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News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

DECEMBER
2018

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Kumano Kodo Trail – Walking a World Heritage Site

A KFC Christmas – One ALT's Take

Taking the Sad out of SAD – Dealing with Seasonal Affective Disorder

Ice Skating in Japan – Finding Community in the Rink



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Magazine Written by the International
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Winter is here! It's that time of year when I find any and every excuse to try *just one more* seasonal drink, wonder about Japan's fondness for Mariah Carey and Wham, but more than anything start to look forward to Christmas and all that it means to me.

Whether you're planning your own celebrations right here in Japan, or hopping on a plane to spend the winter break with loved ones back home, don't forget to take a flick through our December issue. This month, we've got tips on bringing the festivities to you, recollections of an unique first Christmas in Japan, and an interview with New Zealand JETs looking forward to their first cold holiday season.

For many of us, friends and family are what make the holidays such a special time, and the support networks we build in Japan are what make the JET experience so great. Read on to discover how whimsical scavenger hunts are uniting ALTs across the country, two JETs found their niche through tabletop gaming, and another dipped her toes in the - surprisingly warm - waters of Japanese adult skating!

Of course, winter isn't always the best time of year for everyone. If you're experiencing seasonal affective disorder this year, we hope you can get some use out of this month's guide to battling through the SAD. You've got this!

Wherever you'll be spending this winter break, and whoever you're with, from all of us at *CONNECT* - have a wonderful holiday season!

See you in 2019!

Lauren Hill
Head Editor
3rd Year Tokyo ALT



Photo: Giovanni Perez



NEWS AND EVENTS

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If one is a master procrastinator, does that mean they're winning at life?

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Peyton Goodman

"Excelsior" -Stan Lee

Photo: Colette English



Events Calendar:

DECEMBER

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

Toyama
Ishikawa
Fukui
Gifu
Aichi

Block 6

Shiga
Kyoto
Hyogo

Mie
Osaka
Nara
Wakayama

Block 8

Tokushima
Kagawa
Ehime
Kochi

Block 9

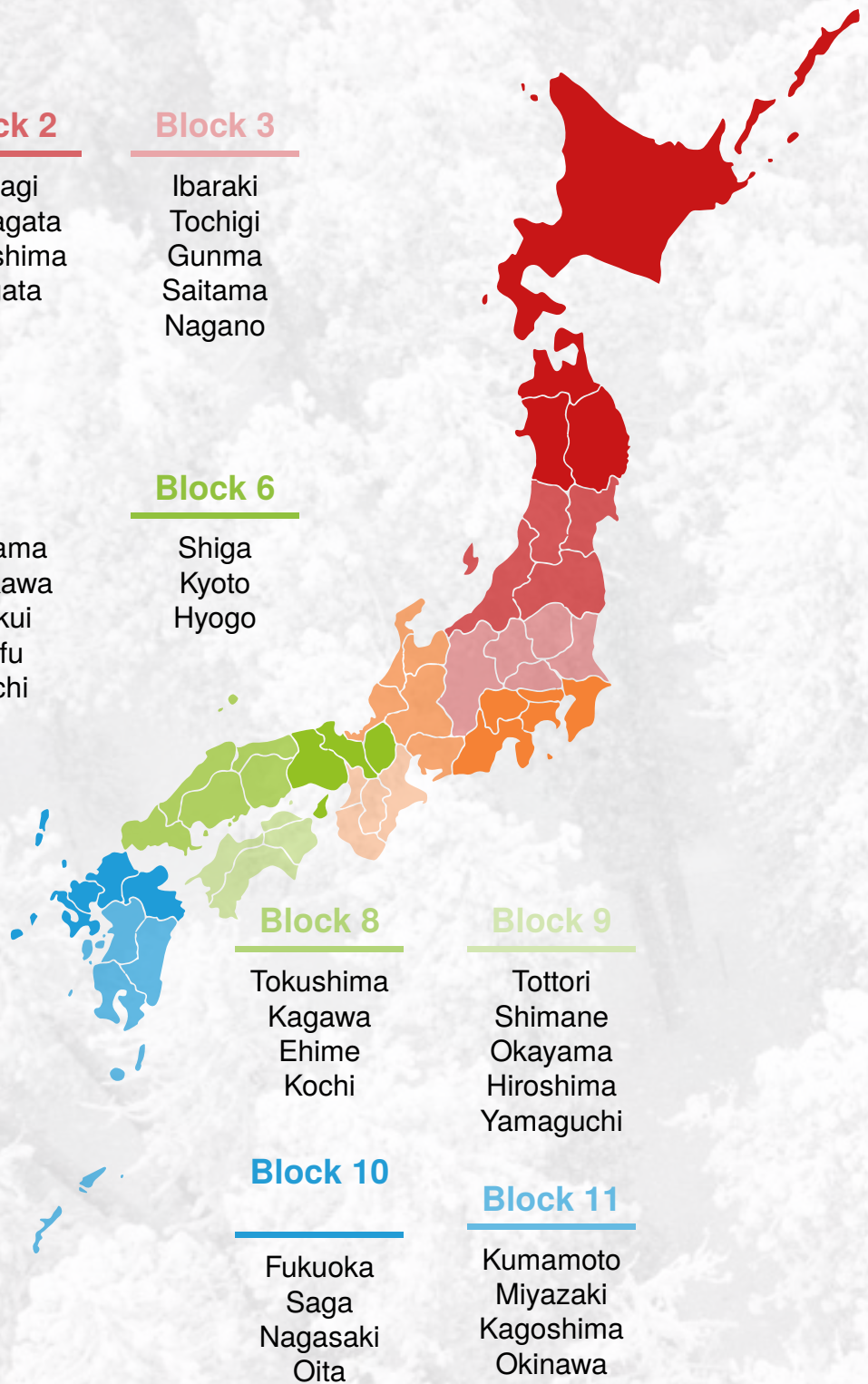
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa







Block 1



Block 2

Misawa Christmas Festival

22 November - 14 January
Misawa City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Christmas Market in Kosaka

01 December – 23 December
Kosaka Town, Akita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Otomo Yoshihide Special Big Band Concert

02 December
Kuji City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hokkaido COMITIA 9

02 December
Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 19th Tono Dressing Festival

08 December – 09 December
Tono City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hiroo Hair Crab Festival

09 December
Hiroo-cho, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tsukinoki Light Fantasy

15 December – 13 January
Yokote City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Dainippo Bugaku

02 January
Kazuno City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Northern Daimonji Wildfire Festa

31 December
Kamifurano Town, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kohata Flag Festival

02 December
Nihonmatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tsururinko Festival

02 December
Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Yokosuka Festival

04 December
Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yoshioka Hachiman Shrine

Shimada Candy Festival
14 December
Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 3

2018 SENDAI Pageant of Starlight

14 December – 31 December
Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Douoshi, Naked Festival of Bishamon

03 January
Sado City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Matsunoyama Onsen, Mukonage and Suminuri

15 January
Tookamachi City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 33rd Niigata Jazz Street

19 January
Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The Nighttime Illumination at Tobu World Square

03 November – 31 March
Nikkō City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 158th Kanto's Strange Festival /Koga Lantern Festival

01 December
Koga City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Competition for Soba heaven

01 December – 02 December
Kanuma City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Oguri Hangan Festival

02 December
Chikusei City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Yuzu Fair

09 December
Ogose-machi, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Daito Festival

10 December – 14 December
Chikuma City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tengu Swearing Festival

16 December
Kasama City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Saitama Quiz King

22 December
Hanno City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Festival of Walking on Fire

22 December
Sakuragawa City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Swearing Festival

31 December
Ashikaga City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Musha Festival

04 January
Nikkou City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Nakanajo Torioi Festival

14 January
Nakanajo-machi, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Togakushi Dondo Festival

14 January
Nagano City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

National Treasure Matsumoto Castle Ice Carving Festival

26 January – 27 January
Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 4



Block 5

The 12th Fuji City Environment Fair

01 December
Fuji City, Shizuoka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tsukimi's Cafe Concert Vol.32 (Jazz)

01 December
Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Art Illumination at Yamanakako (Lake)

23 November – 03 January
Yamanakako-mura, Yamanashi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

YOGA×CAMP festival

01 December - 02 December
Hadano City, Kanagawa Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 37th Folk Art Festival

02 December
Abiko City, Chiba Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Dango Festival

07 December
Katori City, Chiba Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

German Christmas Market in Tsuzuki 2018

08 December – 09 December
Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Arai Festival

14 December
Shibayama-machi, Chiba Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Events of 1989-2018 quiz night

22 December
Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 9th Inuyama Castle German Wine Festival 2018

30 November – 02 December
Inuyama City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tulip Park Kirakira Mission (Winter Illumination)

01 December – 25 December
Tonami City, Toyama Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Fiber Festival (Clothes Market)

02 December
Gifu City, Gifu Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Cormorant Festival

16 December
Hakui City, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Narcissus Festival

17 December – 18 December
Minami-Echizen-cho, Fukui Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Bells on New Year's Eve at Daian Zen Temple

31 December
Fukui City, Fukui Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 6



Block 7



Block 8

Toyosato Elementary School Former School Building Light Up & Illumination

24 November – 25 December
Toyosato Town, Shiga Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kobe Illuminage

03 November – 11 February
Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Okera Mairi: Old Year's Eve at Yasaka-jinja Shrine

31 December – 01 January
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
[Website in English only](#)

Ramen EXPO 2018 in Bampakukoen

30 November – 25 December
Suita City, Osaka Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 9th Castle Town Wakayama Relay Marathon

02 December
Wakayama City, Wakayama
Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

The 14th Market Festival

02 December
Wakayama City, Wakayama
Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nanki Oya Band contest (Hot Dads Band Contest)

02 December
Kamitonda-cho, Wakayama
Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Aekuni Shrine Festival

05 December
Iga City, Mie Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri

15 December – 18 December
Nara City, Nara Prefecture
[Website in English only](#)

Lapis Dream Orchestra Concert

24 December
Toyonaka City, Osaka Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Seaside Romantic Christmas

01 December – 30 December
Iyo City, Ehime Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Akaoka Festival

01 December – 02 December
Konan City, Kochi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Japanese Yam Festival

02 December
Tobe-cho, Ehime Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The Fifth 2018 Nibukawa Valley Marathon

02 December
Imabari City, Ehime Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The Ninth Hot Springs Village Kamiyamichi Station Festival

02 December
Nishi-gun, Tokushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

German Pavilion Christmas Market 2018

08 December - 09 December
Naruto City, Tokushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 8

Santa from the River

23 December - 25 December
Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Takamatsu Telsa Finale Film Festival

05 January - 06 January
Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ebisu Festival

09 January – 11 January
Ozu City, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Todo Okuri

14 January
Niihama City, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 15th Snow Battle Shikoku Tournament

26 January - 27 January
Miyoshi City, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 9

Winter Flower Illumination in Tottori Hanakairo

09 November – 14 January
Nanbu-cho, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 73rd Higashimuracho Scarecrow Festival

02 December
Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Morotabune Ritual

03 December
Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Winter Fireworks “Mai Gin no Mai”

08 December
Shunan City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ohitaki Festival

08 December - 09 December
Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Shimokawa Festival

10 December
Shimonoseki City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Comedy Lecture World Championship

15 December
Hofu City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

New Year’s Eve Ceremony of Time

31 December
Oda City, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Chinka Festival

31 December
Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Faun Festival

14 January
Shimonoseki City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shimane Prefecture Snowball Fight

26 January – 27 January
Hamada City, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Photo sources:
Colette English
Kirsty Broderick
Kirsty Broderick
Colette English



Block 10

Huis Ten Bosch “large Orchis graminifolia exhibition”

01 November - 18 February

Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kokura Illumination

02 November – 14 January

Kokura City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Shine! Imari Festa

01 December

Imari City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Yansa Festival

01 December

Nakatsu City, Oita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Shimabara Winter Night Fantasia

01 December – 05 January

Shimabara City, Nagasaki

Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yutoku Inari Shrine Hitaki

08 December

Kashima City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Ohitaki

08 December

Kashima City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 11

Minato Odori Park Illumination in Kagoshima 2018-2019

01 December – 31 January

Kagoshima City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Ushibuka Akane Fair

01 December – 02 December

Amakusa City, Kumamoto

Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Naha Marathon

02 December

Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

Traditional culture entertainment Festival

02 December

Uki City, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 32nd Aoshima Pacific Marathon 2018

09 December

Miyazaki City, Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Worldwide Eisa Festival

15 December

Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

Kirishima Kumendaiko (Nine-Sided Drum)

01 January

Kirishima City, Kagoshima

Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

In The News

December 2018

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)



WOMAN ARRESTED AFTER FATALLY STABBING U.S. MILITARY AIRMAN

A 27-year-old woman from Koto Ward, Kyoto has been arrested for killing an American airman with whom she had a relationship.

Aria Saito confessed to stabbing Master Sgt. Nicholas Vollweiler, who was stationed at the U.S. military's Yokota Air Base, because he allegedly wanted to end their relationship.

According to Fuji TV, the murder occurred at his place of

residence at around 8 p.m. on Friday, November 9.

Friends of Vollweiler were present at the time of the incident and restrained Saito until the police arrived. The police found Vollweiler unconscious with a stab wound in his neck. He was later pronounced dead at the hospital.

Source: <https://bit.ly/2RMY2SR>

Image Source: <https://bit.ly/2QzUZxf>

SUICIDES AMONG CHILDREN HITS 30-YEAR HIGH

The number of suicides among children in Japan has risen to its highest level in three decades, according to a recent report by the Education Ministry.

During the 2017-18 fiscal year, a total of 250 children from elementary to high school age were reported to have taken their own lives. This is an increase from 245 suicides last year, which was the highest it had been since 286 child suicides in 1986. This shocking trend has increased among children, while overall suicide numbers have steadily declined.

“The number of suicides of students has stayed high, and that is an alarming issue which should be tackled,” said education ministry official Noriaki Kitazaki.

Mr. Kitazaki also stated that the factors behind the increase are difficult to decipher accurately.

Regarding the 250 cases, a ministry survey has revealed that 33 children had worries about their future, 31 had family issues, and 10 had problems with bullying. Possible reasons for the other deaths are reportedly unknown.

Japan had one of the highest suicide rates in the world until preventative measures were introduced after 2015. Since then, there has been some success and figures have declined. According to the National Police Agency, overall suicides across Japan fell to about 21,000 in 2017, down from a peak of about 34,500 in 2003. Even so, suicide still remains the leading cause of death among young Japanese people.

