA IS CERTAINLY A LESSER KNOWN MARTIAL ART! HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE NAGINATA TO SOMEONE, LIKE MYSELF, WHO HAS NEVER HEARD OF IT BEFORE?

AURIAN:

Naginata's glory days were during the Edo Period. It was popular not only with *samurai* who used the weapon to easily disable cavalymen, but with their wives and daughters. When the *samurai* were away doing battle, the wives and daughters they left behind had to defend the household. The *naginata* is a long, shaped stick. It is usually around six feet long and is very light. The length of the weapon and the use of centrifugal force when wielding it neutralised the strength and height gap between the women and their male adversaries.

NAGINATA IS SO LITTLE KNOWN AND PRACTICED IT IS SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS A LOST ART. HOW DID NAGINATA BECOME LOST?

AURIAN:

The popularity of *naginata* waned dramatically once guns and other western weaponry entered Japan. Other weapons were seen as more useful. Following World War II *naginata* were banned by American forces. The ban was not dropped until 1955, where *naginata* were used again under a new name – *atarashii naginata*.

IS NAGINATA BEING RECOVERED, OR DOES IT REMAIN LARGELY LOST TO THE PASSAGE OF TIME?

AURIAN:

I believe *naginata* is slowly being recovered. When I studied abroad in Kyoto in 2012 -2013 as a junior, many people I met knew of the sport as it was a requirement in elementary or junior high school. Outside of Kansai *naginata* is less known. In Kyushu many Japanese people don't know what it is! Despite this *naginata* is growing in popularity overseas. The most recent 2015 *Naginata* World Championships were held in Montreal, Canada and drew well over 100 participants from many parts of the globe.

YETI:

I agree with Aurian. I think people are becoming more interested in *naginata*, but at a slow pace. Adults I have spoken to generally know what *naginata* is, though my students are confused when they realise I'm not talking about *kendo*! When I have taken the time to explain what *naginata* is to my students they have been very interested and keen to practice. It is a shame there is nowhere in my city that offers it. I have to drive to Nagasaki city to practice which takes me 70 – 120 minutes!

Naginata is still a niche sport worldwide, however it is growing. The *Naginata* World Championships Aurian mentioned, are held every four years. In the 2015 Championship fourteen countries competed, some for the first time. Right now there is an effort being made to help countries new to the sport, like Taiwan and Puerto Rico to set up their own *Naginata* Federations.

HOW DID YOU COME ACROSS AND BECOME INVOLVED IN SUCH AN OBSCURE MARTIAL ART?

AURIAN:

I first heard of the sport when I was a sophomore in college. A girl who lived in my dorm was captain of the college *naginata* club. When she heard I was going to study abroad in Kyoto she made me promise to try *naginata* while I was there. Once I arrived in Kyoto I found another girl in my study programme had seen a flyer advertising *naginata* and was keen to try it out with me. The rest is history!

YETI:

I have always been fascinated by martial arts, practicing *karate* for eight years and dabbling in other martial arts. As I became older and had more stress and demands on my time I was not practicing any form of martial art. Finally, when I had some more free time I decided to pick up a new hobby. Around that time, I attended a Japanese Cultural festival with a martial arts stage. After seeing a *naginata* demonstration and learning about the unique female history, I knew I had to try it! I've now been practicing *naginata* for five years.

HOW EASY IS IT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN *NAGINATA*? WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND OTHER JETS INTERESTED IN TRYING THE SPORT DO?

AURIAN:

After I learned I would return to Japan on the JET programme I asked the president of the *United States Naginata Federation* if he had any contacts in the Miyazaki or Kyushu region. He originally only knew of a *sensei* in Nagasaki, quite a distance from me. Fortunately, I have reasonably good Japanese and was able to find a basic website written entirely in Japanese for the *Miyazaki City Naginata Federation*. The only way I was able to contact the *sensei* was via fax, prompting another struggle. Eventually, the *sensei* called me and advised me of the practice times.

Naginata dojo's are certainly not the easiest things to find without a good grasp of Japanese, particularly if you are outside of Kansai where the sport has enjoyed a resurgence. However, google translate goes a long way. I would encourage anyone interested to try - the effort is worth it!

YETI:

Moving to Japan I knew I wanted to continue practicing *naginata* in its homeland. While most *dojos* are eager to welcome new members, in some areas it is almost impossible to find contact information! I was very lucky as Aurian and my *senpai* found a fax number for my federation, and then eventually sent me an email with places and hours I could practice.

Many *dojos* don't mind if you drop in casually and ask if you can join a class, however, it's always nice to send an email or fax first to let them know you are interested. Usually a quick google of your *prefecture* + *naginata* will set you on the right path.

YOU'VE BOTH PRACTICED *NAGINATA* OUTSIDE JAPAN TOO. WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN LIKE PRACTICING *NAGINATA* IN JAPAN?

