

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

DECEMBER
2019

Japan's Next Top Yuru-chara

Sewing Off! An Interview with Daisy Braid on her unique creations and being a seamstress in Tokyo

Hidden Communities of the Seto Inland Sea

At Home in the World

The Unexpected Path of Life After JET



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

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I am delighted to introduce another fantastic issue of *CONNECT* for the month of December. A huge thank you to our volunteer staff who work tirelessly month after month. People often ask us, “*Are you paid for this?*” and the answer is a simple no. We do it all to spread the stories of fellow international residents in Japan. I have made it my personal mission to meet all staff members across Japan in person. It has been a great way to make friends whom I would have never been able to make without this opportunity! I would highly recommend for you to look into your options to volunteer, whether it be in-person or virtually. Currently I virtually volunteer for *CONNECT*, Stonewall Japan and Peaceboat all from the comfort of desk warming. I would say without a doubt that it will enrich your Japan experience further. So if you ever meet a staff member in the wild and you enjoy our magazine please give us a *high five* or something. It is always great to hear about what people like or don’t like. If you do have any ideas of how to make *CONNECT* better, please don’t hesitate to contact me at connect.editor@ajet.net.

Now for my personal top five in no particular order:

1. Events presents “Japan’s Next Top Yuru-chara.” I personally was awaiting the release of this one. When I received the email that it was ready—I quickly read it with much glee. This ridiculous competition embodies Japan perfectly, for better or for worse.
2. Fashion and Beauty presents “Sewing Off! An interview with Daisy Braid on her unique creations and being a seamstress in Tokyo.” I initially found Daisy’s work on Instagram—low-key fangirl alert—and thought it would be great to celebrate a different type of creator residing in Japan. And here it is!
3. Culture presents “Hidden Communities of the Seto Inland Sea” written about the Setouchi Triennale 2019. I recently also attended in autumn and had a fantastic time. As touched on in the article, the event is much more than simply art on an island. It is also a revitalization of communities.
4. Culture presents “At Home in the World” where fellow Kiwi Connor writes about Kansai Rainbow Festa. This piece is a celebration of the event but it also notes the differences between Western and Japanese Pride. In addition to reading this article, I would recommend reading [this critique](#) on the Queer Eye coming to Japan.
5. Community presents “The Unexpected Path of Life After JET” with a JET alumni. Clare from Community speaks to a small business owner about how they managed to use their JET experience and create a business after leaving in 2005.

That’s all for my personal highlights! Remember to drink water and don’t fall asleep under your *kotatsu*.

Alice Ridley
Head Editor
2nd Year Gunma ALT

Alice R.

Photo: Torin McClellan

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"Is it Seasonal Depression or an Especially Squalid Chapter in American History?"

– *The Reductress*

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Eli Ferster

"好きこそ物の上手なれ What one likes, one will do well." – Japanese saying

Natalie Andrews

"I am a stick." – Shellan, in *Words of Radiance* by Brandon Sanderson

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Isabelle Teo

"Nothing is decided, so everything is possible."
– *Sakurai Sho*

Damien Levi

"Welcome to my kitchen, we've got bananas and avocados." – *Chrish Guerra*

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Ashley Hirasuna

"Life is too short to take things so personally."

ASSISTANT DESIGNER

Rhema Baquero

"Dreams save us. Dreams lift us up and transform us. And on my soul, I swear...until my dream of a world where dignity, honor and justice becomes the reality we all share - I'll never stop fighting." – Superman, *Action Comics Vol 1 775*

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"Life is a shipwreck, but we must not forget tossing in the lifeboats." – Voltaire

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"Wisdom comes from experience. Experience is often a result of lack of wisdom." –Terry Pratchett

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Rebecca Ruth

"Let's not, and not even say we did."

Photo: Vicanda Ma (Kobe)



Events Calendar:

December 2019

For Japanese only webpages, you can download the Google Translate extension to read the pages in other languages

Block 1

Hokkaido
Aomori
Iwate
Akita

Block 2

Miyagi
Yamagata
Fukushima
Niigata

Block 3

Ibaraki
Tochigi
Gunma
Saitama
Nagano

Block 4

Chiba
Tokyo
Kanagawa
Yamanashi
Shizuoka

Block 5

Toyama
Ishikawa
Fukui
Gifu
Aichi

Block 6

Shiga
Kyoto
Hyogo

Block 7

Mie
Osaka
Nara
Wakayama

Block 8

Tokushima
Kagawa
Ehime
Kochi

Block 9

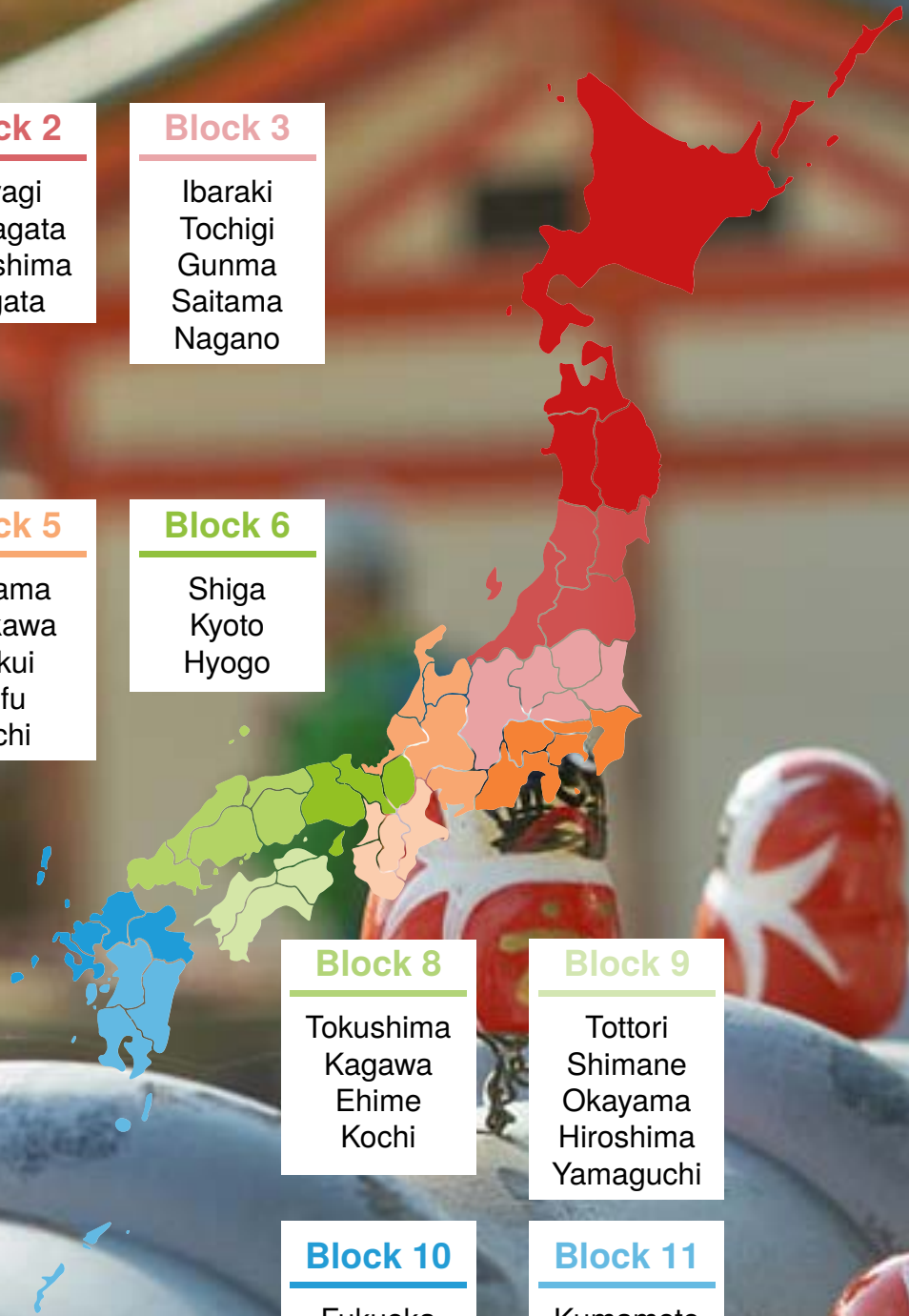
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa







Block 1



Block 2

Hakodate Christmas Fantasy

November 30 - December 25
Hakodate City, Hokkaido Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

64th Hokkaido Gishi Festival

December 14
Sunagawa City, Hokkaido Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

18th German Christmas market in Sapporo

November 22 - December 25
Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Hiroo Hair Crab Festival

December 8
Hiroo Town, Hokkaido Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Koiwai Winter Illumination

November 22 - January 13
Shizukuishi Town, Iwate Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Odate Shining Street

December 7 - January 13
Odate City, Akita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

The Tsugaru Shamisen 2019

December 7
Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Arts Towada Winter Illumination

December 6 - February 14
Towada City, Aomori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shibata Fantasy Illumination

December 1 - December 30
Shibata Town, Miyagi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sendai Pageant of Starlight

December 6 - December 31
Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

32nd Pageant of Light

December 6 - December 31
Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Echigo Park Winter Illumination

December 1, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21-25
Nagaoka City, Niigata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Big Catch of Cold Yellowtail Festival

December 1
Sado City, Niigata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Mt. Zao Juhyo Light-Up

December 28 - February 29
Yamagata City, Yamagata Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tsuruoka Daruma City

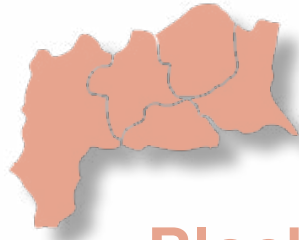
December 17
Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kohata Flag Festival

December 1
Nihonmatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Concert at Takine Goten in Abukuma-do

December 1 - December 29
Tamura City, Fukushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 3

159th Koga Pole Lantern Festival

December 7

Koga City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Oguri Hangan Festival

December 1

Chikusei City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Gunma Flower Park Illumination

November 9 - January 13

Maebashi City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Lake Haruna Illumination Festa

December 6 - December 28

Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Watarase Keikoku Railway Illuminations

December 1 - February 29

Midori City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tomioka Christmas Maruche

December 7

Tomioka City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shimotsuki Festival

December 13 - December 15

Iida City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Karuizawa International Curling Championship 2019

December 19 - December 22

Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Ashikaga Flower Park Illumination

December - February 6

Ashikaga City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kinugawa-Kawaji Onsen Yuzu-yu Baths

December 21 - December 22

Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tobu World Square Illumination

November 9 - March 7

Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kasukabe Hagoita Market

December 2 - December 3

Kasukabe City, Saitama Prefecture

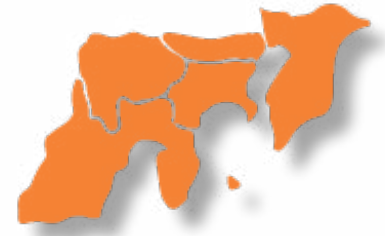
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Chichibu Night Festival

December 2 - December 3

Chichibu City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 4

Setagaya Boro-ichi Market

December 15 - December 16

Tokyo, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Winter Comiket

December 28 - December 31

Tokyo, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tokyo Dome City Winter Lights Garden

November 13 - February 26

Tokyo, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Gishi Matsuri

December 14

Tokyo, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Jewel of Shonan Illumination

November 23 - February 16

Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Mt. Akiba Fire Prevention Festival

December 6

Odawara City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Photo: Ethan Wang (Kobe)



Block 4

Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse Christmas Market

November 22 - December 25
Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Sumatakyo Onsen Thanks Festival

December 6 - December 7
Kawanehon Town, Shizuoka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yamanakako Fantaseum

November 23 - January 5
Yamanakako, Yamanashi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 5

Tulip Park KIRAKIRA Mission

December 1 - December 25
Tonami City, Toyama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tanbo Illuminations

November 23 - December 25
Owariasahi City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Winter Illuminations in Ota River

December 1 - January 13
Toukai City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Donki Matsuri

December 17
Toyokawa City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Gero Onsen Fireworks Musical

December 7, 14, 21, 24
Gero City, Gifu Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri

December 14
Gifu City, Gifu Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Cormorant Festival

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



Block 6

Kobe Luminarie 2019

December 6 - December 15
Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

116th Ako Gishi Matsuri

December 14
Ako City, Hyogo Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Arashiyama Hanatouro

December 13 - December 22
Kyoto, Kyoto Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Twinkle Joyo 2019

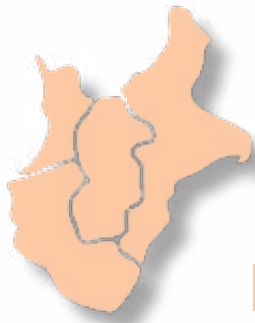
December 1 - December 25
Joyo City, Kyoto Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yamashina Gishi Matsuri

December 14
Kyoto, Kyoto Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tarobogu Shrine Bonfire Festival

December 1
Higashiomi City, Shiga Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 7

Osaka Hikari Renaissance

December 14 - December 25

Osaka, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kotsuma Pumpkin Festival

December 22

Osaka, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

German Christmas Market Osaka 2019

November 15 - December 25

Osaka, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Umeda Snowman Festival

November 22 - December 25

Osaka, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ise Great Kagura

December 24

Kuwana City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tosai

December 14

Kashiba City, Nara Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri

December 15 - December 18

Nara, Nara Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nachi Falls Light up

December 31 - January 1

Nachi-Katsuura Town, Wakayama

Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 8

Sada Wonder Night

December 7

Ikata Town, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nakayamaike Natural Park Illumination

December 1 - January 3

Uwajima City, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ryugado Cave Candle Night 2019

December 21

Kami City, Kochi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Winter Fantasy

November 23 - January 5

Manno Town, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

All-Japan New Year Udon Tournament 2019 in Sanuki

December 7 - December 8

Sanuki City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Santa Comes from the River

December 14, 15, 23, 25

Tokushima City, Tokushima

Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Doitsukan German Christmas Market

December 7 - December 8

Naruto City, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 9

Festival of Time

December 31
Oda City, Shimane Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Morotabune Shinji

December 3
Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shimenawa Matsuri

December 10
Shimonoseki City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

35th Shunan Winter Tree Festival

November 30 - January 5
Shunan City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yamaguchi Christmas City

December 1 - December 31
Yamaguchi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tottori Sakyu Illusion

December 7 - December 22
Tottori City, Tottori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

3D Projection Mapping: The Love Story of Taj Mahal

December 7 - December 22
Tottori City, Tottori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Soja Illuminations 2019

December 2 - January 5
Soja City, Okayama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Momotaro Fantasy 2019

December 5 - January 5
Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Maniwa Illuminations in Heart Plaza

December 7 - February 14
Maniwa City, Okayama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Dreamination 2019

November 15 - January 3
Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Chinka-sai

December 31
Miyajima, Hiroshima Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Luxeater Fukuyama 2019

December 1 - December 25
Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kumano Shrine Cold Misogi

December 21
Itoshima City, Fukuoka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Blindfold Female Sumo Wrestling

December 8
Itoshima City, Fukuoka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Uminaka Christmas Candle Night

December 21, 22, 24, 25
Saitozaki, Fukuoka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ohitaki

December 8
Kashima City, Saga Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Christmas Fireworks

December 21 - December 25
Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 10



Block 10

Church Week in Kamigoto Church Concerts

December 11 - December 15
Shin-kamigoto, Nagasaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Huis Ten Bosch Countdown

December 31
Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Oita Illumination Fantasy

November 29 - February 14
Oita City, Oita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Beppu Christmas Fantasia

December 21 - December 22
Beppu City, Oita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yansa Festival

December 7
Nakatsu City, Oita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 11

Wonder Illumination

November 23 - January 13
Arao City, Kumamoto Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tenmonkan Millionation

December 20 - January 31
Kagoshima, Kagoshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

38th Ryumonji Pottery Festival

December 13 - December 15
Aira City, Kagoshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

20th Anniversary Itoman Peaceful Illumination

December 15 - January 3
Itoman City, Okinawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yambaru Art Festival

December 14 - January 13
Ogimi, Okinawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ryukyu Lantern Festival

December 1 - March 31
Yomitan, Okinawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Miyakonojo Machinaka Illumination

November 16 - January 13
Miyakonojo City, Miyazaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Florante Miyazaki Illumination Flower Garden

December 6 - January 13
Miyazaki City, Miyazaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



JAPAN'S NEXT TOP

YURU-CHARA

The Yuru-Chara Grand Prix

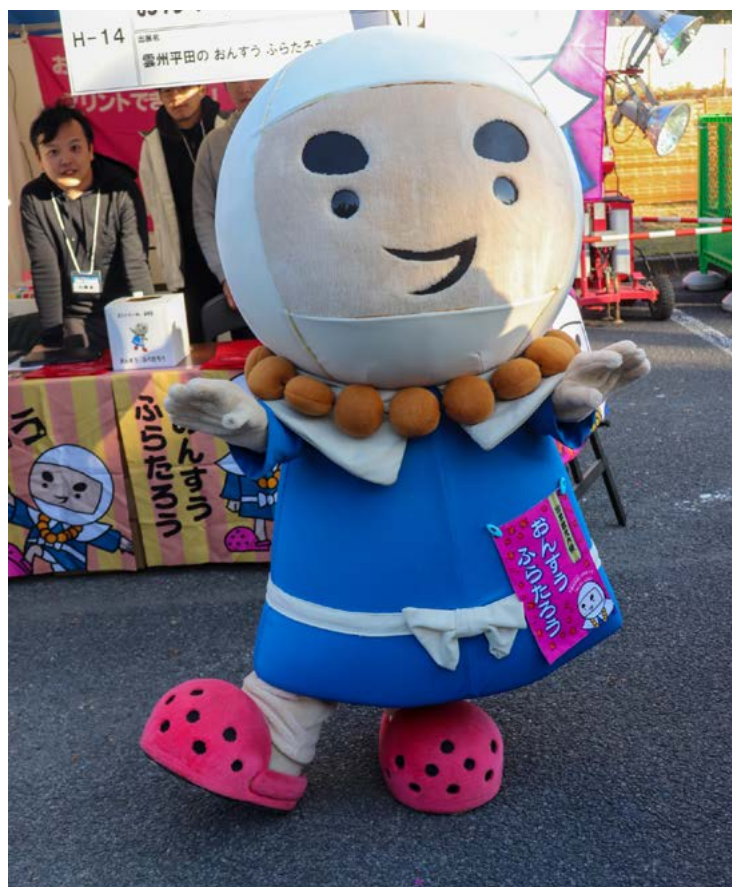


There are a few things that Japan is known for around the world. In recent years, one of those things that has been gaining international attention is Japan's passionate love for mascot characters. The mascots are known as *yuru-chara* (*kyara*), and represent everything from private companies to entire prefectures. The word is a *portmanteau* of *yurui* (緩い), meaning “loose” or “gentle,” and the Japanese adaptation for “character.” *Yuru-chara* was originally coined by *mangaka* Jun Miura and quickly became the label for Japan's booming mascot culture. The characters generally carry characteristics of what they're representing. For example, the *yuru-chara* for the automotive company Yellow Hat is . . . a cat/tire hybrid creature wearing a yellow hat named Hatonyan. These plush, goofy creatures aren't just cute though. Many of them are worth millions of yen and serve as international tourism ambassadors for their regions. Famous mascots, such as Kumamon and Funassyi, have expanded their influence beyond regional loyalty and now have fans across Japan and abroad. These fans become truly important once a year, when the *yuru-chara* gather at the *Yuru-Chara Grand Prix* to compete for the title of “Most Popular *Yuru-Chara* in Japan.”

I knew of the *Yuru-Chara Grand Prix* long before I found out that this year's competition would be held in nearby Nagano. When I studied abroad in college, I did a research paper on *yuru-chara* and wrote about the Grand Prix. Ever since then, it's been on my Japan Bucket List. Now that I live here, I've willingly allowed myself to be swept up in the fan culture, and am the proud owner of an absurd amount of Gunma-chan goods. The morning of Nov. 2 found me excitedly driving to Nagano, ready to rub elbows with some of Japan's most famous ambassadors. As soon as I walked into the venue, I had three strong impressions.

The first was how talented actors within the suits were. It was so easy to forget that there was even a person inside the character, as fluidly and expressively they moved. Somehow, they were able to operate arms, noses, snouts, ears, and even the occasional tail for their audiences. They had clearly established personalities without ever saying a word. In fact, in the Grand Prix, I only found one mascot that could talk: *Kyabattsu-san*, a singing cat wearing a cabbage dress and hat from Tokyo. In addition to the overall popularity contest of the Grand Prix, there were also events for the “*Yuru Olympics*.” I only caught one Olympic event, but it was fantastic to witness. Somehow, to my complete disbelief, these mascots were jumping rope—in full costume. If that isn't an incredible athletic achievement, then I don't know what is.

My second thought was about the people who came to the Grand Prix. Of course, there were plenty of young kids accompanied by parents, as you would expect would be the main audience for giant mascots,



but there were also older retirees, middle-aged people, and some young groups. In some cases, I think the young kids were only there so their parents had an excuse to go. The age range of attendees encompassed pretty much every group. Clearly, yuru-chara appeal to everyone.

My third impression was realizing the true advertising power of these characters. Each character competing had a stall set up. Mascot goods were all over, ranging from the normal items like plushies to the weird and unusual like Sanomaru-kun-themed nail decorations. However, the character merchandise wasn't the main purpose of the stalls. From them, tourist pamphlets and guides were being handed out left, right, and center. The stalls were decorated with pictures of their yuru-chara standing in front of local landmarks, or eating local foods. The yuru-chara weren't just competing for the title at the Grand Prix, but also bringing tourists to their area. When I walked out that evening, I was loaded down with pamphlets and samples of local goods that had been pressed into my hands. My most entertaining gift from a stall was a roll of toilet paper with a penguin mascot's face on it, which I honestly can't see myself being able to use.

The overall feeling of the Grand Prix was a combination of a pageant, a character meetup in Disneyland, and a tourism convention. I was thrilled to meet my two favorite characters, Shinjou-kun, (Have you seen John Oliver's bit about Chii-tan? You need to.) and Sanomaru-kun. What can I say? I love a guy with an upside-down bowl of ramen on his head. I was thrilled to be able to attend the Grand Prix, and it gave me an insight into the world of yuru-chara past the cuteness. I found myself walking away from the weekend falling even deeper into the rabbit hole of yuru-chara fandom, with a smile on my face, a phone full of selfies, and a bag full of merch. I can't wait to meet up with these goofy, squishy friends again.

*Linka Wade is a second-year ALT in Gunma Prefecture from Monterey, California. She is also the Events Section Editor of **CONNECT**. She lives with her husband and two guinea pigs deep in the inaka. In her free time, she loves traveling, exploring onsen, and not having to plan her wedding anymore. As the weather gets colder, her plans are to evolve into her true form as a kotatsu mushi. You can find her on Instagram as @linkaslens, and on her blog [Linka Learns Things](#).*







AN ICY COLD RIVER,
SHINTO PRAYERS,
AND 100 (ALMOST)
NAKED MEN—
WELCOME TO GIFU
CITY'S IKENOUE
MISOGI MATSURI!