Source: <https://bit.ly/2DgKDyA>

Image Source: <https://bit.ly/2QFC1FI>





ADVENTURES IN KAWAGOE

Kelly Carr (Saitama)

As a representative of Saitama AJET, I have been privileged to organize a variety of events for my peers. I've put together book swaps, a National Novel Writing Month write-in, and a Christmas party, as well as collaborated with others on a number of other interesting activities. However sometimes, despite our best efforts, an event just doesn't have a great turnout. It could be that everyone is busy, or simply because there was not enough interest to begin with. Whatever the reason, I don't let it stop me from having fun as long as even one person shows up.

That was the case with this year's Fall Scavenger Hunt in Kawagoe. The Scavenger Hunt is an annual event that has been handed down to the current AJET team by our predecessors. It's an excellent opportunity for people to get out and explore Kawagoe, which is a fascinating and beautiful city. There is a list of activities which each team must photograph or video their team members attempting. Each activity is worth a certain number of points. The list had been made in advance, so our job was simply to get people to participate.

This was not a problem last year. Participants from a huge variety of places took part. There were both current

and former JETs, as well as friends of JETs from Tokyo or elsewhere. The competition was pretty fierce, and everyone had a great time. This year I was expecting much the same; but for whatever reason, only my friend Sam came out to play.

Though disappointed that no one else had decided to join us, we were determined to have a good time. We went out and did the scavenger hunt anyway. Sam is great company, and luckily for me she's a resident of Kawagoe, so she knew where to find some of the things on the list already. With no one to compete against, we were able to really take our time and enjoy the ridiculous activities on the list, including but not limited to: trying on the ugliest outfits we could find, getting a picture of us jumping in the air, and posing as mannequins in a shop window. There are lots of things to see and do in Kawagoe. From the station, we strolled down the Crea Mall with its thrift stores and arcades and over to Little Edo (an area famous for its Edo-style buildings). From there we went over to Candy Lane where the candy for all of Japan was produced during the early Showa period.

We wandered around, going into any shop that seemed interesting. Our favorite was a small store that seemed



to sell nothing but clothes printed with hilariously bad *English*. We never stopped for lunch, but instead ate any food that caught our interest (or our noses), including some sweet potato waffles drizzled with honey, loads of free samples from a store that sold only a variety of flavored beans, and some heartbreakingly delicious lava cakes. According to Sam, those lava cakes were the best discovery of the day!

By the time the sun went down in a blazing red and gold sunset we were ready to drop, so we ended the evening by putting up our feet at a cozy little cat café.

Though the turnout for this event was small, in general scavenger hunts tend to be quite popular. There's really no maximum number of people who can play, and whether you win or lose, they are always a good time. The Saitama Scavenger Hunt is usually held in the fall, but there is also a very entertaining annual scavenger hunt in Tokyo every spring. These events are always a good opportunity to meet and bond with new friends, as well as enjoy the company of old ones. As Sam says, "Living in Japan, away from everything familiar and the support of family and friends, can be really hard. It's days like this that make it all worthwhile..." I couldn't agree more.

Kelly Carr is a third-year JET from Atlanta, Georgia. She teaches at a middle school in Saitama, and spends some of her free time planning events for her peers. She is an avid reader, traveler, and movie-lover. Kelly enjoys spending time with her friends, especially when they are all trying out new experiences together.



On a night not far from All Hallows' Eve, ALTs come out to play. They gather in bunches, in groups, in droves, to let loose and have fun every which way. They get the list, and off they go, to run amok for hours of fun. It's a grand time, one they'll remember someday as a night that won't be outdone.

The scavenger hunt is an annual event hosted by the Oita AJET committee each year in autumn. Originally the brain-child of JET alumni Rebecca Guttentag, the event has now been around for several years and has become a beloved tradition for many. This year it was up to myself and Gina Whitney to man the helm. While taking up the mantle and continuing the tradition was daunting, we were more than willing to give it our all and do our best. In the end, I can say with certainty that we were successful.

Originally, the scavenger hunt was created with the hopes of coaxing new JETs out of their bubbles (either in the city or out in the *inaka*), and encouraging them to get

to know Oita City more intimately, in a way that extends beyond the common parties and dinners so often held. For many of us, there isn't really much reason to go to Oita City beyond the mandatory: attending conferences, dealing with government matters, or getting our driver's licenses. As a result, aside from the obvious spots, a lot of ALTs aren't completely aware of everything Oita City has to offer. It was Rebecca's wish that her fellow ALTs would use this event to take the chance to simply wander the streets and find some hidden gems, be they down a quiet alleyway or at the top of Amu Plaza.

While the event is completely associated with Halloween — as the participants are expected to dress-up in costume — the date of the event isn't always set in stone. It could be in the middle of September one year and somewhere in early October the next. This year we did things a little differently by choosing to host the event on October 27, making this the first year the event was held so close to Halloween proper. Having the scavenger hunt only a few days before the actual holiday ended up being a fantastic idea. It allowed for a more



SCAVENGE AROUND THE TOWN

Nicole Henry (Oita)

atmospheric night, as it was not just the participants of our humble event that were dressed up in outlandish costumes, but tons of unaffiliated folk as well. Countless people were out in the streets, dressed as vampires, witches, and, of course, the much adored banana-loving Minions. With so many people out and about, and a number of festivals and activities taking place simultaneously, it wasn't so strange for us foreigners to be running around in wild costumes. As a result, we were able to truly let loose and have fun, without worrying about looking like fools.

There are all sorts of fun things to see and do all around the city, much more than one can see on a simple two-hour hunt. Each item on the scavenger list was therefore written as a vague concept rather than a specific item. This allowed the teams to be creative in their delivery. For example, in the *Find* category we had our teams search for terrible *English*, or to be desperate for crane machine prizes. For others, we only wrote things like, "Y U SO SMOL?" or "That's so gross... but kinda cute." In the category labelled *Do* we had items such as, "*Purikura*", or "Be a gambler." And in the final category,

Film, we had fun things like, "Yer a wizard, Harry," where teams were expected to create a short video based off the phrase alone. We also had several special hunts, during which teams had to locate myself and my partner at specific locations to receive their next challenges. For these we had fun tasks such as, "*ohashi jouzu desu ne*," where each team chose one representative to try to collect an assortment of small round items into a single bowl using only a set of chopsticks, with the fastest team as the winner. We also had, *sell it*, which required the teams to attempt to advertise two unusual items as a single product to the best of their abilities.

All in all, the scavenger hunt was a blast, one we're more than happy to continue year after year.

Nicole is a 27-year-old 4th-year JET. Located in the tiny town of Bungotakada, she loves to play video games, especially with friends. When she's not playing games, you can bet she's at someone's apartment watching them play games instead.

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"I'm wearing Spiderman pants." - Anonymous Senior High School Student Who Should Really Keep That To Himself

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"I now realize that letting you summon a kraken at will was a very poor choice." - A DM with Regrets

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"Fashion is the armor to survive the reality of everyday life." —Bill Cunningham

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Tayla-Paige van Sittert

It's nice that everyday we get to watch a sunset... and that everyday ends.

Photo: Kirsty Broderick



HIT POINTS, EXPERIENCE NERD PO

Chelanna White (Kyoto)

I am not a nerd. No, really. I kind of wish I were though. I'm more nerd-adjacent. That's actually one of the reasons why I joined my university's Model United Nations club: to get more nerd-cred. Maybe that alone makes me an actual nerd. And maybe that's why I became interested in playing *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). I dabbled a bit in elementary school, but I don't think we ever got much past the character creation stage. I have been a fan of fantasy my whole life, from the time my grandma read me *The Chronicles of Narnia* before bed. Since then, I've practically devoured fantasy novels; I remember begging my friend's mom to let me borrow her copy of *Harry Potter and the Order of The Phoenix* since I could finish it in two days and get it back to her. Even my love life has been influenced by fantasy! I fell in love with the man who would become my husband over a conversation about Neil Gaiman. And in case you are wondering, yes, I was also one of those people who was disappointed when *Game of Thrones* caught up to *A Song of Ice and Fire*. After all that, D&D just seemed like the kind of thing I would enjoy (while also giving me those coveted nerd points).

I began my search for fellow nerds through other interests before arriving in Japan, joining nearly ALL the JET Facebook groups, including [JET Gaming Enjoy!](#) and [JET Tabletop Enjoy!!](#). Despite this, I was never able to connect with anyone in my area. A friend had found a D&D group through a non-JET gaming page, and when somebody left, he asked

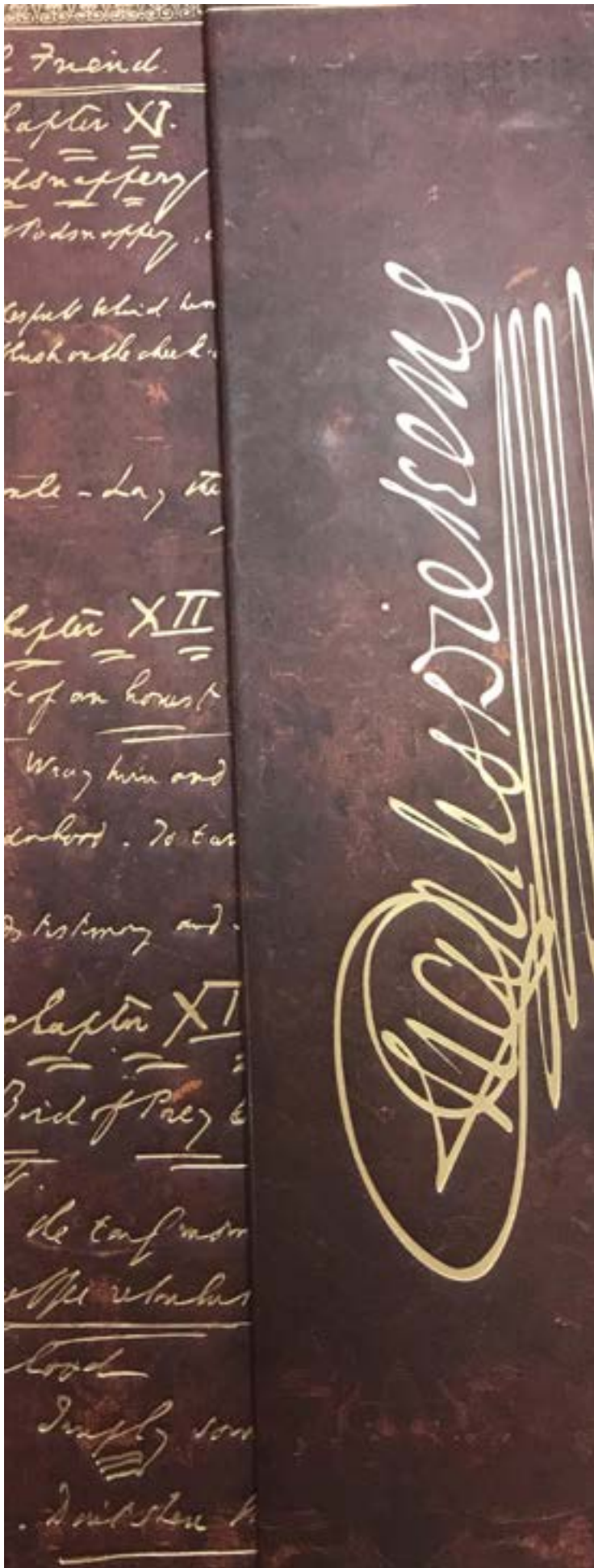
the other guys if I could join. Being a total newbie and a woman, I wasn't sure if I would fit in with the group of men who had been playing together for about a year. I quickly came to realize that my concerns were unnecessary. The group was very welcoming. Several members are ex-JETs who stayed in Japan or came back for work or family, and we all teach in some capacity from preschool up to university. JET may be a huge international program, but it can provide very close connections.

Before our first meeting, I'd been in contact with the Dungeon Master (DM). In D&D, the game is led by the DM. The DM is the grand arbiter of any dispute about the rules or actions in-game. He sent me a ton of information, answered a ton of questions, and helped me bring my character, a sun-elf wizard, to life. I had a lot of fun writing her backstory. I've been known to spend hours fiddling with features on my *Sims* characters, so it was nice to have the freedom to create my character just the way I wanted her.

Speaking of video games, D&D reminded me a lot of *Skyrim*. I loved that game. The visuals, the story, the world--everything (except that blasted crimson nirnroot sidequest. Does anyone enjoy that quest?) At any rate, it wasn't until after I joined this group that it became obvious that many video games, not just the *Elder Scrolls* series, rely on D&D elements. In many ways, games such as *Skyrim* are really just digitized versions of D&D. Stats, hit points, leveling-up... these concepts existed back when *Pong* was

POINTS, POINTS?





a thing. There was even a video game called *dnd* released in 1974, the same year the first Dungeons and Dragons edition was published, based on this soon-to-be tabletop classic. So from the very beginning, D&D has been a part of the world of video games. But there are several differences between the two as well.

Besides the medium, one of the biggest differences between most RPG video games and games like D&D is the social factor. D&D isn't meant to be played alone. It was designed to be a collaborative storytelling game between the DM and the players. This requires quite a bit of flexibility for both parties. The story changes and develops to a greater degree as it goes on than any video game I know of. Because the non-player characters (NPCs) are in a sense being played by the DM, they are far more reactive than the programmed responses offered by their digital counterparts.

It can be frustrating, though, having to wait for the group to get together to play. You can't just play D&D whenever you feel like it, and getting a group together can be challenging, especially if members of your party have children or other commitments. My group tries to get together once a month, but we skipped one session over the summer due to the difficulty of scheduling around several family vacations and trips back home.

My group plays in English, as we have varying levels of Japanese proficiency, but I have seen manuals printed in Japanese. I think it would be fun to be able to play in Japanese, too. This got me thinking about playing a simplified version of D&D with the English clubs at my schools, but their English and my Japanese is too low to make it fun, I think. I'm also not sure that I am up for the challenge of DMing such a setup, but it is something that I would love to do someday. And while I firmly believe that D&D can be played by anybody, I get that it's not necessarily everyone's cup of tea.

Although I am still new to the game, I have found ways to incorporate D&D into my other interests. I am an obsessive journal buyer (note that I am not necessarily a journal *writer*). I am a sucker for the Paperblanks brand in particular. I brought one from home that was just waiting for a worthy use, and it now serves as my character's spellbook and journal. I had also been holding on to a skein of hand-spun and hand-dyed yarn that my mother-in-law sent me for Christmas, and it was just the right amount to be knit up as a dice bag. After agonizing over which

colour dice to choose, I settled for ones that matched my one-of-a-kind bag. I was tempted to pick up a pack of *ダンジョン飯* (Delicious in Dungeon, in English) manga from my local Book-Off, but my unread manga pile is starting to haunt me, and I can barely get through much simpler material.