AURIAN:

I really enjoy practicing *naginata* in Japan. My federation is relaxed when it comes to commitment; I only manage to practice a couple of times a month. The *sensei* are all *oba-chans* and understand people have busy schedules. They have been particularly understanding of my needs. As my city does not have a *naginata* group I have to drive one hour and fifteen minutes, one way to practice with my group. However, this does vary from *dojo* to *dojo* - our favourite saying 'ESID' in play again! My federation is not focused on competing, those that have more of a focus on competing generally expect more from their members.

YETI:

My experience differs from Aurian's – my dojo competes and I have made a serious commitment to *naginata*. The group I practice with is small – currently three students and our *sensei* who comes once a month. I practice almost every Saturday for around two hours. If we are training for a tournament, like we are currently, I can practice for up to four hours. Sometimes this is exhausting and even a little frustrating, particularly with the long drive to and from practice. I have to be organised and I have made a few sacrifices to prioritise *naginata*. I sometimes miss out on activities in my town and I can't go on impromptu get-aways with other ALTs.

However, it is certainly not all bad. I have found a lot of joy in *naginata*. I can't really explain it, but there is a certain feeling that you get when you're training. You're tired and you're frustrated, but you still want to keep going, and when you achieve that goal, it makes it all the more satisfying. I get that feeling when I'm practicing *naginata*.

YETI, YOU'VE COMPETED IN *NAGINATA*. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT?

YETI:

I've competed in my home Canada, the USA, and Japan. In Japan I have competed in the Kyushu championships. Last year this was held in Matsura, Nagasaki. Although I have competed before, I felt both very nervous and very calm leading up to the Kyushu championship. I only knew my other teammate. I didn't know anyone else's name, their ranking, or how well they had previously done. When I competed in Canada and the USA I had a general idea of everyone else competing and how I would most likely fare. Here I had no idea. However, I was also an unknown to everyone else.

I ended up placing second in the beginner category. I was shocked! I'd never placed before and I didn't realise at first, that I had done so well.

This year the Kyushu Championships will be in Kagoshima and I will compete in the intermediate division. I'm very nervous and very excited. By the time this is published I will have competed! I don't know if I'm quite ready but I'll know I've certainly trained very hard.

WHAT HAS YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH *NAGINATA* BROUGHT TO YOUR LIFE?

AURIAN:

New friends, that's for sure! My senior year at college was my favourite because I was able to join the *naginata* club and train with some amazing ladies. It has brought me friends from all around the world.

Naginata is also meditative. You need to be killer precise and yet graceful at the same time. It is a beautiful sport. I sometimes train for hours on end, just practicing my footwork, with no *naginata*.

It's also a cool fact to throw out at parties!

YETI:

I've made friends outside my usual social circle which has given me different perspectives and opportunities. One of my training partners invited me to a *Yabusame* (archery on horseback) event in a nearby town. I would never have even known this event was going on had I not been invited.

I have also been able to travel to places I would probably never have gone to if it were not for *naginata*. In my first year I was able to travel with my team to watch the All Japan *Naginata* Championships in Matsuyama, Ehime. It was a great experience to watch all these *naginatas* at the top of their game. Really inspirational.

Photos:
"Aurian Eghbalian demonstrating *naginata* at the Miyakonjo World Festa"
Jodi Dobinsky

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE EXPERIENCE WITH *NAGINATA*?

AURIAN:

Last year I and fellow members of the *Miyazaki City Naginata Federation* were asked to demonstrate the *naginata* at the Miyakonjo City World Festa. We demonstrated the *naginata* on a big stage. Around 1000 people came to the Festa that day. Even my elementary students came to cheer for me!

The most memorable part of that experience was hanging out with the younger members and introducing them to culture booths from around the world. I feel like I have made a real difference to these kids. Before they met me, they had no interest in anything outside of Japan. However, on the day they made crafts from New Zealand and tried on clothing from Mongolia. I saw a spark of interest grow within them. Being able to practice the sport I love and engage in cultural exchange at the same time was a highlight for me!

YETI:

In my first year when I was travelling with my team to watch the All Japan *Naginata* Championships in Ehime we drove to Oita to catch the ferry. My Japanese wasn't very good but I really tried my best to speak and make conversation with my teammates. I really got to know everyone then, and I felt a lot closer to them after. This really solidified my desire to keep training.

*Aurian is a third year ALT in Nichinan-shi, Miyazaki prefecture. She's from Birmingham, Alabama, where the tea is sweet and the people are sweeter ;). When she's not practicing *naginata*, she's listening to k-pop, going to concerts all over Japan and dreaming one day she'll find a Chik-fil-a in her part of the inaka.*

*Yeti is a third year ALT from Montreal, Canada, currently living in Sasebo-shi, Nagasaki. When she isn't practicing *naginata*, you can probably catch her singing at karaoke, and hitting up all the local cafes.*



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