A group of men participating in the Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri festival. They are wearing white headbands with red markings and white loincloths. They are splashing water on their faces, and the scene is filled with water droplets and splashes. The background is bright and slightly out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting near a river.

Natalie Andrews, Tokyo

It is the middle of winter in Gifu City. The morning dawned cold and misty, the sky clearing as the sun rose. Now, at noon, the temperature hovers somewhere between 5°C and 10°C, cold enough to ensure anyone stepping foot outside does not do so without a thick winter coat.

Everyone, that is, apart from the procession of about 100 men heading down the hill toward the banks of the Nagara River, led by several *kannusha*—Shinto priests. Despite the chilling bite of the air, this group of men, who range in age from young to old, are clad in absolutely nothing save a *fudonshi* knotted about their hips.

Some of the older men seem unperturbed by the cold, while several of the younger boys shiver and chatter excitedly, their bare feet slapping the ground as they traipse down the slope. When they reach the river's shore they will dive into the freezing water, submerging their whole bodies in a purification ritual known as *misogi* or *misogi-harae*.

The [Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri](#), also known as the Purification Ceremony Festival of Katsuragake Shrine, is an annual event that takes place on the second Saturday of December in Gifu City. Participants, all male, gather to cleanse themselves in the Nagara River and pray for good health, good fortune, and the safety of their families.



Misogi originates from the Kojiki myth of the god Izanagi, who, upon returning from his journey to *Yomi-no-kuni* (the Underworld) in an attempt to retrieve his dead wife Izanami, rid himself of its pollution by bathing in the sea. It plays a significant part in countless Shinto purification rituals, influencing not only misogi-harae, but also *shubatsu*—where people “sprinkle salt over themselves after attending a funeral, sprinkle water at their gate of their homes morning and evening, and place small piles of salt at the entrance to restaurants” (1)—and the more commonly recognised *temizu*, where those visiting shrines will rinse their hands and mouth at the purified water basin at the entrance to the main sanctuary.

Gifu's Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri is said to have originated some 600 years ago in the Oei Era (July 1394-April 1428), during a great famine in the years 1420-1421 (2). According to a paper published by Yamagata University's Institute of Arts and Sciences, group misogi-harae rituals would be again employed during times of struggle and suffering, such as during the aftermath of the devastating floods in 1534 (Tenbun Era), 1611 (Keicho Era), and 1636 (Kan'ei Era). It has also been reported that during the Kansei Era (1789-1801), from the dusk of October 11th to the dawn of the 12th, 25 households of shrine parishioners performed misogi-harae three times in order to ward off misfortune and pray for abundant harvests (3, pg. 156).

During the Taisho Era, the misogi festival was known

under different names including “Festival for Warding Off Evil,” and “Festival for Welcoming the Gods.” Amusingly, it is also known as “Soba Noodle-Cutting Festival”—because after fields were harmed by flood damage, buckwheat was widely cultivated due to its short maturity period, even when planted late in the season. The noodles were then sold at stalls in front of the Katsuragake Shrine (3, pg. 156).

While the festival was abandoned during the Meiji Restoration Period in 1872, it was revived two years later following occurrences such as a disastrous fire that destroyed seven buildings, an epidemic, and the sacred wisteria tree within the shrine grounds failing to bloom (3, pg 156). A tradition through which participants pray for prosperity, good health, and protection against disaster and famine, the fact the Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri has been preserved for at least 600 years speaks volumes about the resilience of Ikenoue's residents in the face of constant hardship.

The opening ceremony of the Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri commences in mid-afternoon at 1:30 p.m. at the Katsuragake Shrine, where participants receive special prayers called *kito* from a priest to remove sin and pollution, and a shrine maiden performs a *kagura* dance. From there, the participants are swept up in a steady march down to the riverbank, downstream of the Chusetsu Bridge. The area they will enter the water and perform misogi-harae is marked off with special ropes;



Shinto shrines, so many who are interested will instead simply spectate.

Perhaps it is the power misogi has to affect people from all walks of life and provide hope, peace, and fulfillment that will see it persist as a treasured purification ritual, in both festivals and smaller gatherings, even as the world changes and marches onward. The Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri was born centuries ago, and ideally, it will remain for many, many more years to come.

the priest leading the procession will wave his *onusa*—a wooden wand decorated with many zig-zagging paper streamers (called *shide*)—left and right during the ensuing purification ritual, which you can see [here](#). Later, at midnight, there will be another ceremony called *Kami-mukae-sai* for welcoming the gods to the land.

The 2019 Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri will be held on the December 14th (Saturday) at the Katsuragake Shrine, commencing at 1:30 p.m. For further inquiries, such as how to participate, the Gifu Tourism and Convention Association can be reached on this [webpage](#) or at toiawase@gifucvb.or.jp.

Gifu is not the only place in Japan to have its own misogi festival. Numazu, in Shizuoka Prefecture, holds a misogi festival in January at the Kohama Coast in Ushibuseyama Park. The Kanchu Misogi festival in Kikonai, southwestern Hokkaido, is known for being especially intense, and even life-threatening. In an [article](#) by *The Japan Times*, vice-chairman Hideo Nigata of Nippon Matsuri Network, a nonprofit organisation dedicated to protecting Japanese rural heritage, is quoted as saying, “These men have icicles growing out of their noses as their bodies literally freeze in the icy water. Their mothers are crying as they watch their sons endure the ritual.” (4)

[Gifu City Official Website \[Japanese\]](#)
[Gifu City Tourism Information \[English\]](#)

Sources:

1. <https://bit.ly/2pRRBWx>
2. <https://bit.ly/33zAQOI>
3. [Yamagata University Institute of Arts and Sciences](#) (Japanese only)
4. [The Japan Times](#)

The Ikenoue Misogi Matsuri, while requiring a certain level of fortitude, is not harsh to this extent—indeed, [videos](#) of the event are more likely to show the young boys dashing into the river water with huge grins. Gifu’s festival also has a notably large number of participants (up to 100), and it is in fact possible for any man from the general public to participate by signing up at Katsuragake Shrine’s assembly hall from 8:00 a.m. onwards on the day of the event, for a fee of ¥3,000. However, the majority of participants tend to be followers of the local

*Natalie Andrews is a first-year JET and a General Section Editor of **CONNECT**, living in Tokyo. She spends a lot of her downtime at work either thinking about what’s for dinner or voraciously reading fantasy books on her Kindle. She is currently struggling with an unrequited love for her dog back in Australia, who steadfastly ignores her whenever she FaceTime calls her family. Is this what they call resentment?*

Image provided courtesy of the Gifu Tourism and Convention Association



**BECOME A
BETTER**

*Language
Teacher*

**THROUGH
JALT**

An Interview With Armando Duarte, President of Kobe JALT

Rebecca Ruth (Hyogo)



ABOUT THE JAPAN ASSOCIATION OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Why does JALT exist?

It exists to create community for language teachers in Japan, not just for English teachers. It exists to improve practice as teachers and to provide opportunities for leadership and for conference participation.

What have people accomplished through JALT?

"I'd like to talk about what is possible through JALT, rather than discussing specific people's trajectories.

JALT is a great opportunity for networking and opportunities within the teaching community in Japan. There are opportunities for leadership within JALT, which can be geographically based (Kobe JALT, for example) or in SIGs, special interest groups, which are not geographically based.

There are opportunities for professional development throughout Japan, doing things like editing and planning, designing, and finding speakers for events."

Why should ALTs want to join JALT?

There are perks that come with JALT membership- membership in any regional chapter would gain you free entry to events in other regions, as well as reduced pricing for the national conference. JALT also has international ties, so you can take what you learn in Japan overseas with you. He mentioned especially strong ties with Cambodia, for example.

"It's important to see the opportunities... Opportunities are abundant within Japan."

His personal experience was of working as an ALT for a dispatch company. He got fed up with uncertainty and low pay and researched ways to move out of the entry-level industry positions, which ALT positions usually are. One of the things he did was join

a Master's program in the winter of 2015, which he did while working as an ALT and finished in the winter of 2016. He did an online course from the University of Southern California. He said, "I got very little sleep, but it was the best way to go about it. I'd read about something on Monday... and apply it on Tuesday."

"Put theory into practice ASAP!"

For him, JALT was a way to get out of entry-level teaching. Armando said that when he went to JALT events, "a fire was lit under [him]." He joined JALT events under one-day membership, and saw that "everybody there was doing the job [he] wanted to do." He says that, "for anyone who wants to go beyond the entry level of education in Japan, JALT is a way to do that."

Photo: Ehtan Wang

What does the membership body look like?

The majority are teachers at the university level, who are non-Japanese. There are Japanese university teachers, and teachers from the K-12 levels. He has never met a university student in JALT, but he thinks there's opportunities for them. He says that lack of diversity is one of the current weaknesses of JALT. JALT needs to recruit people from the K-12 levels and from eikaiwa backgrounds.

When I asked if he thought that eikaiwa teachers should join JALT, he stressed that JALT membership could benefit eikaiwa teachers, and that the JALT community would benefit from having more eikaiwa teachers in it. "I've met people who have very lucrative careers in eikaiwa... those teaching experiences are also important."

What have you done as Kobe JALT President and in JALT before that role?

"Getting new people in, that's what I'm really proud about."

In 2018, he was co-chair of the program. In 2019, he became chair of the program and president of Kobe JALT. He says

that he is proud of bringing less experienced speakers to JALT, reaching into a broader pool of talent. The big thing he's done has been starting a journal, which published their first edition in September. It has things like a career advice column and articles about research. It is a way to provide a platform for members to show off their work. October's event's focus was PhD students, who are passionate.

Could you tell me a little more about leadership opportunities within JALT?

They're accessible, even if you don't plan on being in Japan for the long haul. Most positions are only for a year term. They're decided by elections. So an ALT who is only here for 2 or 3 years could gain a lot of professional development by joining JALT and getting leadership experience.

What events does JALT have coming up in December and January?

In December, there's a big event that will feature a speaker from the US. Information about that will be coming to the [Facebook page](#) soon. In January, there are no conferences, because the officers will meet to set the year's agenda.

How can ALTs get involved?

He recommends that you get started by going to an event that interests you. If you show up, you can pay a small fee, usually about 1000 yen, and join as a 1 day member. If you go to a couple of events, you can think about joining as a 1 year member.

Armando Duarte is the current President of Kobe JALT, and a professional English teacher in Japan. He is relatively new to JALT, having joined in 2016. He came to Japan in 2011 and worked for a dispatch company. He got his Masters Degree while working as an ALT.

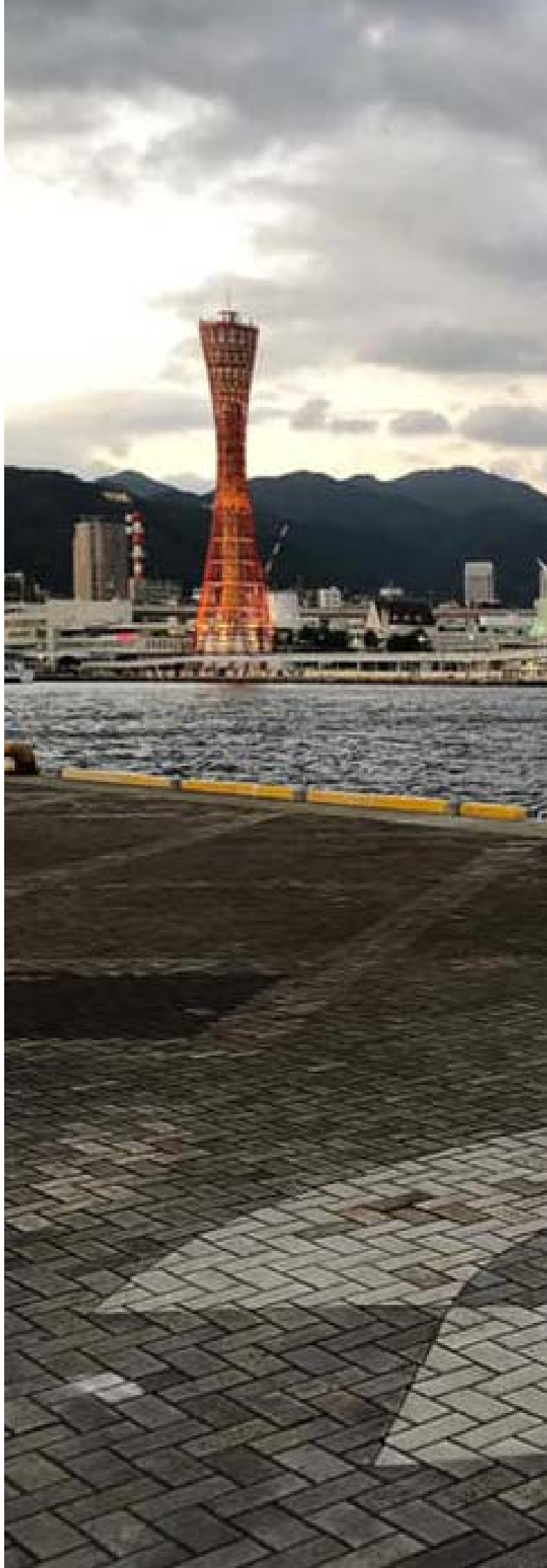




Photo: Ehtan Wang

THE THREE SKILLS OF *Effective Teachers*

Interview with Mayumi Asaba

Rebecca Ruth (Hyogo)



Mayumi Asaba recently gave a presentation at a Kobe JALT event about her Ph.D. research. She studied the traits of truly effective teachers, using existing literature, her personal experience, and through studying four university teachers who are currently teaching English in Japan. One of those teachers is Japanese, two are American, and one is Australian.

I was lucky enough to have a chance to ask Mayumi about her research this November, and hear her explain why she chose these three skill sets as the most crucial for effective teachers. She dove right into the material.

Content Knowledge

I want to talk about knowledge, the kind of knowledge that effective teachers have. The first one is related to pedagogy and content. It's called pedagogical content knowledge. The teachers know a lot about the content they teach. So in the case of English teachers, they know English grammar and also if it's a content based class they know a lot about the content they teach, or if they're teaching a skill based classes, they for example know what good writing looks like.

That's content knowledge. And the pedagogy part is about how L2 students learn. They can consider students' motivation. They know how to facilitate, for example, effective reading programs. They can assist students better to learn.

Knowledge of Learners

The second one again is related to knowledge. They know a lot about students. Knowledge of learners. They have general understanding of what Japanese students are like. If they're teaching elementary school kids they know a lot about generally how they behave, how they learn, how they behave in the classroom.

They also know a lot about their own individual students: Akita kun struggles with this, Hanako chan is interested in this. They have both very general and very specific knowledge about their students.

Problem Solving

Effective teachers are good at finding problems. Whatever they do, their routine, they're good at finding problems in their routine. This is something they usually do, but they realize there's an issue. They're good at finding problems and solutions.

Can you give an example of a problem within a routine?

A handout. They've been using this handout but students are not producing the results that they're expecting. So for example, they're not talking enough. The teacher realizes that maybe the order of activities is a problem, or the language that's used on the handout is too difficult for the students to understand, or the topics are too difficult. So they realize that there's an issue that's preventing students from producing the results that they want them to.

It might be a little bit self-evident, but my next question is, why do they need those skills in particular?

I think that the ultimate goal of language teachers is to help students learn a language, right? Unless they know how to facilitate that process, it makes it difficult to achieve that goal. Especially in a Japanese context, I think, knowledge about learners is really important. The students I've interviewed, and the literature I've read, said Japanese students often expect to build some kind of emotional bonds with teachers, or they look up to their teachers, they want them to be their role models, rather than someone who just teaches them a subject. Language learning takes more than just giving them the language, it's actually building a relationship, being a role model. It really helps them learn, and grows up their motivations.

How can new teachers develop these skills? Especially the student knowledge, building those connections across the language barrier, which I think ALTs want to do but don't know how to do.

I think it depends on the students you have, but definitely show them that you're interested in them. So, for

example, maybe you know that my dissertation topic is on effective teachers. One of the teachers I had, for the first few weeks of the semester, he would take pictures of students, write down notes, and put them up in his cubicle until he memorized everyone's names and faces. He made conscious effort to really, really learn about students. He would refer to them by their names. And when I talked to his students, they said we felt like an individual, rather than just his subject that he had to deal with. Something as simple as remembering their names and calling them by their names, or another teacher said that he would usually struggle in the beginning of the semester to learn about his students. So he would go over during his break before his classes begin and spend time with them. Watch them, talk to them, even during the break time.

Something simple like that—even when handing out assignments, sit and talk with students, even if it takes a long time.

So these teachers that you talk about—are they working in Japanese high schools?

All my participants are university teachers. Some of them are part time, some of them are full time teachers. But one of them spent quite a long time teaching in high school and he often referred to his experience teaching high school as an ALT.

Have the native speakers all been ALTs?

The other two came to Japan and started teaching at an English conversation school, and then moved to a university.

Note: If you are working as an ALT or in a language school, there are resources that could help you transition to a career in a Japanese university. One of them is JALT. For more information, refer to the interview with Armando Duarte, President of Kobe JALT.

How can these concepts be integrated into a lesson design?

I think it's important to reflect on your lessons, on your activities, and continue to look at what you do with critical eyes. You know, reflection is a very popular term used in education. But after you've finished teaching a lesson try to think about what went wrong, what didn't go well, and try to incorporate students' perspectives. As I've said, if students are not behaving in the way that you want them to, it's easy to blame students, but maybe we as teachers can focus on what we can do to solve the problem. So, talk to Japanese teachers, for example, or think about the goals of your activities or project and see how they match up with students' needs.

“effective teachers continue to learn”

Another thing is that effective teachers continue to learn. They go to workshops, they go to conferences, they read.





They try to learn about how students learn a second language. You can try out some of the theories that you read in an article, or try out an activity that you learned in a workshop. See how that matches up. Take risks. Try to see things from students' eyes, try to use things and learn from mistakes.

How did you determine that these three particular skills are crucial?

Literature, my own research, and my own teaching experience, so, three places.

I read a lot of literature. Most of the studies, most of the research has been done in the United States, focusing on middle school kids. I also teach, I've been teaching for 20 years, so I reflect on my own experience. And my dissertation about the four teachers that I studied for a couple of years. The literature from the United States would maybe say this pedagogical content knowledge is most important. I realized in Japan, just making a connection *emotionally* with students is really important.

Do you have any advice for ALTs?

It's hard, but from what I saw among my participants, there's no perfect teacher. They do the best they can in the position they're in, and try to enjoy the process.

I never taught in high school or junior high or elementary so I don't quite know exactly what they're struggling with. There are different factors that affect teachers and their teaching and development, such as their colleagues. Or the materials that they have to use, or curriculum that they must follow. There are a lot of limitations. And it's easy to say, "this is what's preventing me to do what I wanna do." But I think if they could find a way to work around it . . . It's easy to give up. But I think that once you find a problem that you want to talk about, or find creative ways to overcome that, by working with people you trust, or by reading, I think you will make learning and teaching a lot more fun for yourself.

Mayumi Asaba is an instructor at the Hirao School of Management at Konan University. She received her Ph.D. in education, Concentration in Applied Linguistics from Temple University, Japan. Her research interests include expertise in L2 teaching and teacher development.

Photo: Ethan Wang

YOUR WINTER BODY

It's your fall body, but you have the flu now!

Rebecca Ruth (Hyogo)



The Loot

Article Overview

1. How to call out of work.
2. How to get through the hospital and pharmacy
3. How to recover at home in Japanese style.

Calling Out Of Work

Wake up feeling like death is coming for you? It's that time of year. You should call your school and tell them that you won't be coming in. Sometimes you can get by with messaging a coworker instead, but you *really* should call the school directly.

Good morning. It's OOO.

おはようございます。 OOO です。
Ohayo gozaimasu. OOO desu.

I'll go to the hospital.

病院に行くつもりです。
びょういん に いく つもり です。
Byouin ni iku tsumori desu.

Japanese Grammar Note

tsumori expresses intention. Affix it to a simple verb, and that changes the meaning to something like "I will do", "I intend to do"

I'm using regular leave.

年休をとります。
ねんきゆうをとります。
す。
Nenkyuu o torimasu

I'm using sick leave.

病休をとります。
びょうきゆうをとります

Byoukyuu o torimasu

(how much leave)

one day	2 hours	half a day
一日	二時間	半日
いちにち	にじかん	はんいち
Ichinichi	Nijikan	han nichi

Note: sick leave can't be used in hour increments. You have to use the whole day. So, if you're just hoping to go to the doctor and then head to work, it has to be regular leave.

Your coworkers want to make sure that you're okay, so they'll probably ask what's wrong. Here's some common reasons to call out of work!

I have a fever.

熱があります。
ねつ が あります。
Netsu ga arimasu

I don't really feel well.

調子がちょっと悪いです。
ちょうし が ちょっと わるい です。
Choushi ga chotto warui desu.

My head hurts.

頭が痛いです。
あたま が いたい です。
Atama ga itai desu.

When I think about going to work, I feel despair. I intend to escape to Mexico. Only Mexican food can heal me.

仕事に行くことを考えたら、絶望を感じています。多分、メキシコへ逃げるつもりです。
しごと に いく の かんがえたら、 ぜつぼう を かんじて います。 めきしこ へ にげる つもり です。メキシコ料理だけしかが私を直します。
Shigoto ni iku koto o kangaettara, zetsubou wo kanjite imasu. Mekishiko e nigeru tsumori desu. Mekishiko ryouri dake shika ga watashi wo naoshimasu.

I caught a cold.

風邪をひきました。
かぜ を ひきました。
Kaze o hikimashita.

They'll probably end the call by asking you to take care—the literal meaning is "It (your health) is important!"

お大事に!
おだいじに!
O daiji ni!