So far, I love playing D&D. I love the high fantasy elements. I love getting to know the other players, both through their characters and in the time we spend before or after games. I love that it is collaborative and dynamic; no two games are ever exactly the same. I love the back-to-basics, retro vibe. I love that it could be used as an educational tool and that it integrates with my other hobbies and interests. And lastly, yeah, I love how nerdy it is.

Chelanna is a second-year JET living in Kyoto. She lives with her husband and three goldfish named Bianca, Bendela, and Bob. She wishes her landlord would let her get a cat.

Photo sources:
Chelanna White
Ashley Hirasuna





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Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) is the classic tabletop game that is often considered the final gate into total nerd-dom. My introduction into this world was slow-going even though I was immersed in a lot of other nerd-fandom: comics (American and Japanese), various fantasy and sci-fi books, and multiple television followings. For a long time, D&D was only an abstract concept and all I'd heard was hearsay. Whenever I'd hear about the humorous and fanciful stories of people's adventures, they'd constantly pique my interest. Some would include players annoying the Dungeon or Game Master (DM/GM) with their ridiculous actions and choices. Others were of sadistic DMs putting their players through a hellish boss fight. What wasn't to love?

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to participate in my first D&D game until after graduating university. Once I did, though, I was very enamored by the experience. I played Pathfinder, which turned out to be a great introduction to this role-playing style. It reunited me with many of my high school friends, but I also found it blended quite well with the types of books I read. I will say it was a bit of a struggle to synchronize our schedules, but Pathfinder became our way to stay connected. Sadly, I had to cut my time with this campaign short as I was (happily) accepted into the JET Program. But my DM found a way to put my character in a form of stasis until I can join them again.

Coming to Japan, I thought I would have to put my D&D ambitions on hold until I returned home for good. To satisfy my craving for D&D, I began to build and design future characters. While doing research about the different races and classes, as the amount and variations seem to be constantly increasing, I came across the [Roll20](#) website. On this website, people all over the world are able to connect and start campaigns. It offered multiple resources and had the guides for the various adaptations of D&D and many other role-playing games. I was so happy to find a place to play D&D again and expand my experience beyond Pathfinder. But when I looked into the other game options, I ended up settling on Pathfinder anyway to start with. I was familiar with it, and I knew that would help me in my first attempt at navigating this website.

It was honestly great. We had to submit a brief paragraph about our character and what this character's goal would be on the adventure. This was perfect for me as I had already developed the backstory for a few possible characters. I settled on a recognition-seeking half-elf fighter. This group was created from three people from different locations in the US, one person from Germany, and me in Japan.

Each person brought an interesting character to the game, including a greedy human cleric, a wanderer, an amnesiac, a gnome ranger, and a human-hating human druid. It wasn't a balanced team, but it was definitely interesting! We had a great adventure— however, it wasn't the most ideal situation. As I mentioned before, a good amount of players were from the US. The time they chose to play was noon EST, which was sadly one in the morning in Tokyo. We played bi-weekly for about six months on the weekends, but after a while playing these sessions well into six in the morning on Sundays, I felt it affecting my daily life. So though I wanted to continue to play, I knew that in the long run it would be harmful to my wellbeing.



illa (Saitama)

After leaving the group on Roll20, I found myself back in the same situation I was in when I first arrived in Japan. For quite some time, I took a break from actively being involved in D&D. I did listen to D&D podcasts, including *The Adventure Zone* and *Critical Role*, and I also read D&D stories on Tumblr and Twitter. I had also joined the [JET Tabletop Enjoy!!! Facebook page](#), so I was content for the most part.

Then the new batch of JETs arrived this past summer. One new JET, Evan Irvine, made a post looking for players for a 5e D&D campaign. Initially there were seven people interested in the campaign, including Evan and his wife. However when the group met up to do a character creation session, two people decided to drop out. Thus our group was made of Sarin Sithi, a fourth year US JET; Ryan McKenney, a second year Canadian JET; Evan Irvine and his wife; a first year US JET; and myself, a second year US JET. It was great to have a group of JETs from different locations and with unique backgrounds. Our campaigning group is just as diverse: a human rogue with a heart of gold, a frank and brash human fighter, and two Firbolgs, one being a sorcerer that has a naive, childlike personality and other a mysterious druid whose whole village was destroyed.

So far this has been the most effective way for me to socialize since joining JET. We began with just meeting for our playing days at our DM's apartment, but as we began to share more about ourselves and our other activities, we grew closer. This past October, I attended my first large JET party, the Tokyo JET Halloween party, when I found out two of my campaign members were planning to attend. There, I was able to develop more friendships and get a new player for the group: Haroon Hussian, a British JET who plays a mysterious Aarakocra (mysterious because our characters have not yet figured out how to effectively communicate with him). I am really enjoying our time together. Not only have I found an intimate group to share my JET experiences with, but I believe this is a group that I will continue to connect with once each of us decides to leave JET.

As a final note, I hope to organize a D&D group at the school I am working at. I know I would have to adapt the game to my students' abilities. However, I believe it will not only benefit their academic use of English, but it will greatly improve their spontaneous and collaborative use of the language as well. Not only that, but I want them to find the same

welcoming and reassuring atmosphere I found in my D&D group. With luck, this will inspire them to open up and become more confident in themselves. It will be difficult to incorporate, but if D&D can help my students in even a fraction of the ways it's helped me, I will consider that a success.

I am a lifelong nerd, from my early days playing Pokemon Red and reading Animorphs to joining a D&D campaign. On weekends, I will meet up with my few close friends, and we will play multiple games together, talk about the latest episodes of a TV series, or have a movie marathon. I love finding new series, games, or fandoms to explore and perhaps join. I hope you readers will take a look into the world of nerdism (or keep exploring if you're already there) and see that there is so much passion to discover.

Photo sources:
Christina Padilla
Ashley Hirasuna



DECEMBER RELEASES

Sarah White (Fukui)

MOVIES

1 Dec

- In Harm's Way (2017)
- The Cakemaker (2017)

2 Dec

- God's Own Country (2017)

7 Dec

- Destination Wedding (2018)
- Padman (2018)

8 Dec

- A Prayer Before Dawn (2017)

14 Dec

- The Grinch (2018)
- Mortal Engines (2018)
- Dragon Ball Super: Broly (2018)

GAMES

3 Dec

- PlayStation Classic console launch

4 Dec

- Just Cause 4 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Mutant Year Zero: Road to Eden (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Persona Dancing: Endless Night Collection (PS4, Vita)
- Thronebreaker: The Witcher Tales (PS4, Xbox One)
- Gwent: The Witcher Card Game – official launch (PS4, Xbox One)
- Persona 3: Dancing in Moonlight (PS4, Vita)
- Persona 5: Dancing in Starlight (PS4, Vita) Toki (Switch)
- Hearthstone – Rastakhan's Rumble (PC, Mobile)
- Arca's Path (Rift, PS VR, Vive)
- Override: Mech City Brawl (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

6 Dec

- The Last Remnant Remastered (PS4)
- Jagged Alliance: Rage (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Sega Mega Drive Classics (Switch)

15 Dec

- Kings (2017)
- Mary Shelley (2017)
- Den blomstertid nu kommer (2018)

21 Dec

- A Star is Born (2018)
- Ralph Breaks the Internet (2018)
- Maria by Callas (2017)

22 Dec

- Journey's End (2017)

28 Dec

- I Feel Pretty (2018)

29 Dec

- He's Out There (2018)

7 Dec

- Super Smash Bros. Ultimate (Switch)
- Katamari Damacy Reroll (PC, Switch)
- Iris.Fall (PC)

10 Dec

- Dusk – official launch (PC)

11 Dec

- Earth Defense Force: 5 (PS4)

12 Dec

- Insurgency: Sandstorm (PC)

13 Dec

- Book of Demons – official launch (PC)
- GRIS (PC, Switch)
- Forza Horizon 4: Fortune Island expansion (PC, Xbox One)

Sources:

<https://www.imdb.com/calendar/?region=jp>

<https://www.vg247.com/2018/08/01/video-game-release-dates-2018/>

Photo: Rebecca Oliver on Unsplash



CRANKY BOYS:

Forming a Band in Japan

Logan McCarthy (Gifu)

Many of us see going to another country as one of the best times to reimagine the things we love to do. For me, making music is a personal joy I bring with me to new places. It makes me feel at home (even if it means shopping in Nagoya to replace all the instruments I couldn't bring with me from the States). I was placed in Toki City, a small place in the Tono region of beautiful, mountainous Gifu. Being abroad and surrounded by people of all different backgrounds, I knew I wanted to start making music with people.

Prior to Japan, I pretty much made music on my own (though in high school I did play piano for a punk rock band). I record my instruments through a Focusrite Scarlett 8i6 USB audio interface. From there I rearrange, clean up, and mix the tracks using Ableton Suite 8. I make soft, funny rock pieces for Boxing Day every year but have recently picked up electronic genres like chillhop, lo-fi, and jazz hop.

The music scene in Japan started off slow for me at first, but it would eventually pick up speed. August was more about finding my feet in this mysterious new land, and September was about discovering firsthand what it means to be an ALT. We're here to teach, and that doesn't change even when we do find time for our other passions.

Fortunately, Clint felt the same way. We first met during the Gifu mini-orientation at the Keio Plaza Hotel in Shinjuku. I'm an east coast pianist, and he's a west coast guitarist, so we were excited to work together. He's a handsome man with an upright bass for a heart. Before long came Hideto, a native Japanese multi-instrumentalist whom we met at the Oiden Matsuri in Nakatsugawa. He loves music so much, he's already a part of two other bands! On September 8th, we decided to try forming one ourselves—but because we were only a week into classes, we would have to wait until mid-October.



Elysian Sound Studio in Tajimi, Gifu

Our first jam session was at Elysian Studio in Tajimi on October 14th. Having a local in the band proves valuable when searching for a place to play. Not only does Hideto already have connections with studios and venues to play at; he can speak fluent Japanese (a skill Clint and I have yet to master). Our jam sessions and practices provide a chance for us to learn each other's languages. Right now, we're playing English covers, but perhaps in the future we'll switch to Japanese!

One of the biggest challenges that comes with trying to form a band is finding the time for it. Weekends seem to be an obvious pick for jam sessions, but even these days can be packed with errands and trips that ALTs/CIRs/SEAs can't normally make during the week. And if time doesn't beat us, sometimes our energy does. Some days I just wanna crash at five.

I teach at two elementary schools, a middle school, and a special needs school while Clint works at a prestigious high school. I absolutely love my schools, but playing sixty high-powered rounds of *janken* with equally high-powered children daily doesn't make the afternoon hours easy on my eyes.

This is why getting a good sleep schedule is a huge priority (and always should be). A great sleep schedule means

we'll be at our best for when we teach our students. An even better sleep schedule means we can play Coldplay and Death Cab for Cutie as the sun sets.

When looking for venues, Google is everyone's best friend. A lot of cities have restaurants that host open mic nights occasionally. It's just a matter of research and trying new places out. Crowds are usually friendly and curious here, and they would be missing out if musicians decided not to perform.

For those who have access to a major city, music stores, studios, and more are everywhere. I got my guitars from a Yamaha Store but my pianos from BIC Camera. If lugging instruments from a store back to an apartment isn't ideal, it's a good idea to ask if there is an option for scheduled delivery. I know this was the case for both the Yamaha Store and BIC Camera in Nagoya. If this isn't an option, taxis or friends with cars are usually the way to go.



The band's first gig notice — the first of many!

But most important of all: go places and try new things! We're often bombarded at the start of our year with trip after trip, which can be a bit overwhelming at times, but these are the perfect times to bond with people and make new connections. We would have never met Hideto had we not gone to the Oiden Matsuri. And Clint and I desperately sprinting for the Pokemon Center in Nagoya ten minutes before they closed gave us an opportunity to get to know each other better.

Our first show will be at Majolica Bamboo, a popular *izakaya* in Nakatsugawa, on December 2nd. It's the same day as the formidable JLPT, so we'll be needing a big basket of sleep the night before. We don't yet have a name, so we're using three all together: Hideto & Logan & Clinton (or HLC for short). We're endlessly grateful for the opportunities we've had so far and can't wait to do gigs here in Japan!

Logan's music can be found on [Bandcamp](#), [Soundcloud](#) and [Youtube](#). His latest solo release is the chillhop LP [Deguchi](#).

Photo sources:
Marcus Spiske on Unsplash
Ashley Hirasuna

Halloween

Brandon King, Sasha Solomon, Nash Sibanda (All Ibaraki)

A bunch of Ibaraki JETs shipped ourselves down to Tokyo for Halloween festivities. While we didn't get involved in the overturning of any vehicles, we did have a pretty great time. I wanted to take the opportunity to gather some thoughts and reflections from some JETs of African descent, too. Each writer had carte blanche to write whatever they wanted. Thanks for reading!

Brandon King (ALT, Ibaraki)

Being a six-foot-two, 200 pound black dude with dreads so long I can sit on them, I've never had the luxury of being the least conspicuous person in a room. Luckily, I hail from Toronto, Canada, and have benefitted from many years of acceptance as well as questions of wildly varying levels of ignorance. Just to clear up one repeat offender: "how do you wash your hair?" Same as you.

That being said, I have embraced being an unwitting spectacle and believed myself prepared for the attention I would receive in Japan, having visited once before. What I wasn't ready for was the exponential factor that is dressing up for Halloween in Japan.

I enjoy Halloween immensely and try to dress up at least a little bit. Some horns and fangs here, a Pokemon onesie there. Simple, yet effective. Of course, it was the perfect excuse for people to start another round of poking, prodding, questioning, and picture-taking; and honestly, I expected that much. What I didn't expect was how out of control it would get. I was winning cash prizes in bars to contests I didn't enter and being dragged onto stages. I was even on TV with the mayor of the town next to mine for showing up to a street festival.

Overblown and undeserved as it was, on the whole, it was blessedly positive. The Japanese definitely show a lack of experience with black people and black culture (among others), but ignorance can be cured by asking questions, and that's what they seemed to be doing with me. Most of it came from a place of love, curiosity, and wonder, and that's what cultural exchange is about. Tiresome as it can get, I don't begrudge the majority of the people doing it and would do it again in a heartbeat.

I could always use more cash prizes.