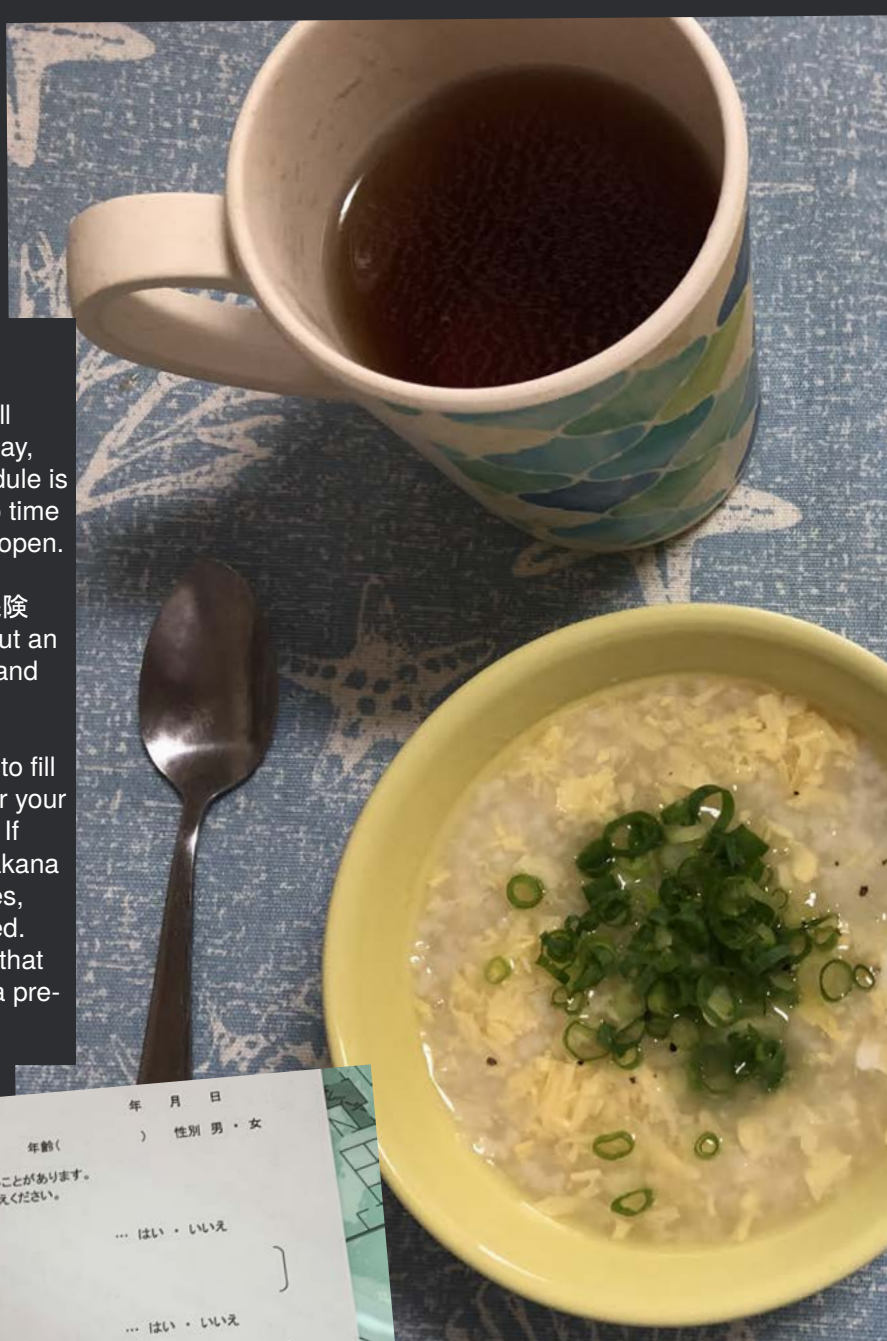


At the hospital

Hospitals are usually open in two parts: a morning reception and an afternoon reception. They're not all open every day, and it's common for a hospital to, say, have no afternoon hours on Thursdays. Their schedule is usually indicated with a chart of days and those two time frames, with circles marking times that reception is open.

They'll probably ask you for your insurance card (保険証、ほけんしょう、hokenshou) and for you to fill out an intake form. Once you've done that, you'll sit down and wait for your name to be called.

If it's your first time at that hospital, you might need to fill out an intake form. You can expect that it will ask for your name, address, age, and if you are male or female. If you have any allergies, keep an eye out for the katakana arerugi-. It will probably ask if you have any diseases, take any medicine, and if you have been hospitalized. Here are some additional, very thorough questions that you might see out in the wild. This was taken from a pre-surgery intake form.



【麻酔問診票】

年月日 () 性別 男・女 () 年齢 ()

手術・麻酔を行うにあたり、合併症を防ぐためにお尋ねしておきたいことがあります。他の問診と重なることもあるかもしれませんが、下記の項目にお答えください。当てはまるものに○をしてください。

- 今までに麻酔や手術を受けたことがありますか。
「はい」の方、何の手術をされたかご記入ください。
(記入例)
分かる範囲で書いてください(全身麻酔)
25歳～55歳未満(全身麻酔)
2010年～現在(ヘルニア手術(脊髄麻酔))
- 手術を受けた際、何か異常なことがありましたか。
「はい」の方、どのような異常かご記入ください。
- 血縁の方で麻酔を受けたために異常な高い熱が出たり、生命が危険にさらされたりした方はおられますか。
- 麻酔や注射の薬、食べ物や皮膚に接するもので、じんま疹が出たり、気分が悪くなったりしたことはありますか。
「はい」の方、当てはまるものに○をしてください。
抗生物質・造影剤・その他薬(卵・大豆・果物・ゴム手袋などゴム製品・アルコール消毒・絆創膏)その他
- 今までにかかったことのある病気、現在治療中の病気を教えてください。
「あり」の方、当てはまるものに○をしてください。
喘息・その他の呼吸器の病気・高血圧・心臓病・血液の病気・肝臓病・腎臓病
糖尿病・脳、神経の病気・心の病気・膠原病・緑内障・甲状腺
その他
- 現在、使用中の薬、サプリメントがありましたら教えてください。
「あり」の方、どのような薬、サプリメントかご記入ください。
(記入例)
病院で処方されている薬、
グルコサミン、養命酒など
- 最近、もしくは手術予定日の近くで予防接種する予定がありますか。
「はい」の方、いつ何の予防接種をされるか分りましたらご記入ください。
(記入例)
○/○ インフルエンザ
- 喫煙歴がありましたら教えてください。
「あり」の方、禁煙歴がありましたら教えてください。
- ぐらつ歯がありましたら教えてください。
- エホバの証人ですか。
- 日中に連絡が取れやすい連絡先を教えてください。

本人携帯電話 _____
自宅 _____

身長() cm 体重() kg BMI()
体温() °C 血圧() / () mmHg 脈拍() /min SpO2() %

069 190726 麻酔問診票



6. Are you using medicines or supplements? If yes, please specify the type, including whether it is over the counter or prescription. (example: prescription type. Name of supplement.)
7. Do you have a plan to get any immunizations before your surgery date? If yes, what type and when?
8. Do you smoke? If yes, how many per day, and how many years have you been smoking? If you have stopped, how long has it been since you quit smoking?
9. If you have experienced chattering teeth, please specify. (no, yes, where in your mouth?)
10. Are you a member of Jehovah's Witnesses?
11. Contact information (cellphone number, home phone)

Note: the second number is asked under the assumption that the hospital will be able to contact a family member at your home. You might choose to write an emergency contact's number here instead of your home phone, if no one will be at your home.)

Recuperating in (Japanese) Style

Japanese comfort food for battling winter sickness comes in two main categories- udon noodles, and *okayu* (rice porridge.) Here is a simple recipe for authentic Japanese rice porridge, obtained from an authentic Japanese mom. It's easy enough to make by yourself when ill, as long as you're not teetering on the edge of death.

(serves 1 person)

- 100 grams of cooked rice
- 200 ml of water
- 1 tsp *dashi* (白だし, specifically)
- Salt, to taste
- 1 egg

Toppings (traditional!!)

- 20g *shirasu*, a.k.a. teeny little baby sardines
- A pinch of green onion

Turn the stovetop to medium heat, and insert the water and rice. Use a spoon to break up the rice in the water. Heat it until the rice has expanded and softened.

Turn the heat down to low. Now, add the salt and dashi. Stir that and then leave it for 5-10 minutes.

Turn off the heat. Pour in the cracked egg and gently stir it in.

Transfer the porridge to a large bowl. Sprinkle on your toppings.

The Mom that we consulted also says that there are many varieties sold in retort packages, as well as udon packages. If you don't like or have those toppings, feel free to use whatever you think would taste good. Umeboshi is a really popular *okayu* topping as well, for example.

1. Until now, have you ever had surgery or been anesthetized before? If yes, what kind of surgery have you had? (example, formatted with age when had surgery, what type, and what year)
2. When you had surgery, did you experience any unusual symptoms?
3. Have any of your blood relatives experienced a high fever or critical condition as a result of anesthesia?
4. Have you had a rash or been nauseous as a result of an anesthesia, injection, food, or skin contact with an allergen? If yes, what was it? If you know the medicine's name, please write it below. (antibiotic, X-ray imaging fluid, egg, beans, fruit, latex, rubbing alcohol, bandages, other).
5. Have you had or are you treating any of these conditions? (asthma, other respiratory organ illnesses, high blood pressure, heart conditions, blood diseases, liver disease, kidney disease, sugar diabetes, brain or nervous system disease, mental illness, collagen disease, glaucoma, thyroid gland disease)

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"Falling doesn't give you a reason to give up, as long as you believe in yourself." – Naruto

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"Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business."

– Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol

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"Can't trust no one else to do what you won't do for yourself." – Peter V. Brett, The Desert Spear

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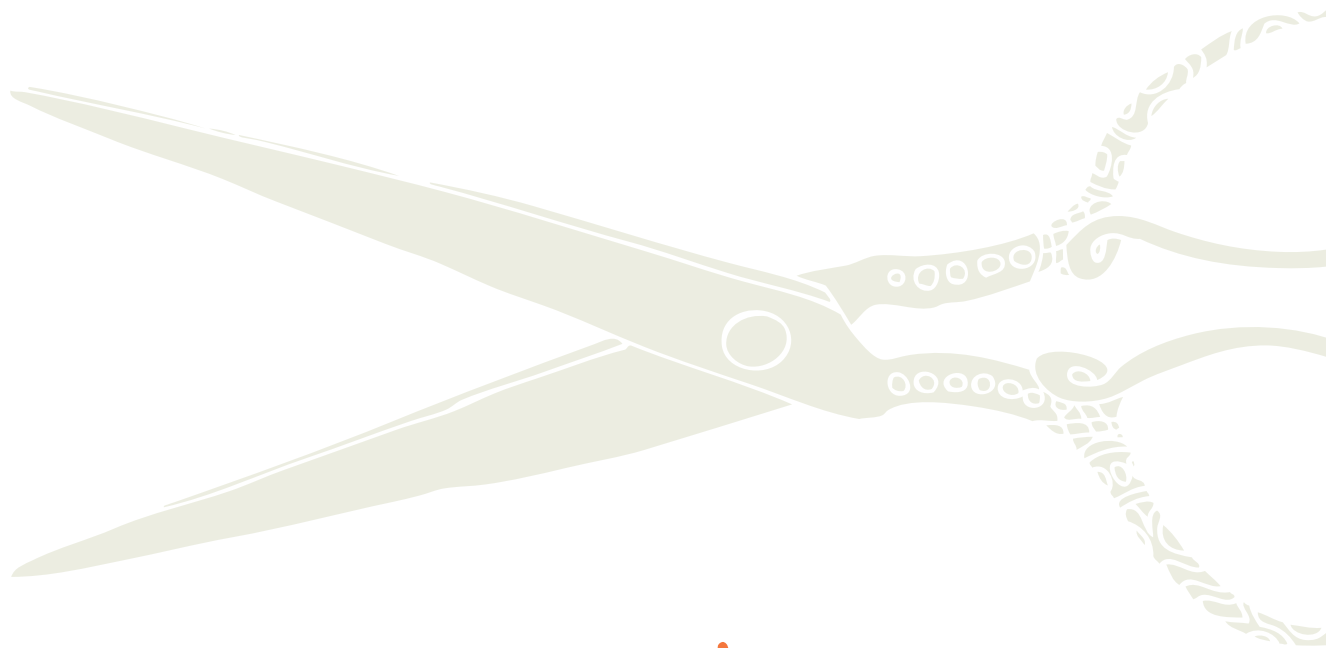
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Valerie Osborne

Photo: Megan Luedtke







Sewing Off!

An interview with Daisy Braid on her unique creations and being a DIYer in Tokyo.

Daisy Braid (Tokyo) Interviewed by Devoni Guise (Saitama)

Daisy Braid is an Australian sewist living in Tokyo, Japan. After scoping out her [Instagram](#) and [blog](#), her clothes spoke for themselves and an interview was scheduled to learn more about her craft. Here it is, enjoy.



Getting Started

Q: So, when did you start DIYing? What sparked your interest?

I've always been a creative person but I started making my own clothes seriously in 2016 when I moved to New Zealand. I got a job at a really cool fabric store and every day was surrounded by a bunch of creative people and heaps of beautiful fabric. I just had to get my hands on some and make something!

Q: Oh, cool, how long would you say it took for you to get 'good'? When did you feel comfortable wearing your work or sharing it with others?

I wouldn't describe myself as 'good' at sewing. I'm self-taught and always learning new things! I think the thing that scares a lot of people off is the idea that you have to be good. I refuse to sew buttons and zippers because they are so tricky and because of that, I have made simple sewing part of my style and brand. I started wearing and sharing my makes from day one. The sewing community is super supportive and encouraging so I was never afraid to share my sewing failures and achievements with them.

Q: What type of reactions would you say your clothing usually gets? Is it different in Japan versus Australia?

I think the reaction is always positive wherever I am. It's a great conversation starter and I love how it can spark conversations about people's hobbies and sustainability.

Q: In Japan versus Australia, how does the DIY process differ for you?

The DIY process here is really different. When I left New Zealand I had to sell my sewing machine and overlocker, two things that I had grown so used to. In Tokyo, I bought the cheapest sewing machine I could find and started sewing in my tiny apartment. Unfortunately, I have a lot less room to cut and sew here which means I don't often take on very big projects.

Q: What steps do you have to take towards the completion of a piece?

It always starts with inspiration. I love scrolling through Instagram and Pinterest for ideas. Once I get an idea, I'll try and find a sewing pattern that could be used as a base or a draw up a plan of how something might be put together. Then I head out to buy fabric and thread. Finally, I wash my fabric, cut it out and then start sewing the pieces together. While I sew, I like to watch movies on Netflix or listen to podcasts. [Wardrobe Crisis](#) by Claire Press is one of my favs.

Q: On average, how much time does it take for you to finish an outfit?

It can take me anywhere from two hours to two days to finish a piece. I used to love ruffles and they took a while to make but it really depends on the project.

Q: Concerning getting materials, fabrics, buttons and all the things you'll need for a piece, where do you go to source materials in Japan?

I usually get materials from Nippori Textile Town or other fabric stores around Tokyo but if I can't find what I'm looking for I'll shop online with The Fabric Store.

Q: Some people (like me) have a slight fear that DIYing my own clothes may be really expensive. What type of pricing should someone expect going the homemade route? How does it compare to already made clothing?

Sewing your own clothes is super rewarding but it is a bit of an investment at first. You have to buy a machine, good scissors, fabric, thread, and an UNPICKER! That's the thing that rips seams apart when you make a mistake. There are lots of great free tutorials on YouTube, too, which is great. When starting out, it's good to buy cheap fabric and practice and then when you have the hang of it you can start buying better quality fabric. Fabric starts anywhere from 400 yen per meter and can go up to 3000 yen per meter. I think it is totally worth it though, because you learn so much about what really goes into making clothes. I also find handmade pieces last a lot longer because you'll want to take better care of pieces you have created yourself. Also, in the long run, it's cheaper than constantly buying clothes.



Hunting for Inspiration

Q: Your pieces are really cute, where do you find inspiration? Is it different compared to being in Australia? How so?

Everywhere! I always spot super cute and stylish people on the train and around Tokyo. I also like to window shop and visit flea markets from time to time to see what's new or find some cool vintage pieces.

Q: What designers, (Japanese or not) do you really like? Do they have shops in Japan?

I love a lot of local Aussie and Kiwi designers like [Layplan](#), [Sister Studios](#), [Penny Sage](#), [Twenty Seven Names](#) plus [Big Bud Press](#) and [Everybody World](#) from the States. None of these brands have



shops in Japan, mostly I just admire them from afar and dream about the day I can add pieces from their collections to my wardrobe.

Q: So, who else do you look at for inspiration, but on social media? What's their handle?

I always look back through my Instagram saved images. It's full of all sorts of things, not just fashion inspo. There are a couple of super colourful stylish people that I love to follow for outfit inspo. They are: [@michellenorrisphoto](#) [@mirandamakaroff](#) [@_chicadeoro](#).

Q: Would you ever consider making your own range to sell?

I have definitely considered making my own range one day but I think it would be more fun to teach others how to make their own clothes.

Q: Japan has a very unique style depending on the city, or even the district within a city! Where in Japan can someone find fashion gems?

I love going to the flea markets to find fashion gems. The Ohi Racecourse Market in Shinagawa is my fav.

A Sewist and her Craft

Q: What would you like to accomplish using your clothing as a medium (besides looking great!)?

I hope it encourages people to think about where their clothing comes from and how it was made. The fashion industry is one of the biggest polluters in the world and I think if more people knew how to make, mend, and care for their clothes it could really make a change.

Q: What is your favorite piece of clothing?

My favourite make is my Kochi Jacket Dress. I made it on the living room floor of my old flat in Auckland and it was my first ever pattern hack! I sewed it up in a beautiful Liberty Tana Lawn and a pattern by [Papercut Patterns](#). This dress reminds me of my time living in Auckland and holds a bunch of great memories from when I wore it to special events and karaoke nights with my friends.

Q: What would you tell someone who'd love to get started in sewing?

Be patient! You aren't going to be making runway-ready garments straight away but if you take your time and practice with lots of little projects you'll build up your skills in no time. Also, jump online and join the sewing community! There are so many fab blogs and YouTube tutorials to teach, inspire and encourage new sewists.

Sewn together community

Q: Making the move from Australia to Japan, how did you keep in touch with your sewist friends back home while forging a new group in Japan?

Instagram has helped me make friends with other creative people in Japan. There have also been a bunch of lovely sewists that have reached out to me to hang out while they visit Tokyo.

Q: Instagram seems to be a staple for you when it comes to finding inspiration and connecting with other makers. Do you have any tips or resources for curating a one of a kind aesthetic looking IG like yours?

Oh, thanks! I used to take it more seriously but I realised that the people who like my work don't really care about aesthetic. They just want to see what I'm making. My advice would be just to be yourself, there's no need to worry about how your Instagram looks if you're having fun and like what you're posting!

Q: And, last question: Favorite place for a photo?

There's an awesome red wall next to the 7/11 by my house but recently I've really been loving snapping outfit photos in conbinis!

Daisy Braid is a Tokyo-based sewist who taught herself to sew on her grandmother's sewing machine, and now makes her own street style inspired pieces. You can follow her on Instagram [@diydaisy](#) and her blog [diydaisy.blog](#)

Zero waste Hygiene

Kelly Carr (Saitama)

Recently, the conversation about climate change and the way our lifestyles contribute to it has become much more widespread. Everywhere, people are talking about what we can do to help. A lot of these suggestions involve different ways to eliminate waste, particularly plastic waste.

Out of curiosity, I read a book titled *101 Ways To Go Zero Waste* by Kathryn Kellog. It was an interesting read, and afterwards, a friend challenged me to try going Zero Waste for an entire week. This meant using nothing that couldn't be recycled or composted.

It was an interesting week. I learned that one of the primary obstacles to going Zero Waste is finding beauty products and toiletries that come in recyclable containers, or better yet, no containers at all. This isn't a particularly easy thing to accomplish in Japan, where everything seems to come wrapped in at least one layer of cellophane or shrink-wrap.

The search for waste-free beauty products took me to Tokyo. There, I went on something of a scavenger hunt. I looked at some pharmacies, but as expected, they were wastelands of superfluous plastic packaging. Next, I poked my head in at John Masters Organics, which a friend had recommended to me. The shop was very sleek and polished, and the packaging looked like it would be recyclable, but when I took a look at the prices, I backed off in a hurry! ¥2000 for a bottle of shampoo? No, thank you.

I hit the jackpot when I stumbled across the biggest LUSH store, not only in Japan, but in all of Asia! It just happened to be right outside Shinjuku Station, and it was four whole floors of amazing. As far as I could tell, all their packaging is 100% recyclable, and they have an entire line of 'naked' products that come without any packaging at all. I piled my basket with package-free deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, and lotion. I even grabbed some intriguing looking 'toothpaste tabs' that came in a recyclable bottle.

I was thrilled with my purchases and I saw many other products I'd like to try another time. However, I did note a couple of downsides. One is the price; LUSH is a bit on the expensive side, though not as expensive as John Masters Organics. The other is that, for anyone who finds strong scents off-putting, the products are probably much too fragrant. Personally, I like scented stuff, so I was thrilled.

I eagerly took my new bath products home to test them out. I found that all of them were a bit more work than the liquid products I was used to. The shampoo

worked quite well once I got used to it, but I couldn't for the life of me get enough conditioner off of the bar to cover my hair (which is not only long, but extremely thick). I did come to enjoy the solid lotion bar, and the toothpaste tabs were all kinds of fun. They look just like little pills, but once you bite down on them and stick a wet toothbrush in your mouth, they foam up like you wouldn't believe!

Of course, due to budgetary restraints, it's impractical to buy all your toiletries in one place. Luckily, there are also plenty of easy do it yourself guides out there for how to make your own . . . well, just about anything, really! I decided to try out a recipe that would yield both body butter and shaving soap. All I needed was some cocoa butter, safflower oil (I suspect olive oil or coconut oil would also work), and castile soap. I found all three on Amazon. The recipe involved me improvising a double boiler, but somehow I managed it. I ended up with a tin of decent quality body butter and another of surprisingly effective shaving soap.

Buoyed by my success, I looked over some more recipes. I discovered that, if you want to go the DIY route for your personal care products, it wouldn't be that difficult. Most recipes have fewer than five ingredients, and many of them overlap. By buying the ingredients for just a few projects, you could do just about all of them. Common ingredients I saw were bentonite clay, baking soda, beeswax, cocoa butter, and olive oil. Most of the recipes make a fair amount and are shelf-stable for at least six months (maybe less in the summer).

Going Zero Waste isn't an easy thing to do, but the personal hygiene aspect of it turned out to be fairly straightforward. I encountered no insurmountable obstacles. In other areas of life, it's more difficult to achieve Zero Waste. However, if I can get rid of my personal hygiene waste, I still believe that's a victory and a small step towards making the world a cleaner place.

Kelly is a 4th year American ALT. She teaches at two schools in Saitama, Saitama. In her free time, she enjoys reading, novel writing, and travel.

Photos by Kelly Carr



DECEMBER RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

MOVIES

December 6

- Last Christmas (2019)
- Ever After (2018)
- Lupin III: The First (2019)

December 7

- Driven (2018)
- Becoming Astrid (2018)

December 12

- Madagascar 4 (2019)

December 13

- Jumanji: The Next Level (2019)
- Sorry We Missed You (2019)
- The Two Popes (2019)
- A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon (2019)
- Acceleration (2019)
- A Faithful Man (2018)
- 3 Faces (2018)
- The Ideal Palace (2018)

December 20

- Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker (2019)
- Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile (2019)
- Kill Chain (2019)
- How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World (2019)
- The Upside (2017)
- Non-Fiction (2018)
- The Breadwinner (2017)
- Death Kiss (2018)

December 21

- Animal Crackers (2017)

December 27

- Heavy Trip (2018)
- Mard Ko Dard Nahin Hota (2018)
- Champions (2018)

GAMES

December 3

- Life is Strange 2 – Episode 5 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Arise: A Simple Story (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Saga Scarlet Grace: Ambitions (PC, PS4, Switch, Android, iOS)
- Skellboy (Switch)
- Farming Simulator 20 (Switch)
- Neverwinter Nights: Enhanced Edition (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Phoenix Point (PC, Xbox One)

December 5

- Star Ocean First Departure R (PS4, Switch)

December 6

- Assassin's Creed: The Rebel Collection (Switch)
- Ancestors: The Humankind Odyssey (PS4, Xbox One)

December 9

- Ashen (PS4, Switch)

December 11

- Mechwarrior 5: Mercenaries (PC)
- Hades – Steam Early Access (PC)
- Shovel Knight: King of Cards (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Shovel Knight Showdown (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

December 17

- Wattam (PC, PS4)

Unspecified Date

- Superepic (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Good Night, Knight – Steam Early Access (PC)
- Lost Words: Beyond the Page (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)



Sources:

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

<https://www.vg247.com/2019/07/15/video-game-release-dates-2019/>

AT HOME IN THE WORLD

Reflections on the Kansai Rainbow Festa

Connor McLeod (Mie)

Kansai Rainbow Festa was my first pride festival in Japan. I went with my boyfriend and some other JETs for the first time just over a year ago now. I was then fresh to Japan and the festival was a sigh of relief for me at the time.

Being a JET couple, my boyfriend Sam and I were both out to our colleagues and community from the beginning whether we wanted to be or not. It was nice in some ways, not dealing with assumptions of heterosexuality. But it was also draining in others, such as my partner being awkwardly asked on his first day which bathroom he would need to use, or people laughing, thinking we were joking when learning that we were a couple (ha-ha, gay people!).

None of the reactions were surprising, but soon my everyday life of suits, seriousness, and the realities of senior high school life in the countryside left me missing the company of the rainbow (1) community and a place where my identity wouldn't be consistently challenged or misunderstood.

The Kansai Rainbow Festa has been held at Ogimachi Park in Osaka on the third weekend of October since 2006. Festival-goers can enjoy drag shows, speeches, and other pride-like showcases, while also visiting the dozens of booths in the sandy park, which sell everything from rainbow pins and flags to cold beer and special holiday packages. There are also several events in bars and other venues in the surrounding area over the two days, however, the main event is the parade on the Sunday.

Last year's festival happened to be held on one of the last truly hot days of the year; a very lucky thing for mid-October. We met with a group there and checked out the booths. I picked up a rainbow flag with 'peace' printed on it in white block letters, downed a tequila shot at the booze tent with a fellow JET, then retired back to a picnic blanket beneath a tree to cheer while two women were "married" on stage.

I didn't get to make it to the parade last year, so when I saw the Festa coming up again in 2019 I was determined to experience it in its entirety.

I arrived at the parade only slightly worn down from drinking at gay bars the night before. The white tents, which I had spotted flattened and anchored down on Saturday, were back up and proudly showing off the flags of the community. The first day had been cancelled due to Typhoon Hagibis, so the crowds were ready to make the most out of the day.



Parade attendees were put into five groups, one of which had a strict no-photo policy to protect participants concerned about their privacy. Volunteers patrolled the groups and organised us into walking groups of three across. Over and over again they yelled down the lines, creating the most disciplined and serious parade walk I had ever seen in my life. Suddenly over the loudspeaker, we heard a giant “*itterasshai*”. We left the park without music, still walking three abreast, waving flags to a missing crowd. Police patrolled and watched carefully for misdemeanours while we reached the road. It felt strange. I didn’t really understand what was going on.

Back home in New Zealand, I worked at a rainbow youth charity. We had hundreds of young people with our float, most of whom held signs of protest against things such as conversion therapy, or demanding adequate healthcare for trans people. We blasted music and the sidewalks were full of people waving, smiling, and taking pictures. But in Osaka, we simply waved a few little rainbow flags at the public (most of whom didn’t seem to have any clue as to what was happening), took up a sliver of space on the road, and chatted amongst ourselves. The few trucks of dancing men and drag queen entertainers were spaced out and often split apart from the rest of the march due to traffic. It was a calm and quiet walk.

I understand that pride takes on different forms in different contexts. Sometimes it’s a protest; an exclamation of support for people of minority

sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics. A gathering of activists, community workers, youth, the disenfranchised, and their families and allies. A place of discussion and change-making. And more frequently, pride is a party—a sometimes very expensive, and corporatised one.

For myself as a *takatāpui* activist and former rainbow youth worker, the recent development of corporatization at pride has felt uncomfortable at times.

“**Takatāpui**
Takatāpui is an umbrella term that is used by indigenous New Zealanders to describe Māori people of minority sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics.”

Earlier this year in Copenhagen, I danced through the streets of the city’s pride festival, chasing after a beer keg on wheels, snapping photos with costumed performers. It was fun—I enjoyed every moment of it. But most floats were filled not by charities, or community groups, but by banks, insurance companies, and other businesses. It was a generic giant sponsored party with a rainbow slapped on top. I didn’t see anybody advocating for our rights; any





young people or youth groups participating. It was as though there was no longer a need to.

The Osaka walk was different from both of these. It felt like a demonstration. A declaration of existence. There were no overbearing corporate sponsors, hundreds of rainbows with logos, or flying company banners. The parade was by, and for, the community.

I later learned that the reason we had to walk three-abreast was that if the group became too large it could be treated as something else by law enforcement; a protest or riot. For a while, I walked on the road seeing no rainbows; no people celebrating on the streets. Until in a shop doorway stood an old man furiously waving a little flag smiling and cheering for us all by himself. I would go on to spot a few people doing the same and they made it all worth it.

Even though the parade felt strange to me, I couldn't help but grin at the high-fives, *tadaimas*, and *otsukares* from an awaiting crowd on our return. People were proud—and so happy—that this was all happening.

Arriving back to the park, a huge cheer went up as the world-famous-in-Japan [Obachaan group](#) were for some reason scheduled to start the party. I waved my rainbow peace flag and jumped with the crowd. At this time, surrounded by the community, and unashamedly holding my boyfriend's hand up in the air, I felt just a little bit more at home in the world over here in Japan.

Footnotes:

1) 'Rainbow' is used by the author to describe people of minority sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics, and the term is commonly used as such in his country. He prefers it over acronyms such as 'LGBTQI+' which have the potential to exclude non-Western concepts of gender and sexuality, although recognises that not everybody shares this same opinion, nor identifies as part of a 'rainbow' community.

Connor Mcleod is a second-year ALT living in Mie Prefecture. Before living in Japan, he worked with schools, universities, and community groups to give rainbow people in Aotearoa, New Zealand a sense of safety and belonging. He enjoys gardening and experimenting with vegan cooking using Japanese ingredients in his spare time.

Photos by Yvonne Worden

Further Viewing: [Kansai Rainbow Festa Video](#) by Yvonne Worden





The Setouchi Triennale is a contemporary art festival held every three years on several islands in the Seto Inland Sea, in Kagawa Prefecture, and runs over three seasons. The aim is to revitalize the local area, which has suffered from depopulation in recent years, with this year's theme being "Restoration of the Sea". The festival features over 150 artworks by artists from both Japan and abroad, many of whom make use of abandoned homes to host or even become their art installations. The festival attracts visitors from many different walks of life, and in 2016, the milestone of one million visitors was reached, 13.4% of whom were visitors from overseas(1). In this article, I will highlight my visits in the summer and autumn sessions and hopefully, you can join the next time, because as you will see, it is splendid. As much as I would like to include every photo and art piece I saw, I simply can't. So, I can only hope that this article will suffice in giving you an enticing snapshot of The Setouchi Triennale.

With delicious *Sanuki-udon* in my belly, a dish the prefecture is famous for, I jumped on the big red

ferry at 7 a.m. to embark on the journey to my first destination, Megijima (女木島, めぎじま), population: 200. Naturally picturesque to begin with, the island's beauty was only enhanced by many temporary and permanent art exhibitions that were installed across the island. Megijima is also known as *Onigashima* or Ogres' Island, and some claim that it was the stage for the Japanese folktale Momotaro (Peach Boy), a story in which a boy born from a peach vanquishes a hoard of ogres. The caves where the story is set can be found on the highest peak, Washigamine (188 meters above sea level). The caves are about 400 meters in length and cover an area of about 4,000 square meters.

On the same day, I went to visit Ogijima (男木島, おぎじま), population: 168. Around 20 installations could be seen on this island during the festival's summer installment, all unique and different in their own way. Once again, the island was so naturally beautiful, and the food served was locally sourced, and delicious. Ogijima is a community that has taken charge of its own development and through this, has come

Setouchi Triennale 2019

Communities of the Seto Inland Sea
Ari Gorney (Kochi)



to embody the Triennale theme “Restoration of the Sea”. This theme particularly resonates with the owner of the only library on the Island, Junko Nukaga-Fukui. He says it was during the summer of 2013, when zero children lived on the island, that its only school closed. However, that same year, artists from the contemporary art group “The Group 1965” reopened the defunct school to house a Setouchi Triennale project with the slogan “Go Back to School and Start Over.” Junko’s daughter went every day and told her parents, “I could go to this school if you like.” The family decided to move to Ogijima from Osaka, applied to have the school reopened, and in April 2014, their daughter began attending Ogi School, a combined elementary and junior high school.

However, every time Junko left to go to Osaka, he noticed the rapid depopulation of the island upon his return, and he wanted to help. He said to himself, “This isn’t the goal. It’s just the starting line. When the students graduate from school, what then?” His answer was to build a library—a place

for people to study, a place to communicate with the islanders, and a place to get the information needed to move there, such as the location of empty houses. Ogijima Library opened in 2016, the island’s nursery school reopened the same year and, in the last four years, 40 people have relocated to Ogijima.

After my visit to the library I went to explore some of the quirkier exhibits on the island. The work “*The Room Inside of the Room*” (2016) by Oscar Oiwa, a Brazilian *nikkei* (Japanese emigrant or descendant) artist, is a very fun work of art that utilises perspective to create an intriguing landscape. It was a real head-scratcher. In addition, a very beautiful sculpture “*Walking Ark*” by Keisuke Yamaguchi (2013) can be seen next to the sea.

The following day (with more delicious udon in my belly), I set my sights on one of the more famous islands in the region, Naoshima (直島町), population: 3,117. Getting in early is recommended because you really do want to rent a bicycle for the day. Riding the bicycle to see all the different exhibits Setouchi had to offer was lovely, especially because Naoshima is known for its permanent collection of art. The most well-known is the Chichu Art Museum (no photos allowed inside). The museum is a set of interlinked, half-buried buildings that house the owner, Soichiro Fukutake’s, personal collection of five Claude Monet water lily paintings.



Notwithstanding Monet's art, the most striking work at Chichu for me was by American artist James Turrell. His interactive work had you enter a room that made it feel like nothing else existed anymore, and time and space both moved and stood still at the same time. The second was by another American, Walter de Maria. This room was a temple-like space with golden pillars mounted on the walls and steps leading up to a giant granite sphere.

The most iconic piece on Naoshima is located on the beach: a giant yellow pumpkin by Japanese pop artist Yayoi Kusama—a surreal beacon jutting out into the sea. The pumpkin is a permanent exhibit on the island and is a highly sought-after photo location.

Another attraction of Setouchi amongst all the exhibitions on the Island is the wacky “i♥湯” public bathhouse—a collage of junkyard scraps and neon signs that operate as a functioning *sentō*. The bathhouse was a nice way to relax after a long day biking around the island (no photos inside, of course!)

The following day, I went to visit Teshima (豊島). In Japanese, the name Teshima means “bountiful island,” and the island is true to its name. Like Naoshima, bikes can be rented at the island's ports and are a great way to enjoy the beautiful scenery. I hopped on one myself to explore the landscapes of Teshima. First, was the Teshima Art Museum (no photos allowed), which turns the standard idea of what a museum is on its head. For a start, it is empty. Or to be precise, there is nothing on display. Instead of looking at artworks or objects, visitors are invited to contemplate nature in its purest form: light, water and air. The effect is deeply calming. Teshima Art Museum itself even blends in with the surrounding landscape. Curved and low lying, it looks both other-worldly and somehow part of the surrounding landscape. However, the strangest aspect of the museum is its location—next to a rice terrace.

Bright red strawberries and mandarin oranges are products of Teshima, and Shoji Yamamoto's orange orchard is a well-known part of the island. I read about Shoji before coming to Teshima, and he says, “Teshima is well-suited for fruit growing. It's sunny for much of the year and has good slopes, which means the orchards get lots of sunshine and have good drainage. But each type of fruit requires a different approach, so it's not efficient to grow many different kinds. That's why I decided to specialize in mandarin oranges.”(3) Shoji is 85 years old and has been growing oranges for the last 65 years. The other popular fruit is the strawberry, and strawberry jam and sauce are popular Teshima products. He says, “Oranges and olives had already been cultivated here for many years, and I thought the addition of strawberries would increase the variety of specialty products. I could imagine kids and grandkids

who came to visit, taking Teshima strawberries home with them. I think that revitalization starts with something tasty. For example, visitors who try our delicious strawberries are quite likely to buy our jam in their local store at home when they see the word ‘Teshima’ on the label.”(3)

One of the more enjoyable exhibitions for me thus far was the interactive basketball piece, “*No One Wins—Multibasket*” by Spanish art duo Jasmina Llobet & Luis Fernandez Pons. The artwork was a large map of Teshima with a bunch of basketball hoops on it, and I legitimately could spend hours there, which I did, because I was waiting for my ferry.

Fast forward three months, and I am going to highlight an island that's only available to visit during the autumn session, Honjima(本島), just off the coast of Marugame City (great udon by the way). Since ancient times, the people whose occupation was simply “pirate” had been living on these islands. They became a strong crew with weapons and serious sailing skills. The crew was called Shiwaku-suigun (塩飽水軍). The locals told me that Honjima once had a population of around 3,000 in its heyday, however, the population has dwindled to a mere 450, mostly elderly residents. That being the case, it is still the most populated island in the Shiwaku Island Chain. Apart from its wonderful history, Honjima also provides one of the best views of a modern marvel, the Great Seto Bridge, a long suspension bridge spanning many small islands.

I arrived at 6:45 a.m., rented my bike, and just rode around the island in blissful silence, basking in all the beautiful and interesting pieces that were on display for the Setouchi Triennale. It was a transcendent way to end my journey and a wonderful thing to experience.

The Setouchi Triennale transcends the natural beauty present within the islands, and displays a strong feeling of grassroots collectivism by using local resources to help the community and to keep that community alive for years to come.

Thank you for reading, and see you in 2022.

1. <https://bit.ly/2Cxpqic>
2. <https://bit.ly/2QfUqvn>
3. <https://bit.ly/2K8wQgb>

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Lions, Tiger Bears

Kyo

ers, and - Yokai!

to's Yokai Parade

Chelanna White (Kyoto)

Kyoto is an excellent place to experience the ancient traditions of Japan in their modern contexts. Temples lie nestled between high-rise apartments. Massive *torii* gates straddle busy streets. Everywhere you go in this city, the ancient brushes up against the modern, bringing it to life. The city is also famous for its festivals, or *matsuri*. Food stalls, music, and crowds fill the streets. And of course, no *matsuri* is complete without a parade! Though lesser-known than the “Big Three” festivals (Aoi, Gion, and Jidai), the Taishogun Shopping Street Association’s annual Yokai Costume Parade (Ichijo Hyakki Yagyō) offers the chance to engage with the spookier side of the city’s history.

So what, exactly, is a *yokai*? It is somewhat difficult to say. English does not have a direct translation, but Jisho.org offers “ghost,” “monster,” or “demon,” among others(1). But, each of these terms have very specific connotations. Ghosts are the terrestrially trapped spirits of the dead. Monsters are dangerous, ugly, and usually rather large. Demons carry specific religious meaning, though they are often portrayed in secular media as well. The term *yokai* functions as more of an umbrella for any sort of strange or mystical phenomena. So while all ghosts, monsters, and demons are *yokai*, not all *yokai* are ghosts, monsters, or demons. There is no specific malice associated with *yokai*; they range in temperament from mild-mannered to mischievous to malevolent.

For most of the year, the Taishogun Shopping Street (also known as Ichijodori) resembles any other local shopping district in Japan, until one looks a little closer. Strange monsters made of *papier-mâché*, pottery, and other random bits sit in front of the shops and restaurants lining the street. Now known as “Yokai Street,” this quiet shopping district has become a bit of a tourist attraction thanks to these cute and creepy sculptures(2). But for one night each year, the third Saturday in October, this quiet yet quirky street comes alive for the Yokai Costume Parade, which recreates the legendary “Night Parade of One Hundred Demons” (Hyakki Yagyō)(3).

As the legend goes, after 100 years of use, objects can obtain a spirit, or *kami*, and become known as *tsukumogami*(4). During the Heian period, there was a great house cleaning in Kyoto. Many old and worn objects were tossed into the street. They were distressed, and gathered to plan revenge against their careless former owners. They had become *tsukumogami*. They named the god who had granted them their spirits, Henge Daimyojin, the god of shapeshifters, and marched westward down Ichijodori to thank the god and to terrorize their former owners(5).

The modern iteration of the Hyakki Yagyō, celebrated by the denizens of the Taishogun Shopping Street, began in 2005, led by “ghost’s culture researcher”

Jyunichi Kono(6). People dressed as tsukumogami and other yokai and marched through the Taishogun Shopping Street, just as the spurned household objects had allegedly done so many centuries ago. However, costumes are not limited to haunted housewares, with people dressing up as various famous yokai or their own fantastical creations. The parade draws a mix of locals and foreigners of all ages. Very young children may be scared by the parade, but they are not banned from attending. If you are interested in yokai mythology, or want to indulge your spooky side, the Yokai Parade is the place for you.

I attended the Yokai Parade last year, though I had taken the wrong bus and ended up missing most of the parade itself. I did manage to enjoy the Yokai Flea Market (Mononoke Ichi) that pops up around the parade route, hawking yokai-themed handmade goods such as jewelry, masks, and all manner of gifts. This year, I was determined to take it all in.

Before the parade began, a friend and I wandered the streets, poking our heads into the shops that make up Yokai Street. The Origami Club Noah was also open to the public, and we were invited to come in and try our hand at folding some paper yokai ourselves. At around 6p.m., just after dusk, the sound of drums coming from the eastern end of the street heralded the start of the parade.

The parade was led by the Yokai Parade's mascot—the three-eyed Yagyodoji, messenger of Henge Daimyojin(7). He was followed by all sorts of creepy characters, only some of which I recognized. There was a *kappa*, a turtle-like water-dweller with a taste for human innards; several *kitsune*, or fox spirits, in human form; a walking eyeball complete with dangling optical nerve, and one particularly long-clawed creature that delighted in terrorizing the small children in the crowd to the point of tears. Then, after reaching Daishogun Hachi-Jinja, the parade turned around and came back up from the western end, again preceded by the sound of drums and crying children.

After the crowd trailing the parade dispersed, it was time to go shopping! One booth had an array of crocheted yokai. The shop-keeper asked if I knew what the three-legged crow figure I was holding was, and explained that it was the *yatagarasu*, a helpful yokai that leads travelers to their destinations. I wondered if purchasing a keychain *yatagarasu* would help me find my perpetually lost keys. I managed to cross a few people off my Christmas shopping list at a booth selling hand-printed goods decorated with a one-eyed cat, and a *tenugui* (hand towel) shop specializing in spooky imagery. Last year, I purchased a protection charm decorated with horror writer H.P. Lovecraft's face that would allegedly protect me from insanity from that shop. Unfortunately, none were in stock this year, so should I slip into insanity, I will hold this shop personally responsible!

The Taishogun Shopping Street Association's annual Yokai Costume Parade is a newer tradition in Kyoto, but it is still connected to the city's ancient history. The mix of modern and traditional architecture gives Kyoto a special atmosphere. It is not hard to imagine that strange beings actually lurk in the city's shadows. The Yokai Costume Parade is a great place to see these characters represented by costumed paraders. At least, I assume they were all costumes . . .

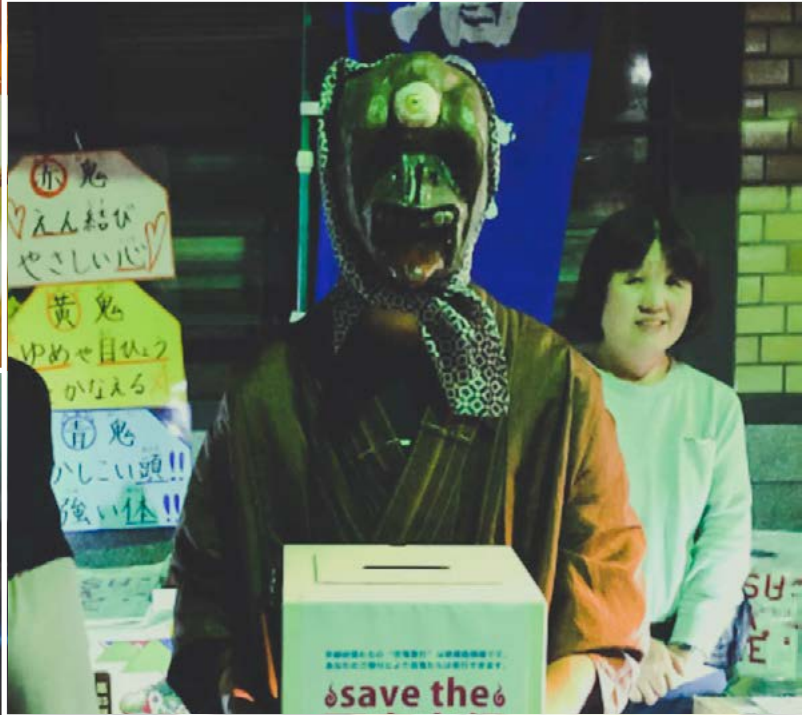
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Chelanna is a third year JET in Kyoto, where she lives with her husband and three goldfish: Dan, BenDela, Bianca, and Bob, respectively.

Photos by Chelanna White and Tayler Skultety







Drone Shadow by James Bridle is displayed at the entrance of the Aichi Arts Center.

Aichi Triennale: A Censorship Crisis

Paige Adrian (Gunma)

The Aichi Triennale, one of the largest art festivals in Japan with an average attendance of around 600,000 people, completed a semi-successful 75-day run in October (1). While the festival curated an impressive selection of art, it was plagued with controversy after Triennale staff decided to censor an exhibit titled *After “Freedom of Expression?”*. This exhibit contained the work *Statue of a Girl of Peace* by Korean artists Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung. The statue is a representation of comfort women: the name for Korean women who were forced into sexual servitude during World War II.

Following the exhibit’s closure, the festival faced repercussions from its artists, the government, and the media. But large art festivals, often organized as biennial or

triennial events, are no stranger to scrutiny. They happen all over the world and attract an international audience, with the Aichi Triennale boasting over one hundred different artists and groups from numerous countries. Why one sculpture caused such an intense reaction reveals a lot about Japan’s weaknesses. It exists in a strange parallel to many of the other thought-provoking works at the Triennale, which questioned Japanese culture and history but did not receive the same attention. People come to art festivals to see something outside the norm. Viewers want to be challenged and shown new perspectives. Larger events like the Triennale are the perfect place for those interested in exploring the many forms that contemporary art can take—there’s something for everyone. The variety of art on display at

the Aichi Triennale was incredible, from large-scale installations like James Bridle’s *Drone Shadow*, a giant painted drone silhouette, to subtle works that almost blended into the environment, like Barteremi Togo’s garbage bags emblazoned with African flags, titled *Africa: Western Trash*.