Brandon (squatting, front-right), Sasha (in the Pikachu onesie) and Nash (rear-left, in a Snorlax onesie) with some of the Ibaraki contingent in Shibuya



Reflections and Advice from Some JETs of AD

Sasha Solomon

(ALT, Ibaraki)

I had heard that Shibuya Halloween was the biggest Halloween event in Japan, but I really was not ready for just how big! I've never heard so many languages and seen so many different people all at once in one space. In a couple of words: utter craziness! But it was also some of the most fun I've ever had - me and a bunch of other people dressed up in Pokemon onesies lyming (as we Caribbean folks would say) or hanging out on the streets of Tokyo with about a dozen other Eevees and Pichachus.

I was with at least 10 other people, so that definitely helped my experience. The capsule hotel we stayed at was comfortable, clean, and right next to a station that made it easy for us to zip off to get dinner, explore Shinjuku, Harajuku, and Shibuya, and get back home. I would recommend going to an event like this with people you feel safe with. There are A LOT of people. Though Japan is safe for the most part, anything can happen.

If you're drinking, carry a flask or go *konbini* crazy. And, of course, keep that drink close by and do not leave it unattended. In hindsight, a Pikachu onesie with pockets would have made things way easier! Especially if you're going to Club Harlem, which is not too far from where the main event takes place.

The only major challenge faced was that travelling around Tokyo can be exhausting if you're not a fan of walking. You'll go up and down many levels of Shinjuku Station, which is a district unto itself, trying to find your specific Platform #2 or #7, so bring those two battery packs for your phone, all the data you can, lots of water, good friends you feel safe with, and lots of yennies. 13/10 would do again!



Photo source:
Neven Krcmarek on Unsplash



Nash Sibanda

(ALT, Ibaraki)

I'm British; back home, Halloween doesn't hold the same kind of national holiday vibe that it seems to instill in our friends in the Western Hemisphere. True, lots of people dress up, some kids go trick-or-treating, and *Thriller* and the *Ghostbusters* theme song seem unavoidable for a week or so prior. I know people who proudly exclaim Halloween to be their favourite holiday. But the costumes tend towards the lazy and half-baked (blood-drenched nurses, blood-drenched vampires, blood-drenched insurance salesmen, etc.). I've never had more than two or three kids knock on my door asking for whatever sweets I've got lying around the house, and both of those songs are the kinds of cheesy dancefloor-fillers that get reasonably consistent play year-round. My Halloween lesson for senior high schoolers essentially lifted a few slides from my American predecessor's far more detailed

presentation before diving into a grammar game that had almost nothing to do with ghosts or ghouls.

Halloween in Japan is odd. It dresses in a lot of the trappings of Halloween back home or in North America, but it seems quite divorced from any cultural underpinnings. You get the sense that it is a day for people to congregate – dressed head to toe in costumes ranging from the nightmarish to the ludicrous – and drink, dance, and party without any real understanding of why. As a black person, this lifting of cultural signifiers from the West occasionally gives me pause, particularly when it's accompanied by people dressing up to pretend to be others. In the UK, a year hardly goes by without some approbation being fairly levelled at the blackface exploits of politicians, university students, or other people-who-should-know-better.



Photo source:
leximphoto on Unsplash

Every year, incoming JETs express concerns and worries about racial attitudes, stereotyping, and insensitivity that they fear Japan and its people may harbor. Halloween — and other occasions for dressing up and wearing the metaphorical skin of others — serves as a flashpoint for such negativity in the West, and I worried that this might also be true here.

Naturally, I was mistaken. It feels almost foolish now. I haven't been here long, and there's still a lot that I don't know or understand about Japan and its people. There are many misunderstandings that Japanese people have about where I come from, almost as many as the misunderstandings I have about Japan that get challenged and reconfigured almost daily. Yet the enduring acceptance and inclusivity that I have generally felt from the people

I've encountered — from staff members to students to the service industry workers that keep the modern world running — has never wavered. Sure, Japan undoubtedly has bad apples, those who are insensitive or unsympathetic to the harm that even casual racism inflicts. It's worth remembering that back home we have those too, no matter where we're coming from. Living abroad, and writing for a magazine whilst doing so, can make a person extrapolate sweeping cultural judgements based on small and subjective experiences, and often this isn't fair, even when those judgements are positive. Halloween in Japan is fine; it's fun. And for the other reserved and grumpy Brits like me out there, find the nearest *genki* group of Americans and Canadians and let their Halloween fever infect you.

AMAZON
TOKYO
FASHION
WEEK:
Runway Coverage

Here are the shows that *CONNECT*
attended at this year's Summer/Spring
2019 Fashion Week.

Kotohayokozawa



Set against an ever changing backdrop, Kotohayokozawa produced a fascinating '60s-inspired collection filled with oddities and quirks. Models wore not only clothes,

but also carried down an assortment of accessories ranging from a boot filled with dirt and flowers to a foot brace that made me genuinely wonder whether the model had had an accident or whether this too was part of the outfit. Though the outfits' inspiration came from various '60s trends, it was as if the designer had chopped up and reassembled them into a Frankenstein mash-up. Trousers were held together by a few threads, coats were missing one sleeve, and in one outfit, a full T-shirt hung from the waistband of a skirt. This show was an interesting example of deconstructed fashion with a nostalgic feel.



Mafamute

Mari Odaka's ninth collection at Tokyo Fashion Week, titled

'Uncertain Memory,' took inspiration from the 2001 Christopher Nolan film "Memento." By creating garments that were frayed and beginning to unwind, she seemed to show the film's protagonist's own struggle with his mind and his sense of identity. Odaka sent models down the runway sporting writing along their chest and neck in reference to how, in the film, he tattoos himself to fight his short-term memory loss. This collection is about how one defines oneself, and through the blending of different elements, different fabrics and styles, we can establish a sense of self. Odaka is famous for her knitwear design, and it was obvious in this collection. The knitwear was the standout of the show, showing its versatility and ability to flatter the female form.





Husband and wife duo Anton Schnaider and Ksenia Schnaider brought their denim designs from Kiev to Tokyo where they showcased a tropical resort-themed collection. Many of the outfits utilised double denim, which gave much of the collection a sense of being a throwback to early noughties fashion. In one instance, a model sported a pairing of white denim high-waisted shorts and a cropped white denim jacket. Another outfit consisted of a fantastic pair of flared jeans with fraying hems up the entire outside seam teamed with a jacket that was also frayed around every edge. This entire collection felt very much like a re-imagining of vintage resort clothing with models wearing denim bucket hats and denim gilets with oversized pockets; but with the addition of deliberate fraying and acid-bright colours, it was modern and energetic.



Ksenia Schnaider





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The stage was well and truly set before the models stepped foot on the runway. The space was transformed into a whimsical herb garden. Dried flowers and herbs hung from above, filling the air with a fragrant and relaxing smell, and the sound of running water and wind chimes was heard in the buildup to the show. The raised runway was made from plywood, adding to the organic nature of the setting. The models were youthful-looking and adorned in fantastic flower creations that adorned their faces. The aesthetic for the collection was soft and understated; the colour palette was neutral with soft greys, blues, and beiges. Flower prints were used on the clothing. The clothes were minimalist and non-confrontational. Unlike other shows where clothes seemed to shout out, this collection can be praised for its simplicity.



AMAZON TOKYO FASHION WEEK: *Street Style Coverage*

This year, *CONNECT* Style and Beauty Editor Laura Pollacco, and contributor and blogger Daisy Braid, headed to Shibuya to get involved with Tokyo Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2019. Along with taking in some of the runway collections, they observed and documented the street style around the venue. Tokyo is famous for its edgy and avant-garde street style, so the two captured some looks that they spotted around the Shibuya Hikarie building.



Laura Pollacco

Perpetually on trend, monochromatic black outfits are still going strong. There were plenty of black and white looks thrown into the mix as well. Many of the looks were edgy, distressed clothes with leather jackets, and plenty of layering created a grungy vibe that suited the industrialised surroundings. In many instances, outfits looked sleek and stylish; suits created a professional look, but accents and interesting accessories allowed the wearers to look modern and stylish.





Among the crowds of carefully curated monochrome looks were a handful of color-loving showgoers. Outfits featured pops of red and purple with a dose of vintage prints thrown into the mix. We also spotted a couple of all-over citrus yellow looks that we absolutely had to snap pictures of to prove that bold colors were totally trending on the streets of Tokyo this Fashion Week!

Daisy Braid

Daisy is a first-year Tokyo JET from the Gold Coast, Australia. In her spare time, she eats burritos and shares her DIY sewing creations on Instagram @_diydaisy.





Welcome to the Best
Yakitori Restaurant
we have an English menu

バーコン
トマト

ね
¥300

ーマンの
肉詰め ¥40

各種 ¥400



Everyday.

Tayla-Paige van Sittert (Kumamoto City)

It's 7 a.m. again
and we are on the same bus
with the same people
going the same direction
as yesterday.

We don't need to notice anything.

We've carved our course
our stale snail trails,
every day's dust piling
onto our selves;

sedimentary rocks,

hardly moving but still changing.

Today we are not much,
but later we will be a lot more;
like a tragedy that doesn't seem
possible at first, then quickly
happening and
altering everything.

Slowly it happens.

Suddenly it overwhelms:

Big Bang, Genocide, Brick In
The Wall, YouTube Auto Play,
Climate Change,

Painkillers, The Useless Class.

We are rocks pushing boulders up hills, too
self-involved to notice.

CHRIS NUNEZ

Chris Nunez (Kumamoto City)

One of the first things I noticed working in classrooms as an ALT was the lack of choice junior high students have concerning their indoor shoes. うわばき, or indoor shoes, are very important not only because they keep the schools clean. They also tell us which grade their wearers belong in. There is usually one color associated with each of the school's three grades; but, of course, it varies with every school. In my junior high school, first year students wear green while second years wear blue, and third years wear red.

Over the year, the shoes start to develop unique characteristics that tell stories about their students, making this uniform staple more individualistic. I am sure we have all seen that student with a half-ripped うわばき walking around. Others may have different colored socks, one sock, or no socks at all. As a fine arts graduate from the United States who loves oil painting, I chose to paint these indoor shoes because they are something we see every day as ALTs. I think the shoe system is unique to Japan and hope to keep painting Japanese culture.

Follow me on Instagram @chrissnunez





Scop
m



Sophie McCarthy

Sophie McCarthy (Hyogo Prefecture)

This is a collection of photos from the summer I spent in Nashville, TN, USA in 2017. Earlier in the year I was gifted a Canon F1 film camera by my grandfather, and summer was the perfect opportunity to dabble in film photography.

I feel strongly about these photos not because I think they are necessarily profound but because they really kindled my appreciation for photography. I've now learned that arming myself with a film camera was a significant moment as it encouraged me to discover new places in the city I'd lived in for two years. Plus, it completely changed my perception of places and streets I'd walked a dozen times before. Actively going out with a camera instead of rushing place to place made me see a different side of my city and truly appreciate the art of its hidden shapes and curves.

Follow me on Instagram for more: [@sophielmccarthy](https://www.instagram.com/sophielmccarthy)



Nicole Readman

Nicole Readman (Osaka Prefecture)

For this piece, I decided to paint an orb-weaving spider as I feel they fit the theme of “art in the everyday” perfectly. From early autumn, I often see dozens of these spiders on my daily walk to and from work. Although they are extremely creepy, their huge and intricate webs are works of art on their own. I always find the slight yellow colouring of their webs fascinating. In addition to their webs, their bodies have brilliant colouration! The spiders I am used to seeing in Canada (where I am originally from) often only come in brown or black, but these orb-weaving spiders are so vibrant!

Follow me on Instagram: @nicoruart



LIFESTYLE



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Amanda Muller

"Well, Happy Birthday Jesus, sorry your party's so lame." -Michael Scott, The Office

TRAVEL EDITOR

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Photo: Kirsty Broderick





AH..IT'S THAT TIME OF THE YEAR AGAIN...
SWEATERS, SCARVES, HOT DRINKS,
BEAUTIFUL SCENERY...



...AND SEASONAL AFFECTIVE
DISORDER!

Battling Through the SADness

Tips to Help You Through Seasonal Affective Disorder This Winter

Written by Molly Voth (Miyazaki Prefecture)

Illustration by Chantel Fugere (Yamagata Prefecture)

It's winter, y'all! School cultural festivals and sports days are behind us, and now instead of worrying about sweating to death you can worry about freezing to death! Winter has plenty of things to look forward to, like holidays and travelling, comfy sweaters and warm drinks. You're doing your best to prepare for the cold, and planning what you'll do for the holidays.

Unfortunately, for 4-6% of the population winter is an unpleasant time of the year, because it often means Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD for short.

To put it very simply, Seasonal Affective Disorder is the annual occurrence of emotional instability that corresponds with the changing of the seasons — in other words, fighting depression in the winter (or even other seasons for some people).

For most people, winter starts off well. You bust out your sweaters, crank on the heat, snuggle up under your *kotatsu* and binge-watch *Friends* for the 10th time. It's a time to wear comfy clothes and relax.

Then it starts to actually get cold. You haven't seen the sun in some time. Going outside is a chore. You're feeling lumpy because you've been eating poorly for days. Every time you try to be active outside of your home, you're hit with anxieties. At this point you might go to work, come home, and sit on your rear end until the next day, and then repeat

it all the next day. Then the weekend comes, and getting out of bed feels impossible. Cue the funk.

First of all — you're not alone. Year after year I blew off the way I was feeling in the winter as just regular life stresses: "I'm stressed because of finals," or "I'm tired because of school." I thought I could get away with being crabby, tired, and secluded all the time by making excuses. I let myself get into an inescapable routine of doing nothing, and then feeling bad about doing nothing while getting anxious about it. Then I let the depression weigh me down. I let myself be lethargic and self-loathing, all the while continuing to do nothing to help myself. Thus the cycle continued.

When battling SAD, everything is difficult. It hits you like a wall, and finding a way over it seems to be an impossible task. It was not until I started actively keeping a daily log of my moods that I noticed a pattern. Every winter I was happy for about the first week, and then it went quickly downhill from there. It remained a vicious cycle of depression until spring.

That being said, after fighting SAD for as long as I can remember I can say confidently that, yes, it sucks, but there are ways to pull yourself out of that cycle even just a little bit! Winter is full of things to do, so many beautiful sights and adventures to be had. Although it's hard, let's try to take the sad out of SAD:

1 Get fresh air. This is one of those pieces of advice that every single website and forum will tell you to do. Listen to them! It is so good for your health. Go outside, breathe in the fresh, cold air, and open your eyes. Embrace what sunlight you can! Sunlight is such an important part of battling SAD. Medical professionals have said that one of the biggest reasons SAD affects people in winter more commonly is because of the lack of sunlight. If you take a second and look around, winter can be beautiful—if you just give it a chance. In the case that it's too dangerous to go outside (I'm looking at you, Hokkaido, and the meters of snow on the ground), turn off the heat, open a window, and let the fresh, cold air come to you just for a few minutes. Let out all that negative energy trapped inside your apartment; let your apartment get cold and filled with fresh air.