Art festivals often highlight art that connects to the local place and culture, meaning that the hosting location can experience a reawakening of sorts. The Aichi Triennale placed many of their artists in the older Endoji neighbourhood, featuring works in traditional houses and lining the weathered shopping street with Ayşe Erkmen’s graceful coral ropes. Although these projects interact with the past and local places in benign ways, that doesn’t preclude works that may question or reveal negative histories.

The Aichi Triennale featured many works offering commentary on social topics. My favourite exhibit might be the work of artist duo Kyun-Chome, who filmed intimate exchanges between parents and

their transgender children. In one video, a transgender man held a calligraphy brush together with his mother. In unison, they wrote his original name in black ink, and then wrote his chosen name over it in red. Throughout the process, their conversation revealed a bittersweet intersection between gender identities and generational differences, and how that intermixes with Japanese culture. Another enlightening work was *The Clothesline* by Mónica Mayer, a project started in 1978 which asks participants to write their experiences of sexual violence or misogyny on a slip of paper. Women looked over the papers knowingly while one man read wide-eyed, seemingly shocked. For a work that's over forty years old, it's sad that it remains so necessary. These are just two works of many that offered criticism and insight into diverse topics like gender, privacy, eugenics, war, colonization, urbanization, and immigration—all difficult issues to which Japan is no stranger.

One work I had a weird experience with was a performance piece called *The Romeos*. Posters placed throughout the venues warned that you may find yourself speaking to an “attractive young man” who started the conversation under false pretenses. The posters said he may even attempt to move beyond conversation and suggested a love affair as a potential outcome. The work claimed to take inspiration from a Cold War spy strategy, but to me it was oddly similar to the practice of “pick-up artistry,” an exploitative internet-based culture that's risen in popularity in recent years. I was standing inside a room crying, thanks to artist Tania Bruguera's infusion of menthol in the air. It was intended to evoke tears over a number representing migrant deaths. A man came up to me and

noted that the menthol seemed to be working. I laughed and we walked out, continuing to the next artwork and discussing our worldly experiences. It wasn't until halfway through the conversation that I accused him, shocked: “You're a Romeo!” He chuckled and admitted that he was. His friend, the creator of the work, had asked him to be one of her Romeos for the Triennale. “I'm usually quite shy,” he mused. Despite our pleasant chat I didn't feel swayed on the work's unconvincing premise. But regardless of my personal dislike for *The Romeos*, I would never expect it to be removed or shut down. In fact, it was one of the pieces that I thought about the most during my visit, and the value of that can't be denied.

Those who censored *Statue of a Girl of Peace* could not see value in pieces that prompt discomfort. The visual characteristics of the piece are not particularly inflammatory. A Korean girl sits on a chair with her fists clenched, a bird on her shoulder. Of course, its implied meaning is much more evocative in light of its further context—another version of the statue sits in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, which the Japanese government has heavily protested. Triennale artistic director Daisuke Tsuda, once a journalist, had organized *After “Freedom of Expression?”* with the express purpose of showcasing works which had been censored in Japan at some point, making the closing of the exhibit all the more absurd. To accompany each piece, Tsuda wrote about the work's history and why it had been censored (2). This educational intent apparently wasn't good



Endoji Shopping Street.



After “Freedom of Expression?” is reopened for the Aichi Triennial's last weekend.

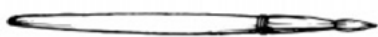
enough as Triennale staff faced angry phone calls, twitter rants, and—only in Japan—a threatening fax (3). The mayor of Nagoya was one of the exhibit's most outspoken opponents, and The Agency for Cultural Affairs has refused to provide promised funding to this year's festival (4). Many Triennale artists revoked the display of their work in response to the censorship, though the original exhibit and its artworks were eventually reopened for the festival's final weekend. As is usually the case with censored works, the restored exhibit drew so much attention that admission had to be designated through a lottery system, and the crowds of people made it hard to even walk past for a possible glimpse.

Although the closure of *Statue of a Girl of Peace* is disappointing, the fact that the sculpture can elicit a reaction of this magnitude suggests an important purpose of contemporary art. Additionally, the support from other artists, as well as the public who spoke of and saw the exhibit, serves to shine a greater light on the statue and the history we need to remember. I hope this incident provokes further interest and meaningful engagement with art in Japan. If you're interested in experiencing a Japanese art festival in the coming year, these are some options you can look forward to:



R O P P O N G I ART NIGHT

May 30 to May 31



Y O K O H A M A T R I E N N A L E

July 3 to October 31



O K U N O T O T R I N N A L E

September 5 to October 25

4

Y A M A G A T A
B I E N N A L E
September 1 to 24

BIWAKO BIENNALE
Sept. 12 to Nov. 24

TOKYO
BIENNALE

October 12 to
November 24

5

6

Referenced Works and Further Reading

- 1) [Aichi Triennale – Official Website](#)
- 2) [Outrage over Aichi Triennale exhibition ignites debate over freedom of expression in art](#) by Philip Brasor
- 3) [The Threat to Freedom of Expression in Japan](#) by Andrew Maerkle
- 4) [Aichi Triennale exhibition may trigger legal battle](#) by Maiko Eiraku

Paige Adrian is a second-year Gunma ALT hailing from Saskatoon, Canada. She dabbles in writing, photography, and illustration when she's not on a road trip, lurking at a conbini, or being a pop culture snob. You can see more of her work at paigeadrian.ca.

TRANS– Art Project in Kobe

Sophie McCarthy (Hyogo)



This autumn a new kind of art project took place in Kobe. Lasting from September 14th to November 10th, the TRANS— project set out to [“transcend and move beyond”](#) the normal art landscape. Featuring two artists, German-born Gregor Schneider and Kobe native Miwa Yanagi, none of the 12 works that were a part of TRANS— were featured in museums. Where were they then? Tucked in subway stations, abandoned buildings, food markets, rooftops, and private homes across three areas of Kobe: Shinkaichi, Shin-Nagata, and Hyogo Port. Rather than install the exhibits in the modern and bustling downtown districts of Sannomiya and Motomachi, TRANS— director Sumi Hayashi opted for parts of Kobe that echoed days of old in an attempt push Kobe towards a direction of revitalization. Much like the sentiment of the artworks, the locations themselves made visitors feel a sense of discomfort, loss, and nostalgia while simultaneously helping them explore the history of Kobe.

Before World War II, Shinkaichi was the largest section of downtown Kobe and hosted much of the cities entertainment, such as cinemas, vaudeville theaters, and music halls, etc. However in the 1960s, as such places began to lose popularity and the decision was made to move Kobe City Hall to Sannomiya, the Shinkaichi neighborhood entered a decline. There were three artworks, or “Stations” of TRANS— located in the Shinkaichi area. The most notable work was Station 3, or “Vanished Reality”, which was located in the abandoned Hyogo Prefectural Institute of Public Health and Consumer Sciences Building. Much like the area itself, inside the building glimpses of the past shimmer through. Visitors start in the basement and take a disorienting rickety elevator ride to the fifth floor. On the fifth floor, the hall is completely white. As the building was a sanitary research institute, the stark whiteness portrays what the workers there were once looking to achieve, but also leaves the visitor questioning reality. On the sixth floor, the rooms were left in their state of abandonment. Looking at the complete disarray, visitors could feel the franticness and dread buried in the walls. However, as you make your way to the rooftop feelings of hope and gratitude emerge. When you reach the rooftop, a panoramic view of Kobe awaits. Facing North you see the gorgeous mountain range, to the South is the sea, to the East is downtown, and

to the West, the sun is setting over the residential area. As you look at the vast city spread out before you, you understand what the workers here were once working so hard to protect.

Kobe has had a history of being a port city since the Nara Period (710-794). In 1858, Hyōgo Port was opened for international trade and Kobe soon became one of the most prominent port cities in Japan and the world. Unfortunately, in 1995 when the Great Hanshin Earthquake struck Kobe, much of the port area was destroyed and Kobe's prominence as a hub of trade and cultural exchange quickly fell. While much of the area has been rebuilt and there are efforts to revitalize the neighborhood (i.e. placing Vissel Kobe's stadium here), Hyogo Port still has not regained its former status as Japan's principal shipping port. The most interesting TRANS— station located in the Hyogo Port Area was Station 8, or Hyogo Hostel. From 1950 to last year, Hyogo Hostel operated as temporary low-income housing for male workers, many of whom worked in the shipyards and on the docks at Hyogo Port. "The Dark Side of Dwelling" was installed on the first floor of the former hostel as part of TRANS—. The rooms were also left as is, but shockingly everything inside was coated in black paint. Visitors were given a small flashlight and left to fumble around in pitch-black, peeking into the old dorm rooms, mess hall, and bathrooms along the way. The darkness produced an instinctive fear. A fear that was probably felt by many of the former residents in the years since the earthquake, as they worried about the stability of their job and being able to afford food and daily expenses. Visitors look at the objects and personal items left behind and also feel the absence and loss for something that once was.

Like the Hyogo-Port Area, Shin-Nagata suffered some of the worst damage during the 1995 earthquake. Some remnants of the disaster can still be seen today, but locals have taken it upon themselves to revitalize the area. Currently, young artists and others have adopted it as a base of operations (as well as the 16m high Tetsujin 28 statue). Shin-Nagata features four TRANS— stations, including the 12th and last station at the historic Marugo Ichiba Market. Marugo Market was opened in 1918 and was one of the few parts of town to survive the



Photo by Ethan Wang





earthquake due to the fact that it was closed on that day. One may be surprised at how quiet the street is next to the market. However, as soon as you head down the small alley entrance of the market, you are overwhelmed with food stalls and people. While the number of shops has dramatically decreased over the years, shopkeepers took it upon themselves to keep the market going and in 2006 started what is now the successful “Marugo Asia Yokocho Night Stalls”. Station 1 and Station 12 worked together to create “Dying and the Extension of Life.” At Station 1 in Duo Dome (JR Kobe Station), a thousand local elders were invited to be photographed and turned into 3D avatars. The avatars are then seen in Marugo Market through an augmented reality app. The avatars of the elders combined with the remnants of the market evoked a sense of nostalgia for a vibrant time of the past as well as a fear that the days are numbered.

Kobe is a city that has always embraced new ideas and accepted foreign culture. The TRANS— art project completely encompassed that. This art exhibit was like no other art exhibit I have experienced before. The choice of Schneider and Yanagi to combine their work with the local history and architecture was masterful and powerful. It transformed the art experience from just a visual experience to an all-sensory, empathic experience. While I have lived in Kobe for a year, there was so much history I was unaware of and areas I had never felt drawn to visit. After experiencing TRANS—, I feel new emotions for and feel more connected to the city of Kobe. And after all, shouldn't that be the point of art?

Sophie McCarthy is a second-year JET teaching at a senior high school in Kobe. She's originally from Philadelphia, PA and enjoys photography, art, coffee, and thrifting. You can see more about Sophie's experiences in Japan on her Instagram [@sophielmccarthy](https://www.instagram.com/sophielmccarthy).

Photos by Sophie McCarthy



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"We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are." — Anais Nin

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Rashaad Jordan

*"I've never lost a game. I just ran out of time."
— Michael Jordan*

Photo: Charlotte Coetzee





Getting Into the Habit of *Making Great Habits*

How to Unclutter Your
Mind and Routine

Teresa Fong (Tokyo)

I've always thought I was a lot of things growing up, such as a night owl in love with the cold who could hold my expectations in place. The problem is that I really hate the cold, I can't function past 8:00 p.m., and all I do is anticipate the potential results! I wanted to think that I could stay out like the people in my age group and be "super chill" about the things happening around me. Honestly, it's natural to think that you're perfect and immune to negativity like I naively did. But guess what? You're not. I certainly wasn't. I still am not. You will get stuck in this loop where you're repeatedly feeling like elephant dung drying out in the sun. Here's a fact coming at you fast: you're not elephant dung, but if you are feeling like dung, at least be Asian Palm Civet dung, the fecal matter that makes the world's most expensive coffee.

Reflecting back, I realize I felt like elephant dung because I was lying to myself a lot. I said I liked the cold, but I didn't, especially in my current apartment that doubles as a refrigerator. I was just used to it. I'm from Boston, a very cold place. As someone suffering from hyperhidrosis, a condition making the human body sweat uncontrollably in obscene quantities, it was obvious why I'd say I like the cold more, but honestly, I like spring and summer because things are bright! Things are colorful! Things are just happier. Each lie I told was one shovel worth of dirt thrown in my face and in the end, I found myself in a very dark hole.



My Pasta Hole

I found that getting out of that dark hole and eventually improving yourself is a multi-step process. The first being the need to recognize that you are susceptible to failure. Being a foreign resident in Japan means you're likely have a sprinkle, or a large scooping, of culture shock on top of swallowing that hard truth. Culture shock may manifest in many ways and you should not believe anyone who says that they never experienced it. In my own case, I realized I had it with my "spaghetti" incident. Some strands of spaghetti had slipped out as I tried to drain the water, and I just lost it. I tossed everything down the drain thinking I failed in life. Somehow those strands of spaghetti equated to my success in life.

I honestly wish I can say, "These are the steps that changed my life!" like a clickbait article, but clickbaits are usually false anyway, right? I did a variety of things to get to where I am, and where I am now is a place where I can predict when I will slip and fall into that hole again. Nonetheless, there are my proven actions that could help to improve your own happiness.

Take Charge of Your Day Like a Boss

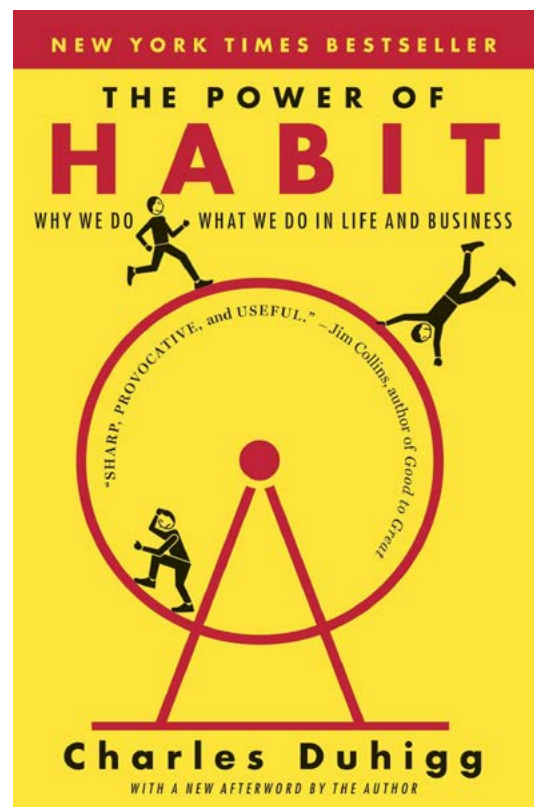
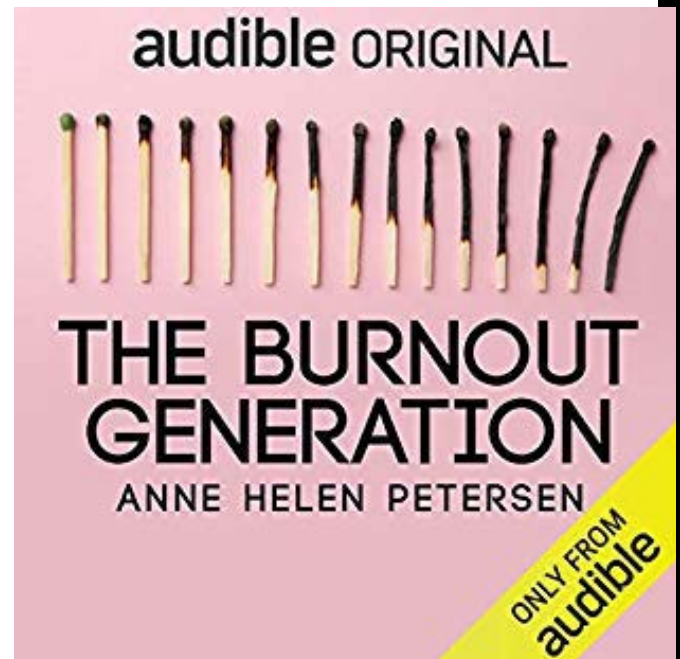
I recently listened to the Audible original called, *"The Burnout Generation"* by Anne Helen Petersen. It was a very enjoyable listen, and in that audiobook is the first time I heard the term "project manage happiness." Petersen was actually saying that we cannot project manage our own happiness, but I like to disagree. In some degrees, you can and actually should project manage your happiness. After all, you must actively ensure that your actions will become habits that end up benefiting your lifestyle and mindset.

I believe we all know about the power of habits. Charles Duhigg wrote the award-winning book called, *"The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business"* carefully explaining how 40 to 95 per cent of your day is made up of routine behaviors. Ever since I learned that this is the case, I started to slowly add habits I think will improve my life. When I say slowly, I mean one new habit every two months at least. You don't want to overwhelm yourself and end up failing before you begin after all.

I tried to combine the two lessons I learned from the readings to the following:

- Manage my day like it's a project
- Analyze your day for open periods where you can slowly add in new habits that you think will improve your situation

I personally use Google Calendar, as you can use it on a browser and on your phone as an app, but feel free to go "old school" with an agenda book or "high tech" with a Gantt Chart. I found empty spots to add in habits targeting my physical and mental health.



Superhero Your Body

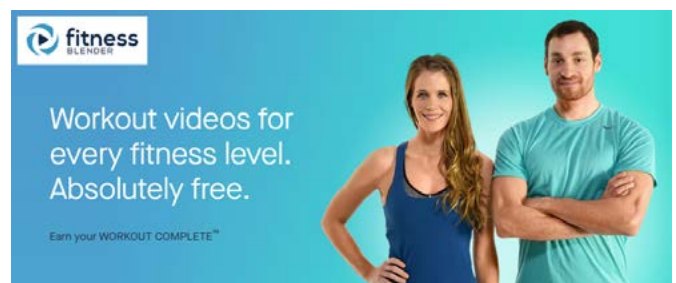
The very first habit I attempted to add into my life targeted my water intake. It sounds simple and easy, and that's the point. When I dropped the entire pot of spaghetti into the sink, it was because I was tired of the cycle I found myself in but I had no energy to get out. See what I was missing? I was missing energy, big time! Regularly drinking enough water has been proven to have many benefits, such as aiding digestion (good if you're not used to eating so much rice) and preventing your body from overheating (good for the oppressing summers here). On top of all those benefits is that water helps clear clouded-thinking and increases energy levels. The increase isn't significant immediately, but it's one tiny step to get the energy to do "larger actions" to avoid having an emotional car crash.

What are the "larger actions" I am referring to? Physical activity! You need to be at least a little energized to get out of your warm bed. I know, this is so much harder in the cold, dark winter, but it's worth it. Have you noticed that as the days get shorter and the amount of sunshine we are showered with gets smaller, you feel so much more tired? Do you know why? It's because of melatonin, the "darkness hormone" as nicknamed by Dr. Matthew Walker. This hormone circulates throughout our brain and body, shouting at our cells to go to sleep. When sunshine floods our brain though, it pauses the release of melatonin. That means we're more energized and less sleepy. Doctor Walker suggests "infusing our brain" with at least twenty minutes of daylight in the morning. Consider this twenty-minute session a multipurpose preventative action because not only does daylight exposure in the morning help you feel more energized, Dr. Walker says it can also lead to better sleep in the evening. Don't you love a 2-for-1?

Now getting out of bed to get a twenty-minute sun shower hardly qualifies as physical activity (unless you're taking a jog outside), so do yourself a favor by doing a 15-30 minute workout. Future You will appreciate this more than you can imagine. There are reports that have found that vigorous exercise at least three times a week is effective against that darn seasonal depression, which is quickly increasing in strength thanks to the approaching

winter. Don't have access to a gym? Don't worry and don't use that as an excuse. There are many YouTubers dedicating their channels to workout routines that can be done right inside an apartment. My favorite is Fitness Blender because this wife-husband pair never tells you to work out to look a certain size. They encourage you to do what's hard for you to become a better version of yourself. It's all about beating Past You's records. They also offer a variety of styles of exercise in case you have a knee injury or simply don't want to enrage your downstairs neighbors.

It should be noted that I didn't eat that many vegetables before I started my habits. The lack of fruits and vegetables translated to sluggish movements. When I first started this journey to improve how I felt, I didn't actually think about the food I was eating. I simply focused on drinking water and exercising to boost my energy levels. I just accidentally started eating better because I found a cheaper grocery store selling frozen broccoli and mangoes, my favorite vegetable and fruit, respectfully. Many studies have repeatedly told us that healthy diets (I use this word to mean the kinds of food I'm eating, not the restriction of eating) will boost your moods. Needless to say, I have so much more energy thanks to the combination of these four "body" habits. You are what you eat, after all!



In short:

- Drink water!
- Bathe in natural sunlight
- Exercise at least 15 minutes a day for three times a week
- Eat well

Your Mind is a Weapon

What I do for the mind requires only a pen and paper. I journal every night before bed. I spend a couple of minutes (sometimes, seconds) thinking about my day and what impression it left on me. If it was a “bad” day, I find the silver lining. I focus on what I’m grateful for because I find that focusing on the good in every bad situation lifts my mood and helps me grow from the experience. Also, I don’t spend an hour writing out pages, but you can if you want. I write only about four short lines and sometimes I write nothing at all. I sometimes like to substitute it with a drawing to spice things up. In my bleakest period, I made myself write three things I was grateful for every day. Even if I thought I had nothing, I forced it out of me, which made me realize that I actually have so much to be happy about, such as being blessed to have my own apartment and a working laptop. Even when I wanted to screech out how there was nothing, I pushed myself to find that elusive silver lining that was always there in almost every situation.

Many people have tried meditation as a way to release emotional turmoil and to gain other benefits, but I personally haven’t started this habit yet. Of course, the idea of sitting silently with nothing to do may seem daunting (it definitely does to me!), but there are multiple techniques that make it a walk in the park. I read that you can start meditating for only five minutes a day and slowly increase the time. Another is to use a guided meditation session available on apps such as “Calm” or “Headspace.” As these guided meditations have scripts to purposefully help you relax, I highly suggest using the apps first if you feel antsy with silence. In case you were wondering what other benefits you can reap from mediation, they can include lower blood pressure, reduced anxiety, a decrease in pain, lessening depression symptoms, and an improvement in sleep. Perhaps I will start this habit right after I finish writing this article!



Photo: Hannah Olinger on Unsplash

In short:

- Journal or write down at least three things you’re grateful for
- Meditate with guided sessions

Habit Track Your Life

It may be hard to track whether you drank enough water every day or exercised at least three times a week when you're struggling to get out of a dark hole (potentially full of pasta). That's why I recommend you use the app called, "Loop - Habit Tracker." Unfortunately, it seems to be only available for Android users, but there are a lot of good alternatives out there to track your habits. "Loop" allows you to create widgets for each habit you want to track, so you can easily see if you've completed what you wanted for the day on your phone's home screen.

Personally, I have two rows of habits I see every time I pick up my phone. Starting from the left, I have a widget tracking if I woke up before 7:30AM every day. Then, I have a widget tracking if I worked out for at least fifteen minutes and another for drinking at least two liters of water. I also have a couple for courses I want to complete, such as Graphics Design for Beginners, just because I'm curious about the field. I even have one recording each time I make an Instagram post that uses Japanese in order to ensure I'm using the language that I'm studying. This is what I mean by project managing your happiness. You have to actively carve time out of your day to do things you love and/or benefit your health.

Apps to Track Your Personal Development:

- Loop - Habit Tracker
- Streak
- Habitshare



Ball's on Your Court

Now it's time to apply this yourself. Look at yourself and pretend to be your sibling, your best friend, your partner, or anyone you don't have to put up a fake face for. Pretend that person is asking:

- What pastime makes you smile? What activity leaves you feeling worse after finishing?
- Who do you think has it all? Why? What can you do to imitate their success?
- What is your motivation for doing these habits?
- Are you kind to (insert your name here)?

Use your answers to slowly add in habits that will help your self-growth. Overcoming culture shock and beating the obstacles life throws at you requires you to be honest with yourself, and most importantly, it requires you to be kind to yourself. We are our own harshest critics. Knowing that will help you not get stuck in a loop where you're only putting yourself down.

What if you missed a workout? That's completely fine! What if you didn't drink enough water? That's not a problem! Do not beat yourself up for missing a day or a week. Just pick yourself up and keep trying. That's the primary idea of what self-improvement is. A week from now you'll wish you started earlier. Time will keep flying by and you have two choices: (1) understand that you're on a rollercoaster ride and falls are bound to happen, but keep trying regardless, or (2) wallow and be your worst critic.

I hope we all pick #1. It's so easy to push ourselves down as if we deserve it. Seeing yourself as your best friend would should allow you to treat yourself with patience, but this is a muscle you need to train and keep training. Consider taking an action that caters to the needs of your mental and physical health before you take up a shovel to dig a pasta hole. Now, let's cheers to you!

Teresa Fong is Fiji-born, America-raised and is currently working in Tokyo. She loves listening to podcasts about self-help and crime. Currently on a mission to improve her digital art skills but a love for meeting with friends in new cafes gets in the way! She's currently seven months into an ab challenge, giving her some amazing lines that unfortunately disappear the moment she bends down. You can check her out on Instagram at [@imterryf](https://www.instagram.com/imterryf).

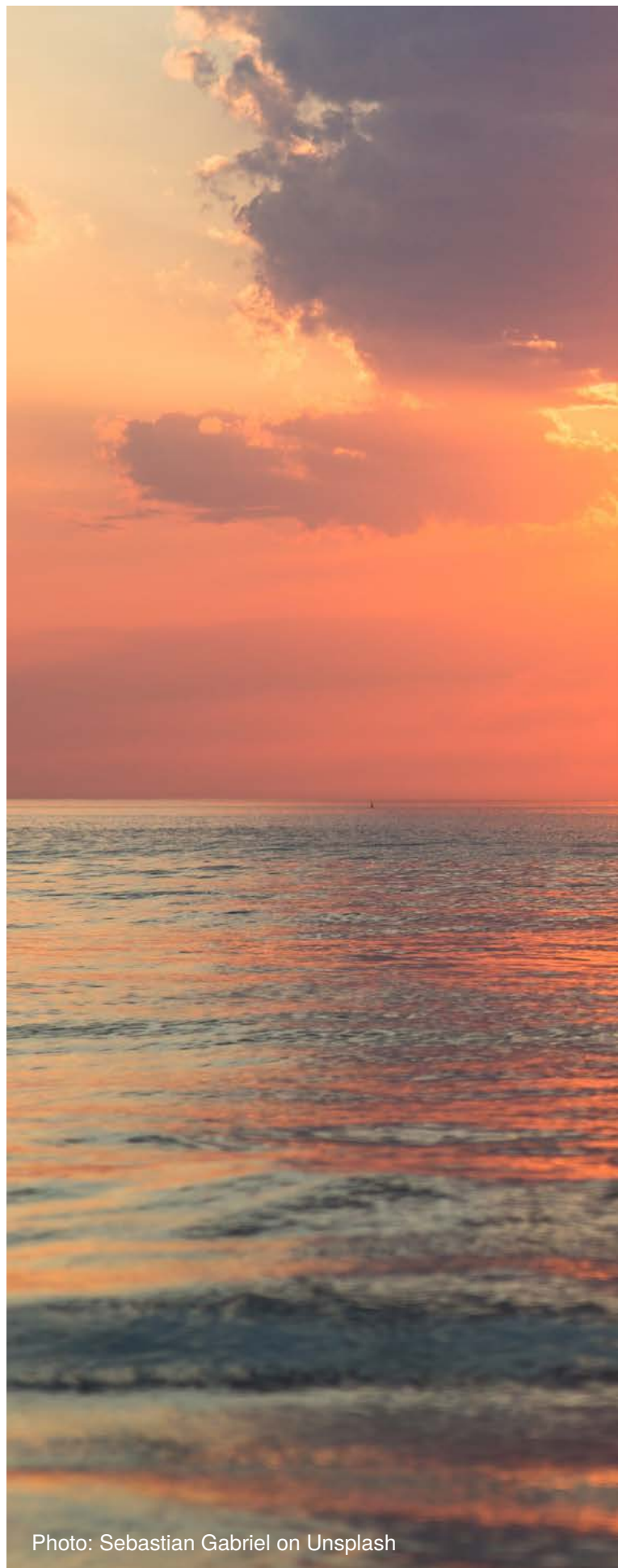
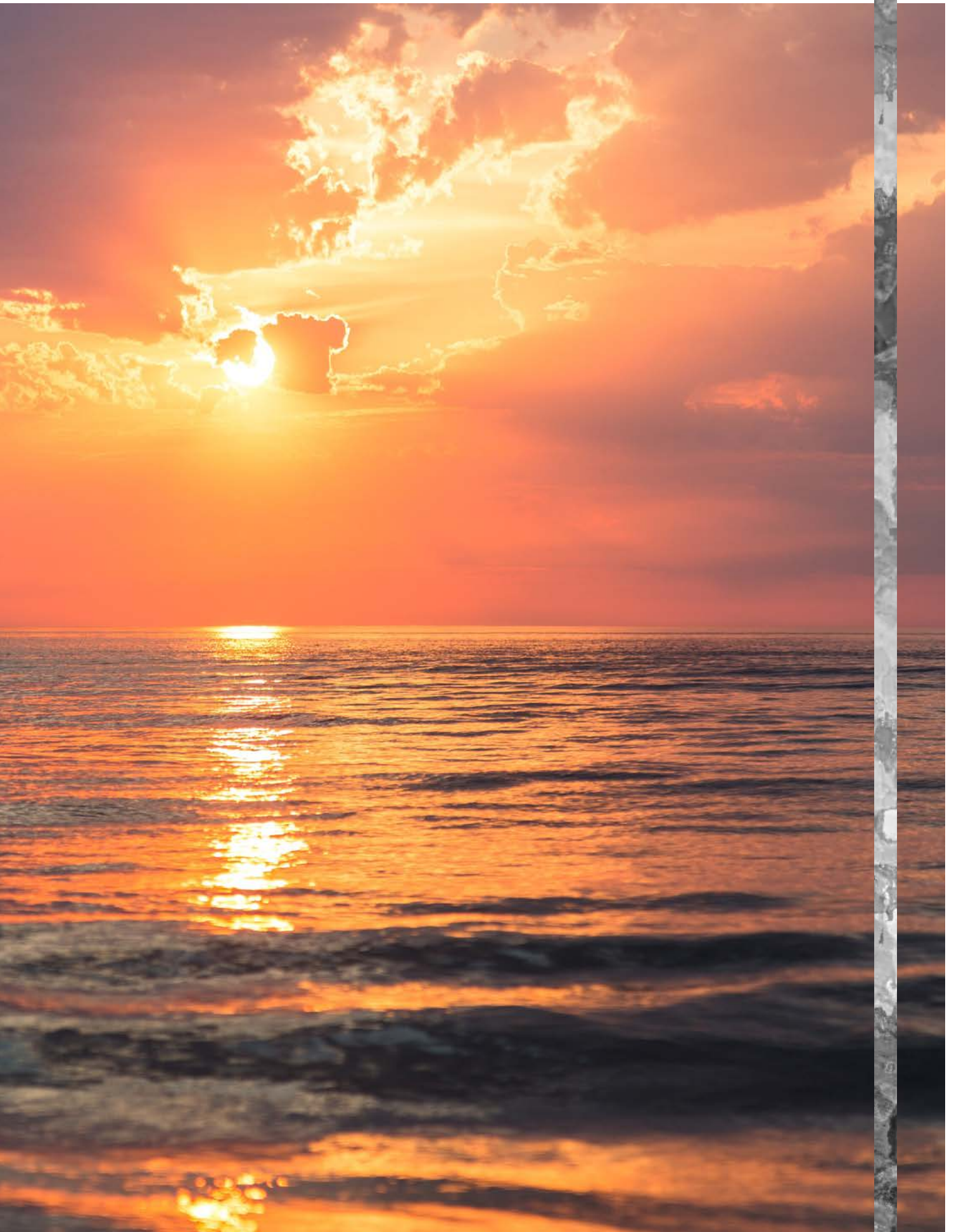


Photo: Sebastian Gabriel on Unsplash



Staying
Happy

and
Healthy

When the
Winter
Blues
Strike

Hazel Reilly (Tottori)

There are any number of reasons why you might feel low as the winter approaches. It can be a combination of things; such as getting to grips with the job, learning how to navigate a new life, social scene and identity. It doesn't help that many international residents come from warmer (and better insulated) countries and the sheer cold can come as a nasty surprise. For first-year JETs, there is the additional brunt of culture shock sinking in, which can be overwhelming. The dip often coincides with the colder weather and test season, meaning more downtime at work and more time to dwell on everything.

There's no reason to feel helpless as there's plenty you can do to improve your situation. Here's a list of hints and tips to keep your mental health in good shape throughout the winter.

Get Enough Sunlight

Many people find that getting enough natural sunlight is important for maintaining good mental health. The easiest way to do this is just to get out and go for a walk or a jog when it's sunny outside. If that's not possible, one other solution is to buy a light therapy lamp. These basically shine a super bright light that helps to ward off SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). Some people find it helpful to turn it on for 30 minutes in the morning (when the darkness can be particularly gloomy) to help them get ready for the day.

There are many available but perhaps the easiest place to buy them is through Amazon. (1) They generally cost between 4000 and 7000 yen and can be used throughout the year.



Keep Connected

Even when it's cold and miserable outside, don't use the weather as an excuse to become a hermit. Stay connected to others. Organize a night in with movies and popcorn, or go to the gym together. Is there anywhere in particular you want to visit? Buy that train ticket with your friend and trek out to see it. Just giving yourself the opportunity to let go and have some fun is so important to warding off the winter blues.

At the same time, be careful about too many late nights involving alcohol. Don't feel bad about saying no if you feel overwhelmed with everything on your plate. Find the balance that works for you between staying in and getting out there.



Photo: Sugarman Joe on Unsplash

Lean in

It's no secret that it's winter when culture shock begins to hit hardest. This is when it's most tempting to immerse yourself in everything from your home country (and that's OK, to an extent, it's all about balance) and swear off everything about Japan. "Why did I even come here?" you might wail to yourself. But this is when you need to do the exact opposite and take the chance to immerse yourself in your adopted culture. Lean in to everything Japanese. Find out where all the events are taking place. Is there a Japanese class you can attend at your local international exchange foundation? Organize a study session with some friends. Is there anything about Japanese traditional culture that you're curious about? Why not try your hand at cooking your favourite new recipe? Ask around. You never know who might have a tea ceremony teacher or be a veritable master of calligraphy and willing to teach you.

Volunteer



At a time when loneliness becomes a problem for many people, it can be helpful to do something for others. This is when volunteering can be a great idea. Ashinaga (2) works with orphaned children and offers volunteering opportunities all year. Also, For Empowering Women (FEW) (3) has a directory of different volunteering opportunities that range from writing, editing and translating to teaching and fundraising. Hands On Tokyo (4) also lists opportunities for those with a range of skills. So, if you're a bit down and disconnected, why not try putting your time and skills to good use?

Take Care of Yourself

Resist the temptation to turn to the nearest conbini for *fami-chiki* and Strong Zero. (or indulge moderately and responsibly). Eat enough vegetables. As I said before, lay off the booze. Hit the gym or try to fit in an early evening walk. It'll do wonders for your sense of wellbeing. Get enough rest and give yourself the chance to unwind in the

evening. Learn to say no if you find that your schedule is too full and take time to look after your mental health if you feel yourself becoming frazzled. I find it particularly nice to light some incense and run a warm bath before going to bed. Maybe you would benefit getting absorbed in a great podcast. Many people also swear by journaling.

Reach Out to Someone

There is absolutely nothing shameful about reaching out to others or talking to a professional if you're struggling with difficult feelings. I repeat. There is nothing shameful whatsoever with talking to others about your feelings, if you feel like you can't cope on your own. Who is there?

If you're a JET, you can talk to the AJET Peer Support Group (PSG). (5) This helpline is available at 050-5534-

5566 (you can also voice call via Skype at AJETPSG). This line is open every night of the year, from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m..

If you're not a JET, there's the TELL lifeline and the TELL chat service. (6) The lifeline is available at 03-5774-0992 from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. every day. If you need to talk to somebody at the weekend, there is a chat service that operates from 10:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night.

Reach Out to a Professional

If you think talking to someone, face to face, might help, then you could try reaching out to a professional counselor. TELL (who I've mentioned above) operates a counseling service that is available through Skype. For inquiries, contact the help desk at 03-4550-1146.

For non-TELL related counseling, please use the database provided by International Mental Health Professionals Japan. (7) This has a list of vetted, licensed professional counselors who you can trust. <https://www.imhpj.org/>

Remember to Have Fun!

Sources:

- (1) <https://amzn.to/2P2iwar>
- (2) <https://en.ashinaga.org/>
- (3) <https://fewjapan.com/>
- (4) <http://www.handsonkyo.org/en/home>
- (5) <https://www.ajetpsg.com/>
- (6) <https://telljp.com/>

Hazel Reilly is a second -year ALT, living in Tottori prefecture who loves crafting, watercolours and discovering new places on her bike. Can often be seen at local festivals, sporting a colourful yukata.

Photo: Alec Douglas on Unsplash



MEALS IN WINTER

*EATING WELL WHEN
IT'S COLD OUTSIDE*

Charlie Perry (Nara)

It's getting to that time where the snow starts to fall, the trees become bare, and the air becomes so chilly that you see steam as you exhale. After spending a long day shivering in a freezing school/office, waiting back at home is the cozy, warm kotatsu that you can snuggle yourself under. It's exciting to think about, isn't it?

However, winter isn't always a happy, fun, and snow-filled season it's made out to be. As the notorious winter blues hit, it can be hard not to slip into bad habits and let laziness take over—especially when McDonald's or that great ramen place is just around the corner . . .

Moreover, our bodies are built to crave comfort food during the winter period. According to dietitian Kelly Kennedy RD (Everyday Health, 2008) (1), it is believed that biological changes are triggered during this cold season which makes us want to eat all that delicious yet bad junk food. This can make it incredibly difficult to stay healthy, both in a physical and mental way.

Yet, do not fret! Here, you can find out how to not give in to that craving and enjoy a hearty, happy winter.



JAPAN'S WINTER FOOD

Luckily enough, Japan has many flavourful seasonal food with many health benefits that you can easily incorporate into tasty meals. For example, *daikon*, the great white Japanese radish, is an iconic winter vegetable reputable for being good for the digestive system. You can use daikon in many various ways, such as shredded in a salad, or stewed for a nice warm dish to soothe your soul. Furthermore, it is very simple to use meaning you can make great dishes out of this delectable vegetable.

A special dish using daikon is *oden*, a fish cake stew, which is a symbolic winter meal here in Japan. Oden features lots of different types of vegetables and proteins food, with eggs, meatballs, kelp and tofu. You can find oden in convenience stores— or why not try making it for yourself?

Another popular winter vegetable is *renkon*, or lotus root in English. This unique root is packed full of macronutrients, vitamins and minerals ideal for keeping your skin, liver, hair and eyes all in good health. Renkon is best enjoyed in traditional Japanese recipes, so if you haven't tried it yet make sure you do! This vegetable is a perfect ingredient to add to all your seasonal dishes.

A dish you have to try during winter is *shabu-shabu*. This hotpot dish can be enjoyed in specialist restaurants or even easily cooked at home! Tailored to suit, you can customise and have whatever you would like in your hotpot, like mushrooms, tofu, green onion, and beef. This meal is perfect to share with friends, so why not give it a go after a long week at work? You could surprise everyone with your very own homemade shabu-shabu! Check out this recipe at [Just One Cookbook](#) to learn how to make it.

BEING HEALTHY ON A DIME

In some cases, it feels as though having a Black Thunder chocolate bar or a succulent conbini fried chicken is far more accessible than a bowl of fruit. Most people believe that fruits and vegetables are more expensive, and junk food is sold at a much cheaper price. This is even more apparent when you think about the sweets you could get for 100 yen compared to a single apple for 350 yen. Nevertheless, you can still keep to a budget all while sticking to a healthy diet and here's how.

Though it can seem fresh produce is expensive, there are many other cheaper options to get your 5 a-day. While there is a stigma surrounding frozen and tinned vegetables, you might be surprised how versatile these products are. They are far cheaper, take less time to cook and are perfect for meal prep dishes, which you just pop in the microwave. You can still be lazy in your kotatsu all while sticking to a balanced diet. It's the best of both worlds, don't you think?

Meal prep is great, because it allows you to tailor your own meals while also adding some simplicity into your life. Adulting can be hard and things can overwhelm you, so when you are feeling particularly stressed after a long day at work, it can be nice not having to worry about your meal when you get back home. It also decreases your monthly shopping expenditure, as all you need are frozen/canned vegetables, meat (or meat substitute for you veggies), and a few carb products like rice, pasta, or noodles. I myself meal prep and my weekly shop on average comes to 3000 yen, sometimes even less! So, not only are you staying healthy, but there are many other great benefits to meal prepping too.

Of course, if meal prepping doesn't sound like something that interests you, don't worry. There are other alternatives. For instance, there are plenty of healthy options in your local conbini sold at very reasonable prices and you don't even need to cook it for yourself!

The soups sold at conbinis are surprisingly delicious, filling and nutritious. They are perfect for the season and average only 350 calories! There are a wide range of soups available, like beef and tofu or vermicelli noodle soup. These soups should definitely be on your food shopping list.



HAPPY BODY IS A HAPPY SELF

Reading about how to stay healthy is easy to do, but committing to it can be difficult especially when things get hard. Still, it is important to stay motivated and understand that eating healthier foods will help you become better, improving your body, mood, mental health, and sleep cycle, among others. You should commit to it, not for anyone but your own self, give yourself that love and care, because you deserve it!

If you are worried about falling off the wagon, there are ways to help you give you that daily motivation. You could keep a food diary, or use helpful apps to track your progress. I specifically recommend MyFitnessPal (3), which helps you log your food and it tells you all the nutritional value. Or you can use post-it notes on your walls to remind you of your goals, like “I want to cut out snack foods” or perhaps a weight goal, or even maybe just a little message saying, “You are strong!”

If you want to take it a step further, why not include more exercise into your regime? According to WebMD (4), exercise is known to stimulate endorphins, reduce stress and increase self-esteem. It’s a great activity to do during this upcoming season to keep your spirits high and happy. You could find your nearest gym, join a sports club, or even sign up for a class and learn something new. Depending where you are, you could also invest yourself in some skis or a snowboard and enjoy some of Japan’s slopes! Not only is it a fun sport, but is also a great opportunity to experience winter in Japan.

If you feel you are struggling, it is important to remember that you just have to try your best to incorporate healthy choices into your lifestyle rather than sticking to a specific diet or regime. Instead of going for that *melonpan*, go for a banana or cereal bar. Instead of soda, have some tea. These simple decisions will make a huge impact and help you stay in a good mindset for the upcoming winter.



STAY WARM!

Sources:

- (1) <http://bit.ly/34RrXA8>
- (2) <http://bit.ly/33zw8zi>
- (3) <http://bit.ly/2Y6PQkN>
- (4) <https://wb.md/2P1bH9f>

Charlie Perry is a second- year ALT from the UK, living in Nara prefecture. She enjoys socialising, reading, writing, hiking, and singing off-key in a karaoke room by herself. She’s also part of the Nara AJET committee and edits the Nara AJET Newsletter. You can follow her on [LinkedIn](#).

All photos: Charlie Perry

RISKS, REWARDS, AND CANYONS

Cory McGowan (Gunma)

It started out like so many other runs. Just get out and stretch the legs, throw on the sneakers, quickly warm up, and run a not too serious 10-12 km.

But there was one big difference: instead of being on the flat streets of Tokyo or along my normal route along the Arakawa, I was in Minakami, Gunma Prefecture, so I would either be running up or downhill, which was a nice change. As I had often stayed in the same house during multiple visits to the area, I already knew my route: head out north along the Tonegawa River so that I could get the dramatic views of Mount Tanigawadake, and return south along the river to get a bit of a push from the crisp north winds that indicated the impending winter in the high country.

I was only about 2-3 km away from home when it hit me, “We could live here.” Similar thoughts that I have gotten on the endorphin buzz of a good run have been often far fetched and rarely been acted upon, but this one had legs (excuse the pun), and started to make sense in my head. It was close enough to Tokyo that I could commute every day to work and we could rent out our apartment for enough that it would cover our mortgage payments and our low countryside rent. Our sons were still young



enough that they could make the transition away from their school and friends to new ones. All I had to do was somehow convince my wife that the rewards would outweigh the risks. When I asked her for some time to discuss it, I knew there was a chance it could happen when she didn't immediately respond with, “No way!”

So we took the leap. It's been a year and a half since we made the move from Tokyo to beautiful Minakami, and I'm still not over the surprise that it happened—or our good fortune to be living in this outdoor paradise. While I am from a rural place in America (Maine, to be exact), this place is much different than any other place I've ever lived—bigger mountains and more wildlife. At one point, my wife and I had been woken up four nights in a row by the sound of a bear noisily



crunching away at the wild walnuts that litter our yard. Fortunately, it was considerate enough to go back to wherever it came from by the time our family got out of bed in the morning.

The first year of commuting to Tokyo wasn't bad. There is something extremely civilized about a daily commute by *shinkansen*. It was close to two hours each way, but even in non-reserved seating, I always had a seat (and a comfortable one at that). If I had a beer on the way home, I was—rather than being the weird *gaikokujin* drinking on the train—just like everyone else headed off toward their weekend destinations. Except that I was going home!

But there was something that didn't quite feel right about leaving my family 160 km away every

day while I was at work. Anyone that's been in Japan even a few years (or especially in 2011) knows it's not considered paranoia to wonder when the Big One is going to hit Tokyo, and if you'll be there when it happened. Also, one of my biggest motivations for moving to Minakami was the opportunity to teach my sons about the community in a way they couldn't learn about it in a big city. But how could I really consider myself part of this community if I was away five days a week and not really working for, or supporting it?