2 Try a new recipe. Now, this one can be a slippery slope. A big part of dealing with SAD, for many people—myself included—is body negativity. Weight gain, or thinking of weight gain, only adds to the stress that leads to depression; it's a vicious cycle. But hear me out: try a new recipe! This is the time of year I like to try healthy desserts, or weird ways to make brownies with sweet potato, black beans, and applesauce. I like to make things I can eat a ton of and not hate myself after. Experiment, go crazy, and deal with the dishes later.

3 Clean! You've been outside, and you've tried a new crazy recipe. Now your jackets are on the floor, and there's a mountain of dishes that makes *Fuji-sama* look pathetic. It's time to tackle it. Pin your hair up (if you have long hair—if not you can skip this step), throw on some gangster rap music (or your preferred music of choice) and get it done! Leave no dish uncleaned. Make your bed (even if you're going to crawl right back into it), put away the pile of clothes you have been actively ignoring for three weeks, and vacuum up the crumbs from around the kotatsu that are beginning to accumulate. Make your home feel like new again! If just cleaning isn't enough, try rearranging. Make your apartment truly feel like a new space. New space, new you.

4 If cleaning and reorganizing your house was not enough, now it's time to exercise. Hiking, skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, or just plain old walking. There's actually a ton of ways to exercise in the winter, especially if you're in a placement that gets snow. Shovel snow. Try ice skating. If you can't get outside, do a workout in your freshly cleaned apartment. Try pilates—it's a low impact, repetitive exercise regime, and it's something new to try that will also not anger the neighbors below you. This doesn't mean to make it a goal to get ripped this winter. But just get up and move. Exercise releases endorphins, which is the human body's natural response to positive stimuli. Your body is happy! A happy body can lead to a happy mind. So give (even very minimal) exercise a try!

5 Now you've been outside, you've eaten a good meal, you've cleaned, and you've tried a new activity. Now let's go back to activities that brought you joy *before* SAD attacked. For some people it's drawing, sewing, knitting, blogging, or dancing. Do the things that used to make you happy on their own. Letting depression into your life can sometimes suck the joy out of the things that used to make you content. This is also a good test for the state of your mental health. See if anything you've been doing has helped with SAD.

The biggest thing is to recognize when it happens and get on that on self-care train ahead of the bout of deep depression and anxiety-fueled loneliness. Make a mood chart—I recommend the app Daylio (free version available on Android and iPhone). Take 20 seconds and type in your mood two times a day. See where you are and where you are headed. It's super customizable too! It will show you your emotional trends and make a visual aid that will help you see when the SAD is kicking in.

Now fight back! Just remember you're not alone. Your worth is more than SAD.

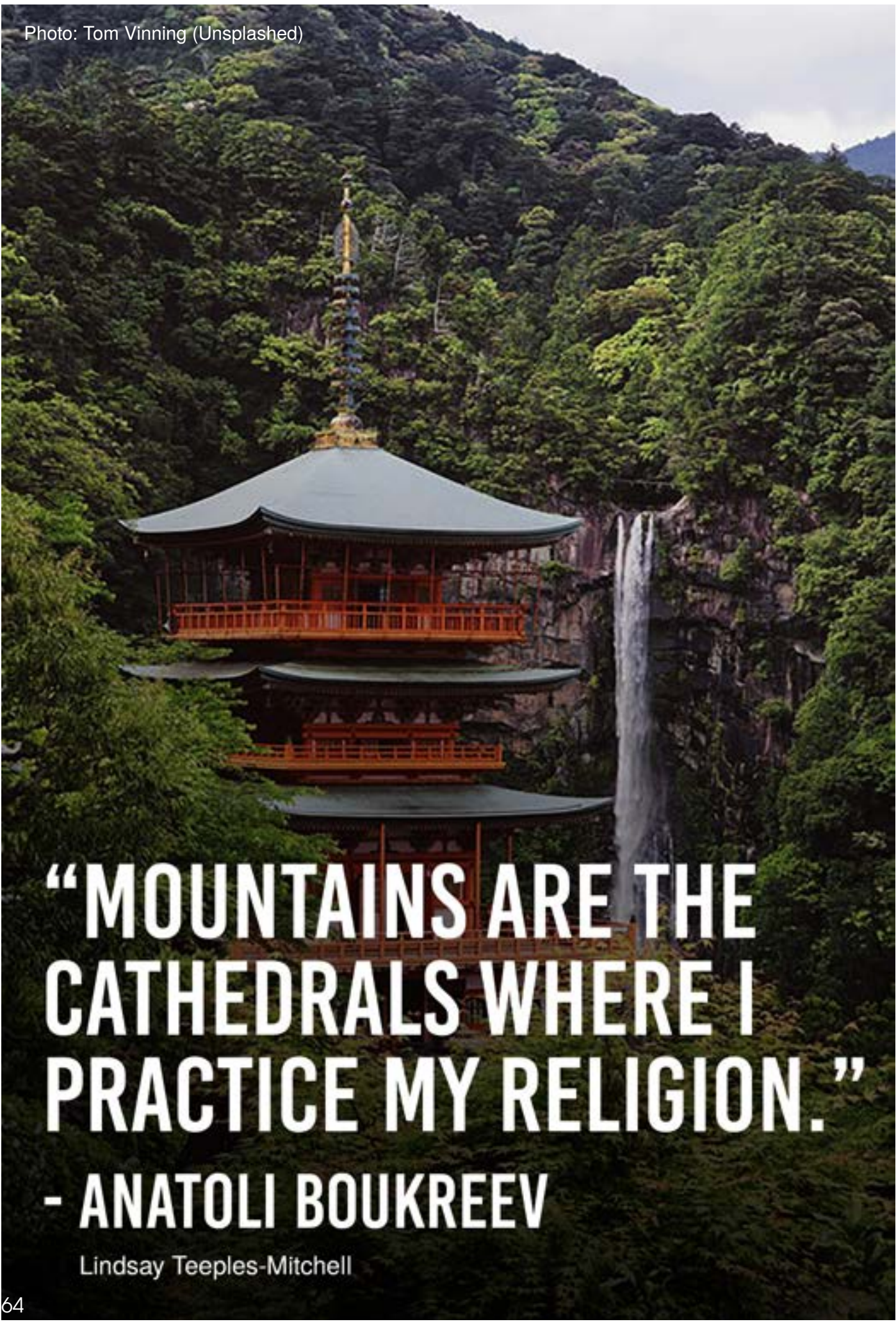
SAD affects an overwhelming number of people every year. Don't be hard on yourself. More importantly, don't give up on yourself. Take care of *you* first.

Good luck this winter, everyone!



Photo: Colette English

Photo: Tom Vinning (Unsplash)



**“MOUNTAINS ARE THE
CATHEDRALS WHERE I
PRACTICE MY RELIGION.”**

- ANATOLI BOUKREEV

Lindsay Teeples-Mitchell



Photo: Alice Hanscomb

You know what I love about hiking? Hiking is an emotional journey, not just a physical one. You learn to set tangible goals. You hit unforeseen challenges even with the best preparations and have to learn how to embrace and overcome them. You feel pain and relief. You feel euphoric. You discover the importance of simplicity. You have time to breathe and reflect on ways to find genuine happiness from virtually nothing- a warm cup of coffee; a kind, eccentric person you meet on the trail; the taste of a granola bar; or taking your boots off to walk through a cold stream. Most often, though, you discover something new about yourself or the world in the process. For me, “getting away from it all” is not just a romanticized ideal - it’s a vital one.

With just over a month under our belts, I knew it was time to find a hike to tackle in Japan. Hoping to envelop ourselves in Japan’s natural beauty and to feel “small” in the grandeur of the world, my husband and I armed ourselves with the

spirit of adventure, hopped on our motorcycle, and headed to *Hongu* for our two-day hike on the *Kumano Kodo* trail.

One of only two pilgrimage routes in the world other than the *Camino de Santiago* to be designated a world heritage site, Kumano Kodo is challenging, rewarding, and absolutely breathtaking. The craggy, mountainous pilgrimage route has been used for over 1,000 years and was originally developed as a means for people to travel between three sacred shrines on the Kii Peninsula - *Hongu Taisha*, *Hayatama Taisha* and *Nachi Taisha*.

Note: Across from the Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine is the (free!) very modern *Kumano Hongū* Heritage Center, which delivers exceptional descriptions in English about the route and its history. Out the window, you can also see Japan’s largest *torii*, which is worth a visit!

Driving through the winding and scenic tree-lined side

streets, we finally arrived at the stunning J-Hoppers Kumano Yunomine Guesthouse just in time for an impromptu wild boar dinner party at the hostel. The space was incredible - a perfect balance of bright and airy, yet warm and cozy, with a beautiful *washitsu* room perfect for gatherings. Not only was the hostel perfectly located to jump right on the road to Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine, it was also nestled in the heart of *Yunomine*, thought to be one of the oldest hot springs in Japan (discovered 1,800 years ago), which made it the perfect setting to gear up for our hike! After a midnight soak in the outdoor onsen attached to the guesthouse and a full belly, we snuggled up and fell fast asleep.

DAY 1

Rising early, we took another pre-hike soak, sipped our morning coffee in the cool air, and wished we had another day to spend at the hostel. By 8 a.m., we had packed ourselves the appropriate provisions (delicious snacks and a couple onigiri) and were hitting the trail - off to the adventure ahead!



Photo: Alice Hanscomb

Note: Thankfully, the hostel allowed us to leave our bike there for the weekend free of charge, yet another perk of our stay! We also were able to hitch a ride from the hostel with some fellow lodgers to the trailhead which saved some time, but if needed, you could take the *Yunomine Onsen Bus Stop* (located about 2 minutes from the guesthouse) to the *Ukegawa Bus Stop*, which is just a short distance from the trailhead, or walk for about 1 hour.

Checking our watches to stay aware of our pace, we jumped on the trail for our first 13 kilometers, from Hongu to *Koguchi*. Mossy, fern-covered steps and small shrines dotted the trail and despite swatting at a number of enormous *akaushiabu*, or horse flies, relentlessly droning in our ears, the hike was incredible. It was both challenging enough for us to feel proud of our efforts and picturesque enough to make it all worth it.

About four hours later, we ended the day in the small town of *Koguchi*. We washed our faces in the cool river that ran through

the town and hiked over to our next guesthouse. Unfortunately, *Minshuku Momofuku* was booked, but we were lucky to find lodging at *Koguchi shizen-no-ie*.

There weren't any restaurants or anything to really take note of in town, but there was a small shop managed by a kind and spirited woman. We grabbed some instant noodles, a couple of beers and a few more snacks for dinner. Note: the guest house offered dinner and breakfast, but we are shoestring travelers and were too cheap—so instant noodles it was! We set up shop, took another long soak, relaxed, watched sumo on television for the remainder of the night and geared up for our upcoming challenge!

DAY 2

The next morning, we snagged a vending machine coffee for the road and headed off for the next 18 kilometers.

For millennia, these serene yet formidable mountains were thought to be the “holy ground where gods dwell[ed].” On the

trail, I even heard from a local hiker that individuals willing to partake in the strenuous 30-40 day voyage were in search of “heaven on earth”. There is no question that their aspirations must have been realized, as hiking among trees as tall as giants while the morning light poured onto the forest floor filled me with a genuine sense of awe and appreciation for our world.

This is not to say it was all sunshine and roses - let me just say: this trail is *not* for the faint of heart. When I say we hiked straight *up* for almost two hours, I mean *straight up*. In fact, there is a name for the almost 5 km, 800 meter elevation gain: *dogirizaka*, also known as “the body breaking slope”. Aptly named, there was truly little reprieve for the grueling first few hours, and at every peak that met the eye, another summit seemed to lay waiting.

Kumano hikers will have no doubt heard tales of *Yatagarasu*, the three legged crow who guided Japan's legendary emperor across the steep mountains. *Yatagarasu*, believed to be a messenger of the gods, or an incarnation of the sun, would no doubt have been an advantageous companion, as much for the emotional encouragement as the directional guidance!

At the top of the final summit, the trail finally began to level out and truly became an entirely magnificent and idyllic hike. The reward was great as the brilliant view of *Nachi-no-taki*, Japan's tallest waterfall, wrapped up our journey.

Today, people from around the world journey to these tranquil mountains to take one of the seven routes known as the Kumano Kodo and find spiritual connection in nature. In fact, we met many on the trail! Apparently during the *Heian* period, so many people took this pilgrimage that it became known as the “march of the Kumano ants”. It makes sense that people would choose this space to connect with something bigger than themselves, as there have not been many times in my life where I have been overcome with such beauty and feeling of reverence. For more information on how to plan your own hike, check here!

One Final Note: If you have extra time to spare, we spent the night in *Ichinono* (just a short walk from the falls) and took a bus from there to *Nachi* station and from there, another train to *Shingu*. It was a really simple journey, and the train ride overlooking the ocean was beautiful! The real treat lay in the city proper - who knew Shingu had so much to offer! From the delicious *Jofuku Sushi* (right across from the station and serving traditional local favorites, like *kombu* and pacific saury sushi, for over 70 years) to *Jofuku Park* - just a 5 minutes walk from the station - or *Kamikura Shrine*, which can be found on top of a hill containing 538 stone steps and offers an incredible view of the city, Shingu was a fantastic city to explore. There is also a really helpful visitors' center right across from Shingu station that will assist you with maps, busses, or planning your next trip to *Dorokyo*!

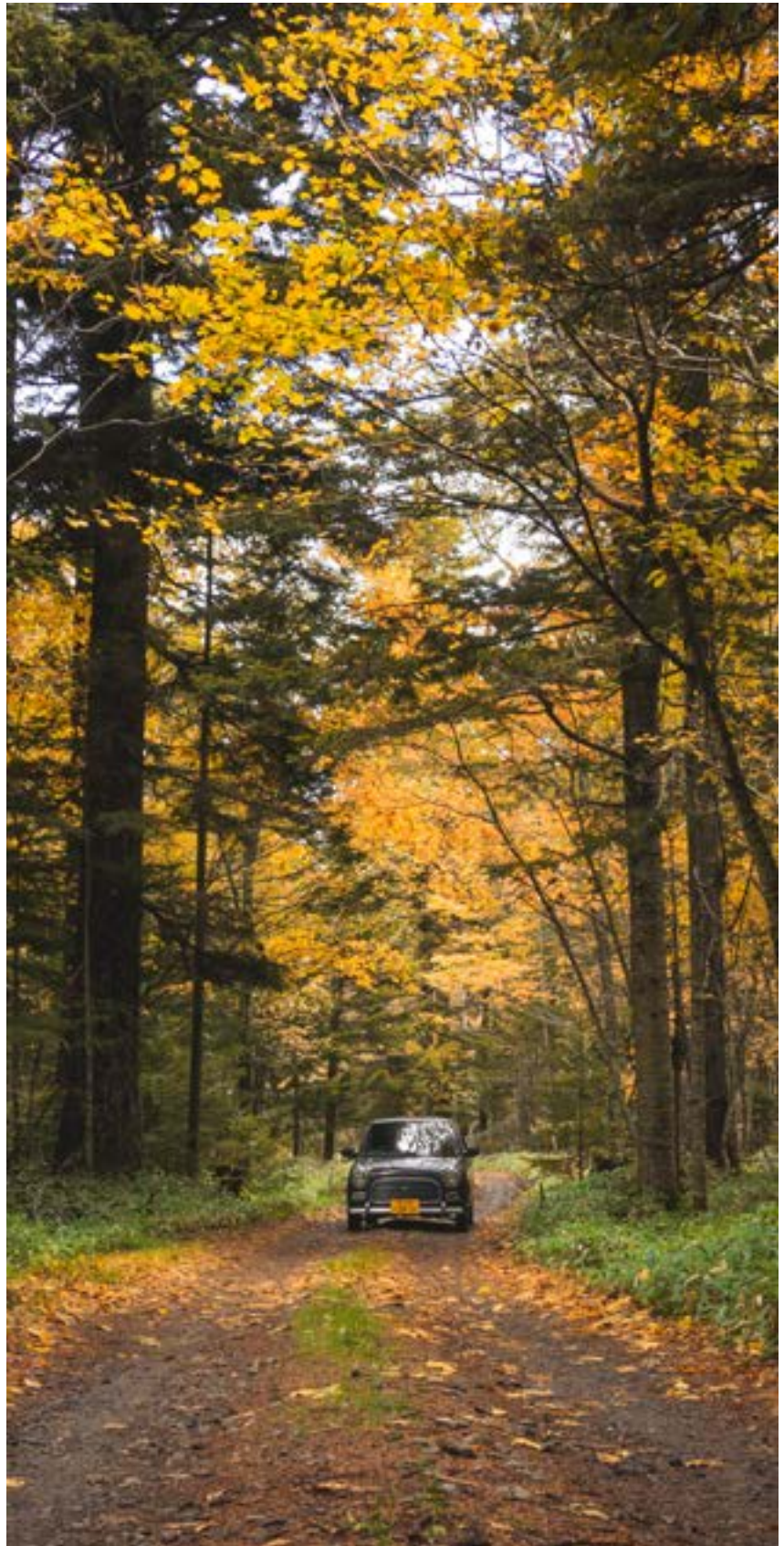


Photo: Colette English



Amanda Muller (Kyoto)

There isn't a lot that tastes like food back home in Japan. Even in a city like Kyoto, it's hard to find authentic foreign cuisine that can make food-homesickness feel like less of a thing. As a New Yorker, the pizza in this country is an abomination; as someone of Italian descent, I have a personal vendetta against cubed ham. I've had more failed attempts at eating Mexican food than I care to even share, and even cooking meals that I would make at home is sometimes impossible here.

It's hard to not crave the taste of home, especially around the holidays. Seeing Instagram posts of your family and friends around the table at Thanksgiving, only to realize that you hadn't even realized it *was* Thanksgiving, is a huge downer. Not going home for whatever winter

holiday you celebrate can be an even bigger downer.

For me, Christmas came at a terrible time. I had been hit hard with Seasonal Affective Disorder, which seemed to just exacerbate my turbulent feelings about not going home for the holiday season. The thought of not being home with my family, and not doing my normal Christmas traditions was enough to make me homesick, and the thought of my parents alone in my house on Christmas was just depressing, and made me feel incredibly guilty.

Christmas definitely didn't feel like Christmas as I did touristy things on my trip to Hiroshima— I nearly forgot what day it was altogether. As it got to be dinner time though, I suggested, half-jokingly, that we check out

KFC to see how crowded it actually gets on Christmas. As only about 1% of people in Japan are Christian, Christmas isn't really a thing here, at least not in the way it is back at home. Couples use Christmas as a Valentine's Day of sorts, doing things together and treating themselves to a nice meal, while others hit KFC for a bit of fried chicken to celebrate the day. The tradition of KFC for Christmas apparently started when the manager of the first KFC in the country had a dream about making a special Christmas chicken bucket, and the rest is history.

It's funny: I've lived in America all my life, but I could probably count on one hand the amount of times I've had KFC. I very rarely ate it, and even driving past the one in my town proved that it's pretty much the least

popular fast food restaurant in my area. And yet in Japan, very far away from Kentucky, KFC is a staple Christmas food.

When we got to KFC, there was a line out the door of people waiting to place an order. While we waited in line, at least forty people walked in ahead of us to pick up the chicken they had ordered in advance to bring home to their families. We had to wait for a while, but not as long as I would have expected. When we finally ordered and found seats, we found that the seating area was virtually empty--only us and one other family had stayed to eat.

For me, Christmas dinner is lasagna, pasta, or sometimes turkey. The idea of fried chicken felt wrong in a visceral way. Despite this, as I sat around the table and split a bucket of chicken with my friends, I was surprised to find the taste of home. It wasn't the food I was used to, and it brought with it none of the traditions I've kept throughout my life. However, even though it was someone else's tradition, it still made it feel more like Christmas to me.

I have never before (and probably never will again) eaten fast food on Christmas, but it tasted like Christmas, because it tasted like home.



Photo:
Aleks Dorohovich on Unsplash

EATING in Every SEASON

A ROUGH GUIDE TO BUYING SEASONAL FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN JAPAN

Jessica Ing (Nagaoka)

Buying produce in Japan can get expensive; but if you stick to fruits and vegetables that are in season, it doesn't have to be! Check out this list of which fruits and vegetables are in season throughout the year and use it to help you plan meals!

WINTER (November to February)

- *Daruma renkon* or *Renkon* (lotus root)
- *Satoimo* (taro)
- *Hakurei* (white turnips)
- *Yuki daikon* (snow radish)
- *Yuzu* (citrus)
- Mandarin oranges
- Strawberries
- *Kinkan* (citrus/kumquat)
- *Daidai* (citrus)
- *Shikwasa* (Okinawa sour orange)
- *Hakusai* (Chinese cabbage)
- Turnip

SPRING

(March to May)

- *Fuki* (butterbur)
- *Fuki no tou* (butterbur buds)
- *Kogomi* (ostrich fern)
- *Nanohana* (flowering rapeseed)
- *Shungiku* (spring chrysanthemum)
- *Takenoko* (bamboo shoots)
- *Wasabina* (wasabi mustard greens)
- *Yama udo* (mountain asparagus)
- *Nagaimo* (mountain potato)
- *Sakura* (cherry blossoms)
- Asparagus
- Cabbage
- *Gobo* (burdock root)
- Turnip
- *Kikurage* (wood ear mushroom)
- Eggplant
- Garlic Cloves
- *Sanshou* (prickly ash berry)
- Snow Peas
- *Shiitake* (mushrooms)
- *Soramame* (fava beans)
- *Zenmai* (Asian royal fern)
- Strawberries
- *Biwa* (loquat)
- Onions



SUMMER

(May to September)

- Carrot
- Onion
- Strawberries
- Tomato
- Edamame
- Cucumber
- Eggplant
- Okra
- Potatoes
- Cherries
- Plum
- Corn
- *Goya* (bitter melon)
- Watermelon
- *Daruma renkon* or *Renkon* (lotus root)
- *Kinchaku nasu* (pouch shaped eggplant)
- Bell pepper
- Lettuce
- *Myoga* (Japanese ginger)
- *Shiso* (beefsteak plant/ herb)
- *Ume* (Chinese plum/ Japanese apricot)
- Mango
- Muskmelon
- Peach
- Pineapple
- *Yuzu* (Citrus)
- *Kyoho* (large purple grapes)
- *Nashi nasu* (pear shaped eggplant)
- *Hechima* (squash)
- *Zuiki* (taro stems)
- *Yugo calabash* (melon)
- *Kagura namban* (spicy green peppers)
- *Kabosu* (sour green citrus)
- Melon
- Blueberries
- *Shikwasa* (Okinawa sour orange)

FALL

(September to November)

- Sweet Potato
- Persimmon
- Pear
- Fuji Apples
- *Kabosu* (sour green citrus)
- *Matsutake* (mushroom)
- *Shiitake* (mushroom)
- *Maitake* (mushroom)
- *Satoimo* (taro root)
- Pumpkin
- Squash
- *Sudachi* (citrus fruit)
- Chestnut
- *Issumboshi* (soybeans)
- *Sakana mame* (soybeans)
- *Omoiohoka* (chrysanthemums petals)
- *Taina* (greens preserved with salt)
- *Nagaokana* (greens preserved with salt)
- *Shikwasa* (Okinawa sour orange)
- *Ginnan* (ginkgo nuts)
- *Shimeji* (mushrooms)
- *Sudachi* (citrus)
- Fig

Resources

1. [Gaijin Pot](#)
2. [Gurunavi](#)
3. [Munchies](#)
4. [Japan Guide](#)
5. [Metropolis](#)
6. [Foodicles](#)
7. [Tokyo Metropolitan Central Wholesale Market](#)
8. [Tsukiji Cooking](#)

COMMUNITY

A photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, there are several traditional wooden houses with steeply pitched, snow-covered roofs. The houses are nestled in a valley, and the surrounding hills and mountains are also covered in snow. The sky is a pale, overcast blue. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

COMMUNITY EDITOR

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Alice Ridley

"I was pleasantly surprised when I heard Christmas music playing in my local supermarket." - An alternative version of myself.

SPORTS EDITOR

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Nikkita Kent

"Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard." Tim Notke

Photo: Colette English



The Power



How Skating in Japan Changed my Worldview

Jeny B. Hague (Gunma)

I am an avid skater. In the U.S., I joined a skating club and participated in competitions, even national ones. I have been skating for decades. Unfortunately, I am not as good as I once was. I went from someone who could pop out jumps as if it was nobody's business to barely being able to get half a rotation off the ice. It's a little thing we call "adult skating."

There is a huge difference between standard skating and adult skating. Apart from skill, there is a dynamic difference. With children's competitions, you have angry moms and coaches who are never satisfied with the results. Competitions are heated and because of constant rivalries, skaters can never make friends with each other. In the adult skating world you have none of that. In fact, it is the exact opposite. Adults encourage one another and are always helping each other improve by offering tips and advice. During competitions, they cheer for everyone and even throw "tossies" (small gifts) on the ice for each and every competitor. Skating creates a small community in which there is no hostility, no discrimination, and no complaints.

With all the hostility in the young professional skating community, it is easy to see how many leave the competition spotlight to pursue other skating options or to quit skating all together. Of the few that I met who transitioned from standard competitions to adult competitions, they were pleasantly shocked at the warmth and love adult skaters bring to the sport.

er of Ice



Getting Out There



In April of 2015, I had the opportunity to attend the Adult U.S. National Figure Skating Championships in Salt Lake City, Utah. Of course, coming from a standard skating background, I went into the competition expecting everyone to be in their own frame of mind, preparing mentally and physically for the events to come. Imagine my surprise when I was met with hugs, handshakes, and gifts as I walked through the doors. I saw people of all ages and backgrounds struggling to do the same exact basic moves I always chastised myself for doing incorrectly. 70-year-old women doing flying camel spins and axle jumps inspired me. I saw people finishing their program, and then sprinting to the next-door rink to watch a fellow skater perform. These people did not come together to have a competition, they came together to celebrate each other and our love for skating. Naturally, when I arrived in Japan, I was afraid I would not be able to experience the same adult skating culture as I had in the U.S. After all, the stereotype is that Americans tend to be more open and accepting of other cultures than Japanese. I was afraid they would see me, a foreigner, as an intruder.

My first experience on the ice in Japan was in the Olympic rink in Nagano during August. Most rinks in Japan are open only during the winter, with only a few being available all year round. It was packed. At least 30 skaters were on the ice doing advanced triple jumps, some quads, and plenty of spins. There was barely any space for my single-rotating, clockwise jumps (most skaters are counter-clockwise). In the corners of the rink, I saw adult skaters grouped together, practicing their basic moves. They waved me over, dedicated a small section just for me, then went about their practice. Their hospitality felt familiar and gave me hope that perhaps there is an adult skating culture in Japan too.

When winter rolled along, I was able to hit up a local rink. After several visits, one of the coaches approached me and offered to give me lessons in exchange for English tutoring. Of course, I accepted! She later introduced me to her students and other adult skaters. Some spoke English, and others did not. It didn't matter. They were happy to accept me into their community and even encouraged me to bring friends. They see me as a fellow skater, not some scary foreigner invading their privacy. They personally greet me as I walk in and say their farewells when I am finished. Children and their parents will often bring home-baked goodies for the fellow skaters to refuel. We give each other tips and advice on how to improve our skills. We celebrate our successes and encourage one another in our losses.

I learned that skating culture is global. It does not care what background you have, what political stances you have, what culture you are from, or what religion you are. We are all the same when we are on the ice. The ice is our hearts. The ice is our home.

I encourage you to try figure skating. Yes, it is challenging, and yes, you may even fall a few times, but you will be shocked by the amount of supporters you will find just by being there. Someone may come to help you. Some children might even teach you how to skate. I had an instance where a group of children saw me instructing my husband on how to do a simple two-foot spin. They came close and asked me to teach them as well. I ended up being surrounded by 10 tiny humans all trying their best to spin on two feet; even their parents got involved.