GOING INTO THE UNKNOWN

Enter [Canyons](#). Or more specifically, Mike Harris, the company's founder. I got to know Mike right after we moved and I started volunteering at the [Minakami Outdoor Festival](#), one of the many projects he started to support Minakami. It is not an exaggeration to say that this Kiwi is a legend in Minakami—but also all over Japan for his work in the outdoor industry. He has been a pioneer in the industry here, and brought the sport of canyoning to Japan, hence the name of the company he launched nearly twenty years ago. On three chance occasions, as I was starting to lose my patience for being away from my family and Minakami so much, Mike and I ended up being on the same shinkansen. On those trips, I learned that he had needs at his company that he thought I could fill. So it was time to have another conversation with my wife about risks and rewards.

Despite Mike's success with this business, making this move would be quite a risk at that point in my career. At the time, I was in line for a director-level management position at a very reputable company in Tokyo, and the salary was well beyond anything I could expect in rural Minakami. Some of my friends also warned me that once I made the move to a company outside of Tokyo and started working in a relatively obscure industry like outdoor adventures, it would be hard to be relevant again in the Tokyo business scene. At the same time, the position Mike was offering me, to be his "second-in-command," help strengthen the company, and prepare it for further growth was an opportunity too good to pass up. Fortunately, things had gone so well with our move so far that my wife was willing to support the change as well.

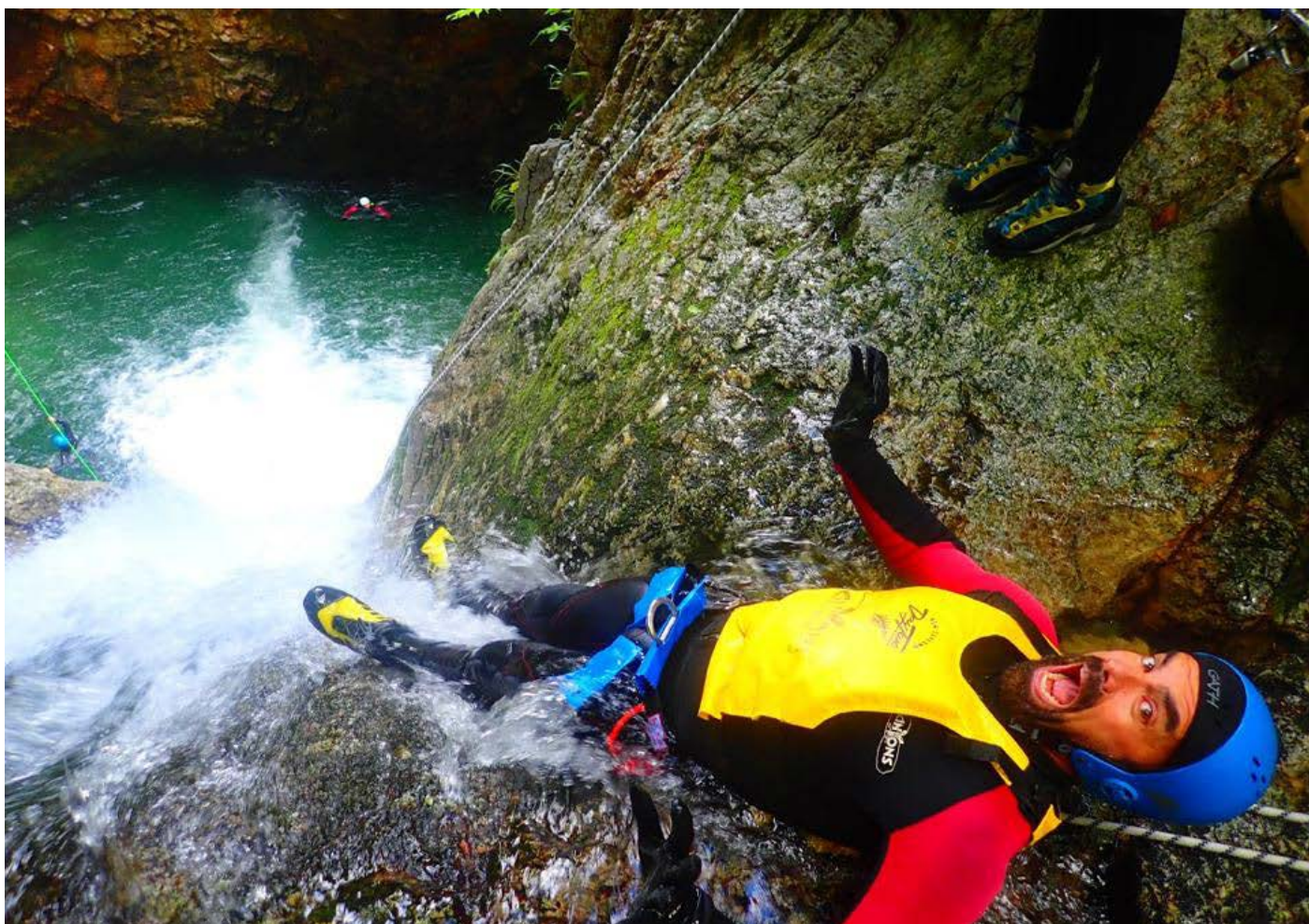
Canyoning was really something I literally knew nothing about and after starting at Canyons,

I learned quickly that it would test my limits. For those unfamiliar with canyoning, it is going on a river adventure by sliding, jumping, and rappelling over rock features and waterfalls. I'm not very comfortable with heights and on my first tour in Minakami, being lowered—and dropped partway—over a 20-meter waterfall was nerve-racking. It scared me, but somehow being on the rock face of the fall most of the way down made it bearable.

Then I decided to go on one of our Okutama tours called Big Holy. It started off with some gentle fun on a slider down some smooth rock. Then came the big challenge—a zip line down a 25-meter waterfall. As the guides started to rig up the rope that spanned the whole fall and sent down the first few people in our group, I started looking for escape routes.

We were pretty deep in a canyon, but I knew I could climb out and run back to the base, wetsuit and all. Of course, that would mean bailing in front of the guides, who were supposed to be seeing me as their new leader—not to mention that the other people in the group sounded like they were having so much fun. I went for it, and not only did I experience an adrenaline rush unlike any I had before, but I also realized just how much that was an analogy for how this job was going to challenge me and help me grow.

Taking on this new challenge at Canyons has really felt like the final puzzle piece in our move to Minakami. The work itself is quite challenging, and I'm learning that the outdoor industry is surprisingly complex, combining different activities in each season with various locations and customers who come to us with a wide range of expectations about the type of outdoor adventures they want to have. But it has also



given us the feeling that we are now “home.” There is something comforting about working in the community you live in—seeing familiar places during your commute to work, waving to the same people every day, and dramatic changes in the surrounding natural environment as the seasons change.

Rural places in Japan have a reputation for being “closed off” to foreigners who try to live in them, and while I’m sure that has some truth to it, this is definitely not the case in Minakami. Thanks to pioneers like Mike Harris and other foreigners who have been living in and building businesses like Canyons in this town for over 40 years, the locals are very much familiar with and welcoming to their non-Japanese counterparts in the community. Frankly, I have been blown away by the generosity of the locals I have met here. It is not an exaggeration to say that my family can hardly go a week without receiving something for free from the people we know in the community—from freshly grown fruits or vegetables, to firewood, to even a Kei truck! And while we do our best to give back something that shows our appreciation, it inevitably results in us getting more gifts.

My conversations with the locals here have shown me they are acutely aware of the fact that despite living in a beautiful place with easy access to Tokyo, they are losing population fast. They are also aware that it is non-Japanese people like myself that are likely to be one of the only ways to help slow down that trend, thanks to our interest in the outdoors and in a somewhat alternative lifestyle from those that live in Japan’s big cities. Personally, I am honored to be considered part of this community now, and feeling like I am home for the first time since I was a kid was a reward that was worth any risk we took to get here.

Cory McGowan is an executive coach and COO at Canyons Japan Ltd in Minakami, Gunma Prefecture. An American living in Japan for 20 years, he spends his time running up and down mountains and waiting anxiously for the snow to come.

All photos by: Cory McGowan

Shirakami Hiking Tohoku

Reid Bartholomew (Aomori)

Japan is home to four [UNESCO Natural World Heritage Sites](#), three of which are difficult to reach from much of Honshū. As expected of places of untouched natural beauty, these sites are stuck in the more remote areas of Japan, making it hard to visit them without plenty of prior planning and more than a weekend off. Luckily for me, I was placed in Aomori Prefecture, which happens to contain perhaps the least well known of them: [Shirakami Sanchi](#), a vast mountain range that stretches across the western half of Aomori and the northern edge of Akita.

I was first drawn to the area after having heard from a coworker of its reputation for steep hikes. As I looked into it, I found that tucked into the 1,300 square kilometers of densely packed forests were a plethora of natural wonders—some of the more famous ones being Aoike, a pool dyed electric blue from an excess of cobalt in the water, and Nihon Canyon, white cliffs that stand in sharp contrast to the surrounding

expanse of green. It also boasts a number of waterfalls, lakes, and the last virgin beech forest in the country.

I was very excited to explore the Shirakami Sanchi—not only for the aforementioned attractions but even more so for the trails that lead to its peaks. After learning how close it was to me, I called up a friend of mine and we set out for the mountains on a three-day weekend. Unfortunately, we only had the chance to climb two peaks: Shirakami-dake and Fujisatokomaga-take, which sit at 1,232 and 1,158 meters high respectively. Had we had the time and planned a little more carefully, we could have chained together a few peaks into a full day's loop. But as it was, two half-day hikes allowed us to see some of the more easily accessible sights in the mornings and finish our hikes before the sun set.



Shirakami Sanchi:
Summers

Adventure

View from the top of Shirakami-dake.



*One of the many ponds at
Juniko on the northwest
edge of Shirakami Sanchi*

The last virgin beech forest in Japan.



Shirakami -Dake

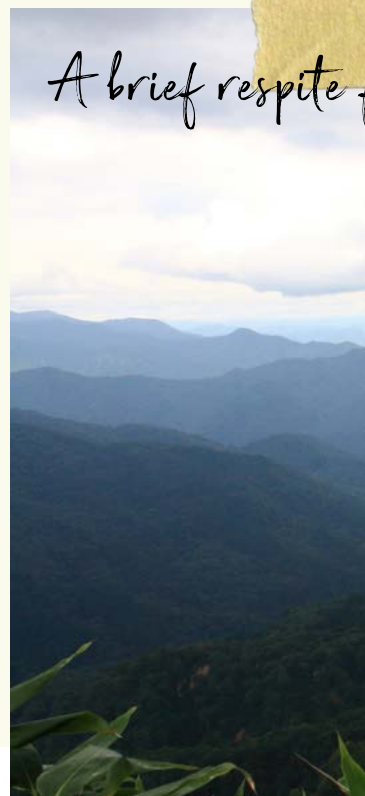
Our first hike was up the namesake mountain on the western edge of Aomori: Shirakami-dake. The trail began rather gently, and the canopy of trees provided shade that kept the soil moist and dark, and the air somewhat cool, even in the end of the summer. There is definitely one thing that I can't overstate about hiking in Shirakami Sanchi in the summer—everything is covered in green. Leaves fan out in every direction from the shrubs underfoot to the limbs overhead, and even much of the rocks are covered in a coat of moss—only the ash-gray bark of the beech trees served to break up the greenery. The landscape was so thick with lush forest that for most of the hike we couldn't see beyond it. There wasn't any way to tell exactly how far we had come until the top.

The gentle slope very quickly grew more severe with every meter, and eventually the hand ropes we had made fun of in the beginning became a godsend for pulling our exhausted bodies up the side of the mountain. Neither of us were strangers to hiking, and having blown through a

few other hikes in Japan, we weren't expecting to have such a difficult time of things. Our legs were burning as we approached the top, and our stomachs were starting to rumble a little thanks to an overconfident decision to leave most of our snacks in the car. Our breaks became more and more frequent, and less and less fulfilling. As much as we were struggling, we occasionally passed people easily three times our age, and I couldn't help but feel a little humbled and inspired seeing them cheerily trucking along.

Our spirits were low when the dense foliage abruptly gave way to a shorter brush, and the landscape suddenly unfurled before us, a green blanket folding into ridges and valleys in every direction except the west, to which the hazy outline of the ocean was visible. Clouds and mist rolled over the earth, and the wind whipped at our sweat-stained clothes, bringing a bit of a chill. Two and a half hours later, we had reached the top.

A brief respite



Fujisatokomaga

-take

The next day brought us around to the middle of the core area in Akita, where we found ourselves looking up at Fujisatokomaga-take. Our legs felt more shaky and we were a little more humbled than the day before. Looking up into the trees, we debated if we even had the time to make it to the top and get back home at a reasonable fashion. Of course, our adventuring spirit won out over our concerns, and we laced up our hiking boots once again. When we started our climb, it started off rather easy with a march across wooden planks atop some mountain marshland. Luckily for us, this trail began higher up the mountain than the day before, but as if to balance this out, a light drizzle of rain fell on and off throughout the day.

The change in terrain was drastic after the marshes—steep doesn't quite capture it. We found ourselves practically scrambling up the side of the mountain, using our hands to balance ourselves as we navigated the mud and rain-slick rocks. Even if there was sun to keep things dry, it wouldn't get past the leaves overhead.

Although the hike was much shorter, the actual climbing was more intense than the prior day and required a lot more focus so as to not smash my camera or worse, my face, on the rocks below. The whole hike was accompanied with the heavy scent of wet earth and plants, mixing with the smell of our sweat-dampened clothes. This trail as a whole was earthier and rockier than Shirakami-dake—which led us to larger steps up what felt like a staircase of boulders.

This time, we reached the top in a mere hour and a half so the hike seemed to go by in no time. By the time we reached the top, the clouds had fortunately disappeared, letting us see out in every direction. Exhausted and wet, I let out a holler upon seeing the incredible view. The landscape pitched and wrinkled in smaller hills and valleys, like folds in a green blanket spread out right up to the edge of the blue sea. As tired as we were, we only stayed long enough to devour our snacks before bombing back down the trail.

The return trip was a little more anxiety-inducing. Mainly because the same slipperiness that had been a pain going up was a threat going down with a different center of gravity—a few times I lost my footing and thought I might tumble the rest of the way down. By the time we made it to the bottom, we had just enough daylight to settle into one of the several onsen in the area as a reward for all of our efforts.

from the rain at Fujisatokomaga-take



Planning

Despite spending hours winding through trails and mountain roads, there was still so much that we didn't have the chance to see due to the sheer size of the area. As I looked over some guides and maps on the drive back home, I kept finding other trails and sights that we missed out on. The mountain range encourages multiple trips, offering something for every season. I recommend the area even for those who aren't exactly keen on hiking, as many of the major attractions can be experienced by driving from location to location and taking short walks at each destination. In fact, some of the most beautiful moments of the trip came from looking out the window on drives through the mountains.

For the most part, accessibility shouldn't be an issue. In the spring, summer, and fall, there is only one significant stretch of road that's unpaved, and though our yellow plate car rattled through the gravel, there were no problems. However, being in Tōhoku, the landscape is an entirely different beast in the winter. While there are some

Reid Bartholomew is an ALT and writer from the state of Arkansas in the United States, where the Ozark Mountains instilled in him a love for all things outdoors. He is drawn to people and their stories, which leads him to write about literature and his travels. Currently living in Oirase-chō in Aomori Prefecture, Reid spends his time outside of school jogging alongside rice fields and finding new places to hike.

All photos by: Reid Bartholomew

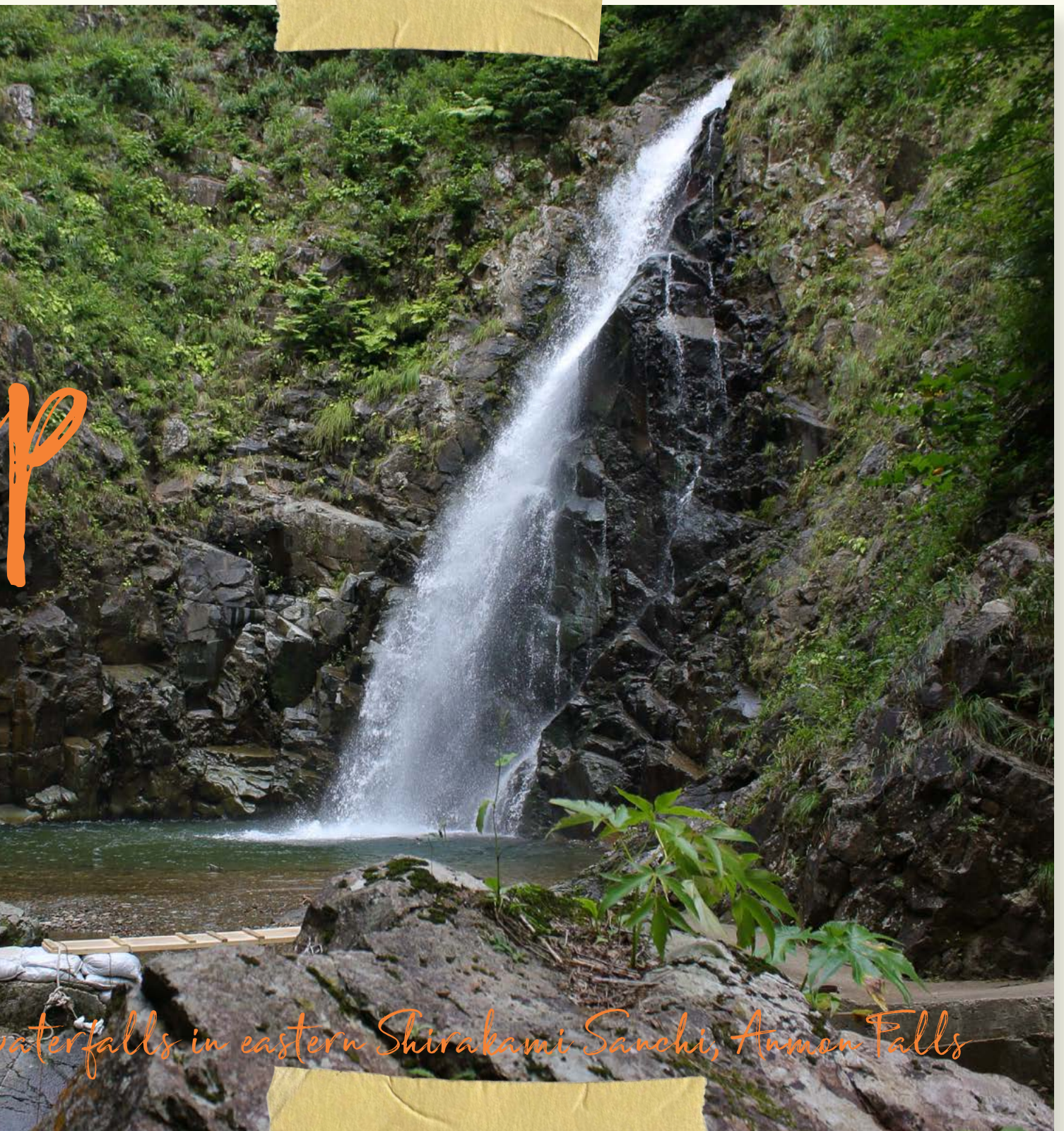
Your Own Tri

opportunities to snowshoe and see some incredible snowy landscape, if you plan to go from November to May, you'll want to factor road and trail closings into the equation.

Shirakami Sanchi is the perfect way to step away from the hectic aspects of life and spend some time in awe of the beauty of nature. With options to make the trip as intense or relaxing as you'd like and plenty of onsen to rest your legs at the end of the day, it's a must-hike for anyone looking to come to Aomori.



One of the m



Waterfalls in eastern Shirakami Sanchi, Aomori Falls



Bonnie Humphrey (Tokyo)



Each summer, I travel back to the US to visit family and friends. I enjoy summer in the US as it is a break from my fast paced life in Tokyo, where I have lived for sixteen years. On one particular summer day in 2016, I was with my dad, helping him at his ranch. We were at the top of the property and noticed in the valley below a large number of cars filing in and parking, which was completely out of place for this quiet, hidden valley. On our way home, we drove by and asked what was going on.

“A Spartan race,” the parking attendant told us.

“A what?” we both asked.

Neither of us had ever heard of it before. So we looked it up on the drive home and by the time we reached the house, my dad and I were convinced we wanted to compete. I was determined to take on the challenge even in Japan.

Spartan!

Spartan in Japan

Spartan racing is a relative newcomer to the sporting scene in Japan—it first arrived in May of 2017. The timing was perfect; I immediately signed up. Thus, my induction to Spartan racing was a bit unique as my first race was the very first Spartan even in Japan, held at the military training field in Sagami-hara.

In the buildup to the race, I was able to attend a promotional event and hear the founder of Spartan, Joe De Sena, speak. Attendees came to the event dressed in suits, yet Joe came in his jeans and hoodies, and spoke from the heart. He spoke about why and how he started Spartan and more importantly, the Spartan mindset. Spartan is more about mindset than the physical demands of a race. Of course, one must reach a certain level of physical fitness to compete with confidence, but it is our mindset that drives us to become what we want to be. He spoke of encouraging athletes to face fears and seemingly insurmountable obstacles—and pushing through to conquer them all.

He also talked about toughening up—since we live with the many comforts modern society provides, we sometimes forget our abilities, and what we can physically accomplish and endure. To remind himself of this, he often takes cold showers. Coincidentally, about a week after listening to him talk, the hot water heater went out in my apartment and I suffered through a couple of days of cold showers. “All part of the training,” I reminded myself.

My favourite children’s book was *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild* by Peter Brown, in which Mr. Tiger, a businessman, gets tired of the confines of city life and decides to strip off his suit and live in the wild. Participating in the Spartan race gave me the same type of catharsis. To be honest, after years of living in Tokyo and adhering to a more formal social and dress code than what I would have followed if I were living in the US, the thought of swimming in mud, climbing walls, and traversing obstacles had its appeal. The Spartan race was a chance to strip away pretenses and expectations, and face down the rugged course. It was OK to bleed, to sweat, and to look like a complete mess.

It is easy to become intimidated when you check out the Spartan website and see photo after photo of men with perfect physiques scaling walls and climbing ropes, but anyone can have a Spartan mindset. It doesn’t matter who you are. When you start the race, it is your determination that will get you across the finish line. Your fellow Spartans in the face are allowed to lend a hand. When you join a Spartan race, you hop the fence to get to the starting line, and then with the other attendees, you scream with passion, “I am Spartan!” You can feel the energy, determination, and courage surrounding you to knock out the course ahead! This is all part of the Spartan way.





The First Race



As the day of the first race arrived, I must be honest—I was more nervous than excited. In fact, there was a large part of me that was actually dreading the race. I didn't know what to expect and didn't have a lot of confidence that I would be able to compete. Fortunately, I had a large group of friends that had also committed to the inaugural Spartan Japan run. We were of many different athletic levels, but as the race started, four of us ended up stuck together throughout the entire race.