Finding a Home Rink

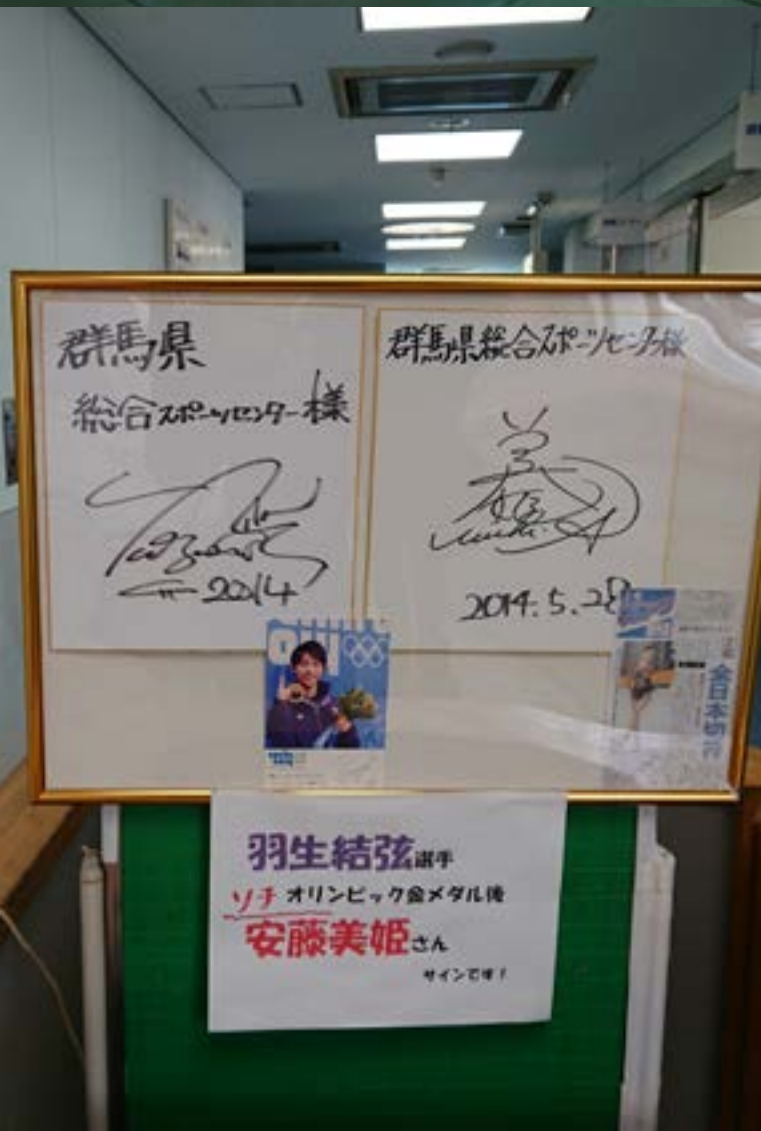
Figure skating rinks are easy to find online in your area. Just do a Google search for *アイスアリーナ (aisu ari-na)* and you will be sure to find a number of results. If you struggle, you can always ask one of your Japanese co-workers to assist you. They may even know of a rink in your area already.

At all arenas, they offer figure skates for you to rent. Most places offer figure skates and hockey skates, and some will even have speed skates available. If you are unsure of what size to get, pick one size smaller than your shoe size. They should be tight and you should not feel your heel move in the boots at all. If they are too small, then work your way up a half-size at a time until you get the perfect fit. Make sure you tie them up tight! Loose boots leave you open to injuries. Depending on how popular the location, they may offer stabilizers and helmets for extra safety and training to make your skating experience even better. Be sure to bring a jacket and gloves! It'll be cold on the ice.

If you are worried about leaving your purse or other belongings behind, you can use the free lockers to store your valuables. I have yet to see a rink in Japan that does not offer them. If you are someone who loves planning events, try asking the rink employees about using their facilities and the availability of group discounts. Some places have party rooms and food so you can enjoy figure skating with all your friends and hold a gathering at the same time. It's the perfect solution to hibernating all winter under the *kotatsu*.

So go on, get out there! Don't be afraid. Meet new people. Get some exercise. Skating is more than just a sport. It is a community. Skating in Japan has changed my view of the world for the better, and it can do the same for you. Please give ice-skating a try and experience the culture.

Jeny is currently on her fourth year in Japan. She teaches at a high school in Maebashi, Gunma. Apart from figure skating regularly, Jeny enjoys playing the piano, and bookbinding. She also has a [blog](#) about skating in Japan as well as traveling.





NIIB:

Edward Portillo (Gunma)



NIIGATA IN THE INAKA INTERNATIONAL BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT



Twice a year in the early morning on a Saturday, people rise and drive from places as far as Fukushima, Gunma, Tokyo, and Toyama, towards a tiny town in the middle of the *inaka* in Niigata prefecture. This group, made up of folks from all across the world, land in the city of Tokamachi for one purpose: to play basketball.

The Inaka International Basketball Tournament, begun eight years ago and inspired by a soccer tournament in neighboring Nagano, draws teams from central Japan to play in a charity event that contributes to the local community, builds camaraderie, and unites expats, locals, JETs, and friends. The latest tournament, held on Saturday, October 27, featured eight teams composed of Japanese people and foreigners, men and women, young and old playing from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in Tokamachi City's Nakasato Arena.

Between scintillating games of basketball, old friendships were renewed and others were able to form new bonds and build connections in places they hadn't known existed until that day. At the end of it all, a new group of champions was crowned, claiming the coveted title belt that they will hold until the spring tournament.

The event is run out of Tokamachi City Hall by the NIIB Tournament Commissioners, who coordinate with various sponsors, gather teams, and ensure everything runs smoothly. Whether it's food, first aid, or the post tournament *enkai*, the people at city hall are the unsung heroes of the event. Each iteration builds on the lessons of the last and makes the whole experience worth going to. It's through the sponsors that lodging, meals, and other forms of support are arranged, so that teams and spectators are left to focus entirely on the action.

And that action is both fun and

intense! Despite being a non-serious competition, teams play their hearts out, putting everything into every game. With a total of eight teams, the morning games are arranged into a round-robin tournament, which serves to decide the seeding for the afternoon's playoffs. The morning rounds see teams jostling for position, trying to keep their wins high and losses low. The afternoon games begin with a split, where the winners of the first round move on and the losers go into a consolation bracket. From there, any losses mean an early end to the tournament, while wins propel teams towards the championships.

This year's winners, the Gunma Dark Horses (of which this author is a member), captained by Andy Siriapismai, won two out of three games in the morning, claiming first seed on points. The afternoon tournament proceeded with fun but tough games, including a down to the wire victory in the semifinals by just one point. The final pitted us against the defending champions from Toyama, No Money No Honey. The Toyama team had also faced a tough opponent in their semifinal match, playing through a nail biter of a game which ended after two overtime quarters with a miraculous three-point shot. Tired, sweaty, and looking forward to the evening's festivities, Gunma and Toyama battled it out; and in the end, the Dark Horses prevailed, bringing the title home after several iterations of the belt residing with other teams.

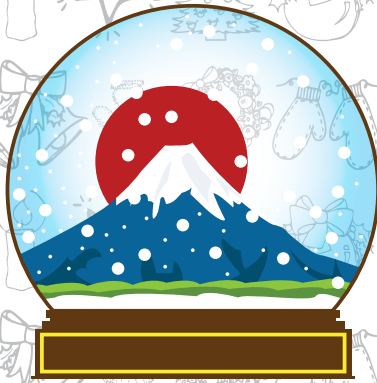
After the games, the remaining players headed off to lick their wounds and recover some stamina at a local *onsen*, before heading to the evening festivities at Hayashiya Ryokan, a tournament sponsor. Once gathered, the traditional prizes — precious and delicious sake bottles — were handed out to the top two teams,

the male and female MVPs, and others, including a special prize for one of the original players who after eight years still attends almost every tournament.

In the grand tradition of NIIB, the alcohol flowed freely and the friendships that had started on the court were cemented amidst many toasts, *kanpais*, and karaoke. Foreigners and Japanese people, men and women, young and old, mixed and mingled together, celebrating games played, titles won, and sake, freely distributed by those who'd won bottles. Delicious food, provided by the ryokan, sated the hunger of the players who'd spent so much energy on the day's exertions. Afterwards, some even went to after-parties, where there was yet more food, drink, and karaoke.

Twice a year, for over eight years now, deep in the *inaka* of Niigata prefecture, people gather to play in one the most exciting and fun sporting events in all of Japan. Twice a year, friendships are forged and re-forged, games of basketball are won and lost, and good times are had by all. The next tournament is tentatively scheduled for June, and Gunma will be there to defend their title. The only question, dear reader, is whether you will be there too.

Edward Portillo is a second year ALT in Gunma prefecture. Originally from Los Angeles, California, he is a big fan of the Lakers and basketball in general. This was his third NIIB tournament and first time winning the title (in the previous two tournaments, Gunma won the consolation bracket). His other hobbies include badminton, video games, and attempting to visit every prefecture in Japan (17 down, 30 to go). This is his second piece for Connect and he hopes to continue writing in the future.



STEPS TO BRING

Your Christmas

TO JAPAN

MAKING THE HOLIDAYS MORE LIKE HOME

Talisha Vernon (Gunma)



*Christmas time is here.
Happiness and cheer.
Fun for all the children call.
Their favorite time of the year.*

I always think of “*Christmas Time Is Here*” by Vince Guaraldi around Christmas time: carols everywhere and sleigh bells in the air. This song reminds me of everything Christmas in Japan is not. At least, that is what I thought after my first Christmas here in Japan.

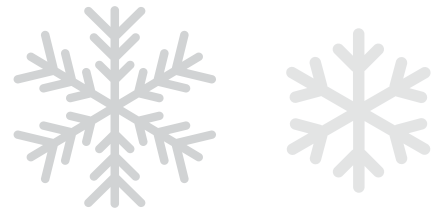
For my first Christmas in Japan, I wanted to experience a “typical” Japanese Christmas where I would passively let Christmas happen to me. That year, Christmas day fell on a weekday, so I went to work like everyone else. Students were already out of school for winter vacation, so all I did was sit at my desk listening to a podcast and browsing the Internet.

Around lunchtime, I had had enough and took the rest of the day off. I met up with a couple of friends who had also stayed in Japan for the holidays, we bought some KFC, a strawberry shortcake (which later became known as a Christmas cake), and just set up camp in a friend’s apartment, watching our favorite Christmas movies. To be honest, it was the most unusual Christmas I had ever experienced, but I really feel that everyone should try it at least once. However, I wanted to do more for Christmas, to embrace the Christmas spirit talked about in all the festive songs blasting in every Starbucks, department and grocery store.

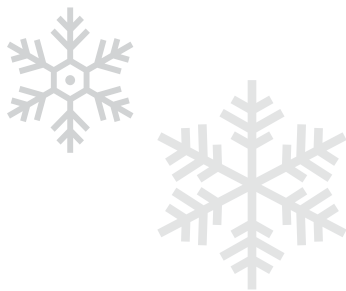
Fast-forward to Christmas 2017. I’m now married with children. My husband is from Nepal and never really celebrated Christmas before, and my children’s first Christmas was in Taiwan, so they were very little help when it came to Christmas spirit. I decided it was my mission to spread Christmas cheer throughout my community in order to outdo the past few years of Christmases in Japan.

Here are the steps I took:

DECORATION IS A **STEP ONE:** *Must*

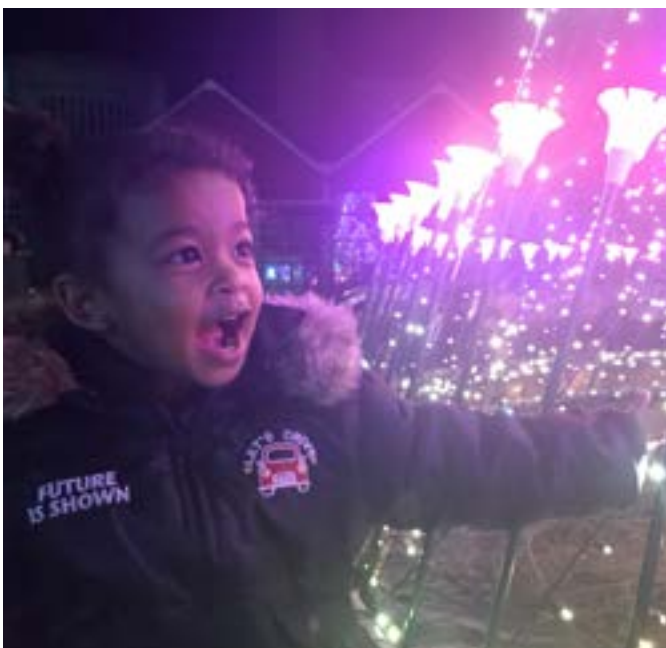


If you need decorations (and a lot of them) but you don't want to spend a crazy amount of money, Daiso or any 100-yen store is the place to shop. Don't just decorate the inside of your house - decorate the outside as well. With a ribbon and a bow, my front door became a beautiful Christmas present. Add a small Christmas tree out front, and *tada*: Christmas cheer is spread throughout your whole apartment. (Literally my *whole apartment*. I live right at the entrance to my apartment complex, so everyone *has* to see my front door.) I bought two Christmas trees: one for the inside of my house and another mini tree for my desk at work. I also made my own chimney out of all the boxes I forgot to recycle and hung lights and stockings from it.



STEP TWO: *Illumination*

GO SEE THE LIGHTS.



They are probably already up and hanging around your local train stations or shopping malls, but the many illuminations this time of year really get me ready for Christmas. Where I live there are illuminations up in the mountains where a little holiday scene and a train ride is set up with lights. These illuminations usually start around the beginning of November and some even continue until February. I make sure to go out and really experience the views at least once. My city has an event called "The Festival of Lights" where local nursery schools design boards of lights to hang up around the station. Last year, Santa showed up with a guitar and played Christmas tunes. Even though it's usually downright freezing outside, being out and about with couples on dates or families with small children with wide eyes of amazement is just so special.

STEP THREE:

COLONEL SANDERS IS NOT SANTA CLAUS.

I am Santa Claus



Did I arrive in Japan with a few Christmas sweaters and on top of that order two more Christmas sweaters and an “ugly” Christmas sweater off Amazon? You bet your gumdrops I did. Did I wear those sweaters everywhere I went for the weeks leading up to Christmas? *Yes, of course!* I even found two Santa costumes at a second-hand store for my twins to wear to their nursery school. After checking if it was okay with my school, I handed out candy and stickers to my students after each class dressed as Santa.





STEP FOUR:

NO MORE KFC
LET'S HAVE A
"Real"
CHRISTMAS DINNER

Okay, I know I may have lost some people. Believe me, I can't cook. My kitchen is only equipped with the basics, so preparing a real meal is impossible. However, I tried. I bought a rotisserie chicken from Costco and followed some basic cooking instructions from my mom over the phone. The whole processed reminded me of times back home when I would help in the kitchen for Christmas dinner.

STEP FIVE: CHRISTMAS SPIRIT CAN *cross oceans*



The most important step for me is to think of friends and family nearby. I know that especially if this is your first year in Japan away from your family, this season can be difficult. However, don't just Skype with your family back home or go out with friends. Invite Japanese people or other ALT friends over for a Friendsmas (Friend Christmas) Party. Connect with people around you and introduce them to how you celebrate the holidays at home.

At the end of it all, that Christmas was actually one of the best I've had during my time in Japan. Once I began to bring in the Christmas spirit from home, that feeling of being alone during the holidays decreased.

This specific example is about Christmas, but with a little modification, these steps can work with whatever holiday you celebrate.

*Christmas time is here.
We'll be drawing near.
Oh, that we could always see.
Such spirit through the year.*

Talisha is a fifth-year prefectural JET in Gunma. As a child of parents in the U.S. Army, Talisha has only lived in capital cities in the countries her parents were stationed. Gunma Prefecture is the first time she has lived out in the countryside. Through this new, slower lifestyle, Talisha has been introduced to many adventures she simply wouldn't have had if she lived in a big city.



JET PROGRAMMES

Sadie Donnelly (Minoh)



My alma mater is a conservative, private college in Dallas, Texas called Southern Methodist University. I am neither wealthy nor conservative. My first few years at university were plagued by a feeling of loneliness and isolation. I couldn't relate to most of the student population, who spent their weekends at fraternity parties and acted like money had never been a concern for them or their family. In my eyes, I had absolutely nothing in common with them. I firmly believed that the only thing that we shared was that we went to the same university. That wasn't enough.

It's only now that I've graduated that I've started to think that maybe it was. Enough, that is. There are things that only people who attended SMU understand, no matter how disparate our previous experiences may be. I only came to this realization after being invited to a meme group aptly named "Methodist Memes for Southern Teens," created by Momin Irfan. I was delighted to find out that the memes shared on this page highlighted the idiosyncratic absurdities of going to this university. Common topics include the ridiculous amounts of fountains on campus and the characters who work in the cafeterias. I found myself laughing at the jokes of people who I'd otherwise never even think to have a conversation with. These memes resonated with people, regardless of their class or political belief, contingent upon only the fact that we were all students of SMU.

When I first started the JET Programme and moved to my new home in Minoh, Osaka, I once again found myself feeling lonely and isolated, as most people who move to a new country are going to feel at some point. People back home didn't understand what I was going through. The memes that found their way to my feed, comforting and relatable to me before, now made me feel even more distant. Memes are rooted in culture, and the culture that these memes were referencing was no longer the one I interfaced with daily.

During orientation, my friend, Kevin Takahashi, showed me the Instagram page of Memesugoi, which was created by Chris McGarr. This is an account that caters to English-speaking foreigners in Japan. I instantly loved it, and knowing that it was such a popular account gave me validation in knowing there were other people going through the same experiences as me. I shared a lot of Memesugoi's posts on my own accounts. It was kind of my way of saying, "hey, this is what I'm going through right now," to the my friends and family back home. However, the one thing I thought was missing

was that sense of interaction and community that Methodist Memes for Southern Teens had provided.

People say "Every Situation is Different" and I've come to hate that phrase. When you get down to it, we as JETs have much more in common than in opposition. I was glad to find that there were already a lot of Facebook groups for JETs, often with very specific subtopics. I'm part of a lot of them, like JET Ladies + and Stonewall Japan. These groups provide valuable resources and ways to connect with people all across Japan and they've been invaluable resources for me.

These groups helped me realize that there were a lot of JETs who at that moment were feeling the exact same way I was. They were struggling with the work culture and the expectations that were placed upon them. They were adapting to a new country and a new culture. Posting in groups like these often carries a serious weight, and Methodist Memes for Southern Teens had proven to me the value of humor as a tool for connecting with others. We needed a group where we could interact, complain about petty things, and revel in camaraderie. I mulled over the idea of creating a meme group for a few days. What would I even call it? Would anyone be interested? One day the name JET Programmemes struck me—low-hanging fruit maybe, but it was too good not to use. I created the group and invited the first dozen members.



At first, I was apprehensive. I really had no idea if anyone would join. At around 50 members, I tepidly posted my first few memes. For a few days, the group was silent and I figured it would just die off—no harm done. I could just tuck it away in my folder of failed attempts and never think of it again.

However, the group has exploded to anything beyond what I had initially anticipated. In under two months, JET Programmemes has gained over one thousand members. I field dozens of member requests every day. Members come organically, from people adding their friends or from people posting about the group in other JET-adjacent forums.

Now when I open up Facebook, my feed is filled with memes that are often piercingly accurate. People share memes about anything from their struggles in the workplace to general culture shock. A meme that I think may be extremely specific to my situation will often be met with comments echoing that same sentiment and it helps me to realize that I'm not alone. Some posts have even given me ideas for lessons! I moderate the group very lightly because I want it to feel like a space where everyone can share what they're going through and not be afraid of judgement.

Yes, our experiences as JETs vary vastly. Some of us are in the countryside and some of us are in the city. Some of us are overworked and some of us are

underworked. But when it comes down to it, we're really the only ones who can understand each other.

Memes are a way for people to connect with each other. At their core, they're lighthearted and relatable. When they're not, they're an insight into somebody else's life experiences. Memes are culture diluted to its very essence. JET Programmes and the people who are a part of it have had a hugely positive impact on me. I hope it has for other people too. I hope that they can realize that they're not alone. If you can find even one person who understands you, it feels like such a huge weight has been taken off of your shoulders. I created this group on September 14, 2018, and I'm just so excited to see where it goes.

JETs are amazing. We're helping students learn English and expanding their worldviews. We are forces for globalization. We persisted through a strenuous application process designed to make sure that we are equipped to handle the tasks ahead of us. However, we're also people, and sometimes we just need to complain about how the checkout clerk at 7-11 gave us a fork instead of chopsticks.

In other words: we made it, so let's make memes about it.



Sadie Donnelly is a first year ALT teaching in Minoh, Osaka. She is from Dallas, Texas. She wastes most of her time messing around on the internet and occasionally makes art and videos. She can be found on IG @saideiy and Youtube as sadie donnelly

Inaka ALT Bingo

10 points for every applicable box. Plus 50 points for every bingo.

なまえ _____

Town is officially a 町 (Double points for 村) 10 (20)	Live in a house 10	30+ minute commute to work 10	Average age 60+ 10	In the middle of the mountains 10
Largest employer is agriculture 10	No train station 10	No cell service in some areas 10	Schools with less than 50 students 10	Only foreigner in town 10
No bus service 10	Declining population 10	** Free ** "You live where?"	No high school 10	Youth flight 10
Town conbini is owned by an old couple 10	Everyone knows your name, even if you don't know them 10	Points for each: mosquitoes, cicadas, spiders, cockroaches, mukade, boar 10x6	Zero people in your dating pool 10	Abandoned houses everywhere 10
Town ATM closes at 5:00pm sharp 10	Abandoned school(s) 10	No shopping or recreation 10	Cheaper to order on Amazon than it is to go to a store 10	Even Japanese people don't know your where your town is 10



KIWIS PONDER A COLD CHRISTMAS

Jacob Fagan (Akita), Alice Ridley (Gunma), Kitty Houchen (Gunma) and
Alex Johnston (Fukushima)



JACOB FAGAN

Growing up, I'd always wonder about those movies where Santa gets in trouble and Christmas is cancelled, expect that at the last minute some plucky young'un saves the day with minutes to spare. This is because I grew up in New Zealand, a full day ahead of America. In the movie world I would be sitting in my house on Boxing Day (a day invented by Australians to help keep the kangaroo population down) wondering why there had been no Christmas. All this during the middle of summer.

The average high for December in Christchurch, my hometown, is 21 degrees C (69.8 F), which is 15 degrees (59 F) warmer than where I'm based in Akita prefecture. I have yet to have a Japanese Christmas or winter, but I will share my thoughts anyway.

I was told that Japanese people eat KFC for Christmas. I recently found out that it's just a couples thing, so I'm disappointed. It will be strange having hot food for dinner. Most of my Christmases consisted of eating cold meats in the garage with all my family. More recently, we've eaten outside on the lawn but the food hasn't changed: ham, cold turkey and chicken (turkey's

expensive, and there's a lot of us), cold potatoes, cold peas, and warm salads (it's hot outside). The next day we'd gather for leftovers. Dad would BBQ some of the ham and potatoes, and maybe we'd get a new salad. We didn't have a hot meal. I'm not sure what my plans are this year. I might do something with friends, I might just stay by myself. Beyond the normal not being round my family, the thing that I think will be oddest about Christmas this year is the food. Putting aside the possibility of Asian influence, the food will more than likely be hot. Hot because it's so freaking cold. It doesn't scream Christmas to me. I can do without the decorations; I'll survive without my family. But not having the 'right' kind of food? Who knows.

At the end of the day, Christmas is about more than all of those things. There're lots of things that make Christmas *Christmas* and food was the first thing to come to mind. Having a cold Christmas isn't a foreign concept. I have after all watched American Christmas movies and TV specials. The cold doesn't bother me either. Akita is colder than Christchurch but it's drier. It's the food I'm not sure on yet.

Jacob is 25 and from Christchurch, New Zealand. He currently works in Akita Prefecture as a first year ALT. His favourite Japanese phrase is '失礼しました'.

First and foremost, I would like to disclose a couple of things before I get into my musings about having a stereotypical cold Christmas. Firstly, I am not a Christmas person. Christmas to me represents some evil things in the world that I don't completely agree with. Along the years, Christmas has moved away from the core value of what the holiday means. It's a lot of buy buy buy and waste waste waste in my opinion.

My family never really celebrated a traditional Christmas. Our Christmas tradition was that every year we would all cook food from a different country together. I really loved our tradition. We traveled across the globe with cuisines from Germany, Hawaii, Sweden and Romania (to name a few). I am going to talk about what most of the population will be doing for this day.

Secondly, I am Kawaussie (It's a thing, look it up!) which means I have lived in both Australia and New Zealand. I tend to lean more towards kiwi these days. Controversial, I know, but there is just clearly a better country of the two. At least we can hold a prime minister for more than a year. A total badass female prime minister as well! Anyways, I will leave the political downfall of the world for some other time. Now back to Christmas!

To think back to my childhood Christmases in Australia, I mostly remember there being a lot of prawns, roast chicken and a lot of chocolate-covered almonds. We would usually eat outside on my grandmother's veranda while frantically waving the flies away from the spread of food. After the main Christmas lunch was eaten we would usually go into a food coma, or want to nap everywhere because

of the scorching heat that an Australian summer brings. Dessert would include a pavlova, Christmas cake with custard, or a trifle. Sometimes even all three if you were brave enough. Generally speaking, most people have their family Christmases outdoors in parks or family backyards. We would end up playing some sort of backyard cricket and drinking a buttery Chardonnay or a VB in a schooner in a flimsy camping chair. A Kiwi Christmas would be very similar to the Aussie Christmas minus the terrible heat (although in saying this I live on the South Island). Other main differences would be more fresh seafood such as crayfish, a different drink of choice for binge drinking, and our countries probably trying to act like we celebrate Christmas differently.

For this coming Christmas I am "volunteering" to sing Christmas songs a local event in my city to showcase what Christmas really means to us. Truth be told, I wasn't given an option because all foreigners must love Christmas and feel the need to publicly sing because of it. I might even be forced into one of those horrible Christmas sweaters by my fellow ALTs. Other than that the day will be a fairly standard day as I haven't planned on doing anything major. Things I wouldn't be mad at about happening on Christmas day would be eating some sort of custard (out of the carton ideally), roast potatoes, chocolate-covered almonds, seeing a Japanese child in a pudding costume, and maybe even watching *Love Actually*. I hope that Christmas fanatics across Japan are still able to get their fix through interacting with their own communities and other foreigners that live around them as I know this can be a time where people often feel homesick. *Kia kaha* - Stay strong!

ALICE RIDLEY

Alice is a first year ALT hailing from New Zealand finding her way in Japan residing in the mighty cabbage patch of Gunma. She is a lover of a good coating of sarcasm, finding fellow plant-based folk, wearing black clothing 24/7 and is constantly refusing plastic bags received with strange looks. Who knew we had arms?! @twignsshit

KITTY HOUCHEEN

Approaching Christmas in Japan, I can't help but think fondly about what I've given up back home. I'm certainly not alone in this. I'm sure many Kiwi expats are fondly dreaming of the summer fruit, the beaches, beers, BBQ's, and of course pavlova. But I can't help but think that this longing is rose-tinted. When I really think about it, Christmas for me means salt and sand stinging sunburned skin; drunk uncles falling asleep in deck chairs, their skin drying out and crisping up until they resemble the Crypt

Keeper, or some kind of dried pork product; and the ever-annoying presence of extended family who feel obligated to stay beyond their welcome because the sun hasn't set yet, and won't for another four or five hours.

Most of my Christmas days were spent skulking around with a glass of the nearest alcoholic beverage, trying to avoid being roped into waitress duty. And yet, somehow, despite my lifelong dream of experiencing a white Christmas, I can't help but feel nostalgic about New Zealand's particular brand of Christmas. Spending Christmas alone in Japan will be a very different, though probably somewhat freeing, experience. My expectations are high — probably too high. If it doesn't snow, and I don't get a winter wonderland full of seasonal joy and pure, unadulterated Christmas magic, then I'll be seriously doubting my recontracting decision.

Either way though, whether my dreams of a perfect Christmas are realised or not, I think I'll miss the good old Kiwi Christmas - drunk uncles and all.

Kitty was born and raised in New Zealand. At (almost) 30 years old, she is a generic JET, trying desperately to escape society's expectations.

ALEX JOHNSTON

I didn't give much thought beforehand to the idea of having Christmas in Japan, other than that I'd probably end up having to work that day. In New Zealand, aside from a few extended family gatherings here and there during childhood, Christmas was a quiet affair. It would often consist of a good sleep-in, a few presents under the faux Christmas tree, and some kind of BBQ and beer filled afternoon.

One memorable thing from my childhood is from the Dutch side of my family. We'd celebrate Sinterklaas (O.G Christmas) on December 6 by chucking a carrot in a shoe the night before and waking up to these tasty little biscuits called Kruidnoten and chocolate in the shape of letters.

I imagine this year I will either organize dinner and presents with hypothetical friends or end up downing some poor quality homemade eggnog and crying into a bucket of the colonel's finest. Either way, I'm looking forward to it.

Alex stands at a mighty two metres tall. A Dutch-Kiwi hybrid born in the canals of Amsterdam, he was raised in a hobbit ghetto among the streets of a small New Zealand town called Timaru.

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CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

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

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

ARTICLES

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

SPOTLIGHT

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

COMMENTS

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

PHOTOS

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

HAIKU

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

COMICS

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



CONNECT WITH US

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

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