It probably took me the first couple of obstacles to get warmed up and after that, I realized something. I realized I was having fun. Sure, it was challenging and I was out of breath and covered in dirt and mud—but it was *fun*. You bond with your fellow runners when you push them over fences, they drag you over hurdles, and you support and encourage each other along the way. When we reached that finish line and jumped the fire pit, I felt so accomplished! We all did! Since that first run, my husband and I have competed in Spartan races in Japan, Australia and in the US. Yet, no matter where we compete, the energy is the same and I always feel that same sense of accomplishment when I finish.



Spartan for the Whole Family

When we compete, we don't just limit it to us adults. Our kids join us as well! It is a huge confidence builder for them to master miniature versions of what the tough guys are doing. Just like adults, it gives kids the opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and give it a go. The first race my kids competed in wasn't even an official kids race. We met Joe and a few other families early in the morning and headed out to the Sagamihara military base for the inaugural Spartan Japan race. Joe led the charge himself. He took the kids out onto the course and had them run the actual obstacles with no mercy because he had high expectations for them. But more than that, it impressed me that Joe was out on the course, breaking it in. He wasn't tucked up in a press box giving interviews. He wasn't mingling with VIPs in the head tent. He was out on the course with a group of kids he had just met and showing them what it means to be Spartan.

As a family, we have competed in three different races in Japan—one of which was in the middle of a typhoon. My dad flew to Tokyo to compete with me, and we climbed up muddy slopes and slid down slick mud slides. None of them were official obstacles, but they just reflected the nature of the course race (Not surprisingly, it took days and several rounds of laundry to get the mud out).





Spartan Challenge

Spartan has gained great popularity in Japan over the last few years. But it's not just Westerners like my family and I competing in Spartan racing—a large number of Japanese compete in various levels. But what they all have in common is a will to push themselves to the limit and see how far they can go. For me, Spartan racing in Japan was a release from the daily stress confinement of city living and a way to just get out there and compete completely covered from head-to-toe in mud. It is quite the experience and accomplishment when you jump that fire pit at the end and receive your medal. Victory at last!

I was lucky enough, as I mentioned before, to meet Joe De Sena when he came to Tokyo. I picked up his book, *Spartan Fit!*, and had him sign it. On the inside cover with his signature, he wrote, "Bonnie You are a Spartan!" That summed it up. When he signed it, I hadn't even competed yet. I wasn't even sure if I would be able to finish the race. But I was thrilled to be a part of a group that encouraged me and told me I could do it.

So if you are looking for a way to get fit, challenge yourself, step outside of social norms, and get a little dirty, Spartan may be a fit for you. It is a chance to just be yourself and see how far you can go. Ask yourself, who are you? If the answer to that question is, "I am Spartan," then it is time to join a race.

Bonnie Humphrey is the author of the blog [Blue Pine Notes](#). She writes about what life is like in Tokyo as an international resident for the past 16 years. She also shares insight on how to gain more from your travels through seeing beyond what a typical tourist experiences and how to record those journeys through journaling and reflection.

All photos by: Bonnie Humphrey



COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY EDITOR

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Clare Braganza

"We are not written for one instrument alone; I am not, neither are you." — André Aciman, in Call Me by Your Name

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Hoong Shao Ting

"Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow~"

Photo: Tayler Skultety





Remember for the

JETS' ADVICE FOR A WINTER AWAY FROM HOME

As winter rolls around and the holiday season begins to pick up speed, I find myself visited by memories of blankets and Hallmark movies by the fire with my family and Dirty Santa gift exchanges at holiday parties in snug college apartments, and a little warmth always accompanies the thoughts. Like many first-year JETs, this is both my first time living alone and my first time unable to make it back home to my loved ones for the holidays.

Of course, I'm not the only one in the world to experience this and being in America, I'm surrounded by people who have surviving the winter as a science. So, I've gathered some of the veteran JETs and their experiences to help you. I could learn a thing or two from how to fight off the cold. I had about the upper half of what I ended up spending. A few JETs near me: A



Seoul

OME Reid Bartholomew (Aomori)

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eaking to three
angelica Wang, a

24-year-old CIR in Hachinohe from
the American Pacific Northwest;
James Elias, a 25-year-old ALT
in Hachinohe from Cardiff, Wales;
and Marcus Gills, a 25-year-old
ALT in Towada from Manchester,
UK. Each of them was more than
happy to share what made their
winters away from home a great
experience.

Stay Busy

The number one piece of advice that I got from people was to stay busy—it's harder to be homesick when you're in the middle of having fun. "We did a lot during winter. We never had a weekend where we sat at home." Marcus told me, clearly reminiscing over the memories he made as he spoke. "We went skiing, to winter festivals, onsen. There's so much crazy stuff to do." For James, he was so busy that homesickness and loneliness was never a problem. "I honestly didn't notice." He told me. "We were doing so much stuff, and it was so exciting, I just didn't notice." It's not that their placements are exactly Tokyo either, but rather, there really is so much to experience if you look for it.

Of course, it's not quite that easy for everyone.

It can be incredibly difficult going so long without being near your

family or loved ones, especially during seasons where that distance feels magnified. While those feelings can be overwhelming and cause you to withdraw, Angelica and James both asserted that those feelings are exactly why you should push yourself to stay busy. "I think it's easy to feel homesick, so do things that you would do normally at home," Angelica told me. "You have to remember to treat yourself." James echoed the sentiment, attributing part of the winter blues to a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy: "The best thing to do, I think, is to not stop doing things."



Photo: Şenol Hasan

"I THINK THERE'S A LOT OF SELF-SABOTAGE SOME PEOPLE. THEY STOP GOING OUT AND DOING THE THINGS THAT MAKE THEM HAPPY."



Photo: Şenol Hasan



Make it feel like home

It can be hard to fully settle into life in Japan. At times it feels like such a temporary arrangement, that I've heard countless times from my friends that they feel like they're on vacation, despite the work. It's especially difficult to feel rooted if you're one of the JETs only intending to stay a year, but, "A year really is a long time," Marcus reminds me. "Today we were looking back at all the things that happened last year, and I feel like a very different person."

So, while it's easy to slip into the temporary mindset, he stressed the importance of making the place you currently live feel like home. He invested a fair amount of energy and resources into his apartment, and having been there, its couch and shelves with trinkets do make it feel cozy and lived in compared to my own bare walls and half-empty rooms. "Make a

living space that you can enjoy because sometimes you can't go out. There's simply too much snow and going out is dangerous." While not everyone has to worry about Aomori's brutal winters, there will be times where everyone will have to stay in for a bit, and having a home place you feel comfortable in will go a long way in mitigating those feelings of loneliness in the times where you can't feasibly get out.

Of course, there's more to feeling at home than the physical place. It's also about community, connections, and history—the intangible things that tie us to a place. Each of the people I spoke with mentioned making friends and spending time with them, but for Angelica, she really became attached to her placement in Hachinohe thanks to the locals. When asked what made her feel comfortable in her city, she told me it was "meeting people I could relate to, local people especially, who could show me around their hometown and their memories of the place they grew up in. It's easier to see a place as home if you can see it through someone else's eyes." In growing closer to the people who have spent their whole lives in your placement city, you become a little bit closer to the web of personal histories that makes a lived space a shared cultural place.

**THE THINGS THAT GOES ON FOR
AND THEY STOP DOING**



Lean in

“I went into winter prepared to have a good winter,” Marcus told me, which brings me to the last point of advice: lean into your life in Japan this winter. There are things about your experience that you can’t really change, but Marcus suggests that at the very least you can change your mindset. “You can either laugh or shit yourself. So, laugh at the snow, don’t get annoyed with it. When it snowed really bad, I would open my door to take a picture and send it to my brother like “Where on earth am I living? It’s absurd.”

For Angelica, even though she missed out on the little traditions she had with her family, being in Japan over the holidays was an opportunity to experience something new. “The holidays not being a thing felt invalidating,” she admitted, “but if you’re feeling brave enough, you should ask your coworkers or Japanese friends to show you around a Japanese holiday. I feel like it’s really fun to see a different culture’s way of celebrating.”

For me, the holidays have always been a certain immutable fact of life. I spend Christmas evening with my extended family at my parent’s home, where we eat my grandmother’s meatballs and open a present early, and then the

next day we all go to my aunt’s for Christmas dinner where my uncle makes ham and we all drink a little too much. At first, seeing as I was missing out on all of that, I saw this year as essentially skipping the holidays. But there’s no way that the holidays have to look to be valid. A fact that James reminded me of.

His New Year’s Day was spent on a beach in Thailand with his new friends, and while the whole thing was surreal for him, one of his friends found it nostalgic: “So for Jess—she’s Australian—it was like normal holidays. She doesn’t have cold winters, because of the southern hemisphere. Her Christmases are beach barbecues and going swimming in the sea.” It seems so simple, but for some reason, that remark really left me excited to experience the holidays I loved growing up in a new way, even if I would be missing people at the same time.



Closing Remarks

At the end of the day, as difficult as it might be, we'll all get through the winter, whether we're dealing with the intense cold or separation from our loved ones for the first time. What I want to leave you with is the last piece of advice that James offered up right at the end of my time with him:

" CRITICALLY THINK ABOUT WHAT IS IT THAT YOU MISS ABOUT BEING WITH YOUR FAMILY, OR WHAT IT IS THAT YOU ENJOY. IF IT'S 'I DON'T LIKE BEING ALONE' THEN YOU SHOULD TRY TO BE WITH PEOPLE. OR IF IT'S 'I MISS THE TRADITIONS THAT WE USED TO DO' THEN GREAT, START NEW ONES. "



I think the takeaway from this is that you already have all the tools you need to have a wonderful winter, you just need to be honest with yourself and anticipate the needs and problems that you know will arise. If you can do that, then the only thing left to do is stay warm:



" BUY HEAT-TECH "
—ANGELICA

" BEING WARM IS A NICE FEELING. INVEST IN BEING SNUG. "
—MARCUS



Reid Bartholomew is an ALT and writer from the state of Arkansas in the United States, where the Ozark Mountains instilled in him a love for all things outdoors. He is drawn to people and their stories, which leads him to write about literature and his travels. Currently living in Oirase-chō in Aomori Prefecture, Reid spends his time outside of school jogging alongside rice fields and finding new places to hike.

TYPHOON HAGIBIS: **BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER**

Clare Braganza (Fukushima)



For many of us foreign residents in Japan, we are unused to extreme weather. We hear about natural disasters in other countries, but are rarely affected ourselves. Natural disasters in Japan, however, are a fact of life. Earthquakes happen frequently, and typhoon season ranges from May to October. Japan equips itself with suitable architecture, early warning systems, and encourages people to prepare evacuation kits. Even with all this preparedness, the actual event can still catch you unaware.

On the 12th October this year, Typhoon Hagibis made landfall in Japan. Three foreign residents on the JET Programme, from Nagano and Gunma, share their experiences of the typhoon, and give advice on how to better prepare in the future.

MY FIRST TYPHOON EXPERIENCE

Hoong Shao Ting (Nagano)

Let's talk Typhoon Hagibis, also known as No. 19, one of the worst to hit the Kanto region in recent years, as well as the first disaster I've encountered. Coming from the natural disaster-free island called Singapore, the experience was slightly scary and extremely enlightening—here's a checklist of what I did and learned to prepare myself better for next time:

BEFORE

- Check and prepare your emergency kit—DIY with items from 100 yen shops and the supermarket!
- Know your nearest evacuation centres—do you know where else you can go in case your nearest designated one is unavailable?
- Check the news and traffic advisory, and make sure you are not stranded outside when the typhoon hits.
- Fill your bathtub with water, which can be used for washing and flushing the toilet in case of a water outage.
- Charge your phone, laptop, power banks etc. in case of a power outage.
- Withdraw cash in case banks are closed, and ATMs are not working during the outage.
- Download emergency alert apps on your phone to get real-time notifications.
- If you feel unsafe in your house or are scared to be alone, go to a friend's—it's nice to have company and huddle together.

DURING

- Keep your curtains closed and sleep away from the windows in case they break after being hit by objects swept away by the winds.
- Monitor the news and check phone alerts—stay aware of the situation and know whether you need to evacuate.
- Check in with people in your region—it's heart-warming to show concern for one another in times like these, and they can also be a source of information about your area.
- Keep friends and family updated so they know you are alive and kicking!

AFTER

- Check travel advisory to see if your usual commute will be affected.
- Avoid using the plumbing such as taps and toilets especially if there is a swollen river or flooding in your area—the sewage plant may not be able to handle it!
- Know your surroundings and beware of falling objects, landslides, flooding and other potential aftereffects.
- Replenish your emergency kit if you have used anything.
- Seek help and support from friends and professional services, if necessary—you are not alone!

My local train's bright red bridge had its five minutes of fame, with videos and pictures of it collapsed into Chikuma River constantly repeated in the news. It is still sitting on the riverbed waiting to be restored, and is a reminder of how the force of nature is definitely not one to be reckoned with.



Shao Ting feels extremely fortunate to be born in natural disaster-free Singapore, and appreciates how resilient the Japanese are in the face of Mother Nature's wrath. When she's not hiding from typhoons, you can probably find her in some café, or travelling!

NEAR YODA RIVER

Hannah Pettorini (Nagano)

Typhoons have hit Nagano Prefecture in the past so when I saw Typhoon Hagibis on the news, I was not concerned in the slightest. I was ready with a carefully crafted emergency kit. My co-workers and Japanese friends also didn't seem worried. But this typhoon was different. According to my Japanese friend, Nagano hadn't seen a storm like this in decades. Everyone was so taken aback by the sheer amount of rain.

I live near Yoda River, which runs through Ueda City. Only an hour after the rain started, I saw the river rising quickly. From my window, it looked like it only had a meter left before it would overflow into my apartment area.

I had my bag ready to go, but I still panicked. "Where do I go?" My evacuation center was across the rising river. "What do I take?" I only had enough food for one day. "How long will I be gone?" I wrote "evacuated" on my door to let my neighbors know I had gone. Even though I had prepared for my physical needs, I didn't predict how panicked I would feel.

I thought I would receive a warning on my phone telling me where to go and when. Instead, I got several messages telling different districts to evacuate with varying danger levels. None of the alerts mentioned Yoda river even though I could see it rising quickly. I decided to leave anyway. After I arrived at the evacuation center, I finally got the warning for my district.

I always felt safe in Ueda because natural disasters are rare, and I had an emergency kit ready just in case. With Typhoon Hagibis, I realized that an essential part of an emergency kit is mental fortitude and planning.

Hannah Pettorini is a fourth-year JET ALT living in Ueda, Nagano. She loves teaching and exploring her countryside hometown. Totoro probably lives in the woods up the hill, though she has yet to find him.



SURVIVING A TYPHOON, TORNADO, AND EARTHQUAKE

Linka Wade (Gunma)

The day Typhoon Hagibis hit, I had cleverly managed to put myself directly in its path. I was with a friend in his home in Moriya, Ibaraki-ken. Throughout the day, we had bursts of heavy rain and wind, followed by periods of calm. We diligently taped up the windows, filled the bathtub with water, and located a few flashlights to have nearby in case of a power outage. Then we waited. In the late afternoon, an evacuation order was put out for the elderly. Shortly afterward, we got notifications that a tornado had picked up nearby. At some point, we opened the door and peeked out. Trees were bent over and threatening to break under the wind, and it was a full body fight to even get the door open. I think it was then that we both realized that there was no way we would be able to leave. So we sat and made jokes about it, because what else could you do?

Later in the evening, there was an earthquake. It was then that we started sending our passport numbers and other identifying information to friends outside Japan. Just in case. The wind was so strong the entire house was shaking, and there was some serious contemplation about the structural integrity of windows covered in masking tape. Rain was somehow going in every direction simultaneously—up, down, and sideways. It was a long night with not a lot of sleep, but eventually everything was quiet. The power hadn't gone out, the apartment hadn't flooded, and the windows didn't shatter. So in one night, we had made it through a typhoon, a tornado, and an earthquake. And that ain't half bad.

*Linka Wade is a second-year ALT in Gunma Prefecture. She is also the Events Section Editor for **CONNECT**. She enjoys traveling, learning to cook, attempting to bully her husband into studying Japanese, and procrastinating on literally everything. You can find her on Instagram as @linkaslens, or on her [blog Linka Learns Things](#).*



EVACUATION KIT 101

- 3 day's worth of food (e.g. tinned food, crackers)
- 3 day's worth of water (approx. 3 litres per person a day)
- a torch/flashlight, in case of power cuts
- change of clothes
- toilet paper and tissue
- candles
- portable gas cooker
- radio
- rope
- spare sanitary items



The Unexpected Path of Life After JET

An Interview with
JET Alumni Lillian
Hanako Rowlatt

Community editor Clare Braganza interviews Lillian Hanako Rowlatt (Niigata 2003-2005)

What now? This question will probably strike many of us once we've left Japan, if it hasn't already. The JET Programme only lasts 1-5 years, so before we know it, many of us have to return to our home countries and face the realities of entering (or re-entering) the 'normal' job market.

But even after we've left Japan, our time here will find ways to sneak back into our lives. This is what happened to Lillian Hanako Rowlatt, an ex-Niigata JET whose career path deviated from Japan before returning a decade later. Now, she's the co-founder of *Kokoro Care Packages*, a company which delivers premium-quality, all-natural Japanese foods

straight from Japan to customers worldwide.

In this interview, Lillian tells me how it all began with the JET Programme: "Being half-Japanese, I have always felt a strong connection to Japan and wanted to learn more about my heritage before entering 'the real world'. I chose the JET Programme



for its established reputation and sense of community.

My time in Japan turned out to be beyond what I could have anticipated. I lived in the small town of Kashiwazaki-shi in Niigata-ken, and the people I met, from locals to teachers, students to other JETs, all opened their hearts and homes to me and made the experience one that I will never forget.”

One of the many welcoming gestures Lillian experienced stands out for her: “I remember a principal at one of the schools taking me out to the school garden, even though he didn’t speak any English and my Japanese was very basic, to show me the fresh fruits and vegetables they were growing. He told me the stories behind the garden and let me try some of the fresh produce. Even though we may not have understood each other’s words, his kindness spoke volumes. I encountered this sense of inclusion and openness in so many aspects of my life on

JET. It made me feel like I was surrounded by family, even though I was miles from home.”

After two years in Niigata, Lillian returned to Canada and experienced “a sense of reverse culture shock.” She explains how “getting a ‘normal’ job can feel foreign in many ways.” But even though she’d previously seen her time in Japan as a “break before entering the ‘real world,’” she came to realise that JET had given her many useful skills.

“Taking the path less traveled can itself be something that distinguishes you from others. In a world where many follow the road map given to them, taking chances and trying something new can build character and skills that apply to any career. Thinking outside the box, taking on challenges, a willingness to try new things—these are all skills that are not only applicable but valued in many positions. If you keep your mind open, you’ll be

surprised where your journey in Japan will take you.”

Lillian credits her time on JET as the reason she was able to transfer to New York and cover the Japanese stock market. However, her time in Japan never really left her.

“I have always treasured my connection to Japan and being half Japanese. I still keep in touch with many of the people I met in Kashiwazaki, and my love and interest in Japan has only grown since then. I feel a sense of calm and belonging every time I return. It truly feels like a second home!

Covering the Japanese stock market did help me stay connected to Japan, but not on a deep level that felt meaningful. I wanted to be more in touch with the traditions and the people, and to share the culture and philosophies that meant so much to me with others.”

Japan has a strong sense of

community, which is part of the draw for Lillian. “Japanese culture is so dynamic and becomes more and more interesting the deeper you experience it! Part of the fascination comes from how Japanese culture embraces values I feel we are losing in the West; in the West, we are becoming more individualized and inward-looking whereas Japan puts the community first. Japan also has a strong sense of tradition, respect for its elders, attention to detail, and takes the time to master skills—values I feel we could all learn from. Whether you’re in Japan or experiencing Japanese culture, you always feel like you’re taking part in something bigger. Whether it’s sharing in traditions that are centuries old or taking part in cutting edge technology, you always feel a connection that is larger than you!”

Lillian was able to realise this desire when she met her Kokoro Care Packages co-founder, Aki Sugiyama. “Aki and I met when a mutual friend thought we would hit

it off given our similar backgrounds in finance and our mutual passion for health, wellness and working out. We met for dinner during one of my trips to Tokyo and it felt like meeting my twin! We are very similar in many respects and share the same vision and drive when it comes to the benefits of a healthy diet and living a wholesome and connected life. Aki does an incredible job, doing all our sourcing and interactions with our local Japanese producers, while I work on sharing their stories abroad so that others feel connected to the people and culture of Japan.”

The challenges of dealing directly with food-producers halfway across the world were also eased by Lillian’s experiences in Japan: “Being on the JET Programme helped me to have an appreciation of the customs in Japan, a deeper understanding of the hierarchical structure that exists in some aspects of the corporate culture, and an acceptance that sometimes processes like incorporating can

take more time. Despite this, I still run into some surprises! But most importantly, JET exposed me to the traditions, philosophies and respect people in Japan have for their food.”

These discoveries led Lillian and Aki to decide the goal of their new business: “To reconnect people around the world to the food they eat and the land from which it’s grown. I feel as if we’ve lost the true meaning of enjoying a meal with friends and family and the appreciation for the people and the land that creates it. Given our fast-paced world, we hope that Kokoro Care Packages will remind people to slow down and savor the gifts from the earth while enjoying the excitement of new tastes and flavors. We hope that through our Care Packages, people are able to be a part of a community that shares these values both inside and outside of Japan.”

With the benefit of hindsight on her path from JET to the stock markets to co-founding her own business,

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Kokoro Care Packages

For us, food is about community. Not only do we strive to offer the highest quality products we can find in Japan, but we also share the stories of the passionate farmers who produce the food, and the beautiful regions where they're grown. We've featured a soy sauce that takes three years to brew using 200-year-old family traditions, a brown rice jam made by a young couple that started their own local farm just outside of Osaka, and a yuzu miso created by a 66-year-old woman

who started a yuzu company in Tokushima in order to preserve the pesticide-free yuzu and help the aging farmers with their harvest. Through these stories and many others, we hope to connect people on a deeper level to Japan, its people and its traditions. We also love seeing people sharing their creations and their experiences with our products. The Kokoro Community is truly what makes our products special.



After spending eight years in capital markets, Lillian left her SVP position in the financial industry to launch Kokoro Care Packages, which delivers premium-quality, all-natural Japanese foods straight from Japan to customers worldwide. She helps connect people to Japan through its unique tastes and flavors while also supporting the local farmers and producers by sharing their stories of tradition and passion. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree, Honors in Mathematics with an Economics subject of specialization and was an ALT on the JET Programme from 2003-2005 in Kashiwazaki-shi, Niigata-ken.



Winter



Wonderland

Hoong Shao Ting (Nagano)

While delicate snow crystals float down gently, I want to be soaking in an outdoor bath with a view of a quiet snowscape. Coming from Singapore which sits just 1 degree away from the equator, I'm excited for my first snowy winter in the prefecture that boasts some of Japan's best ski resorts, and also looking forward to the *poka poka* (the Japanese onomatopoeia for 'warm') goodness of a warm bath on a chilly day.

Although winter may seem long and cold, it stretches across the cheery year-end and new year festive seasons while offering interesting sights such as the [Omega Sun](#), and the arrival of winter birds like [Red-Crowned Cranes](#).

This month, we take a look at some of our contributors' experiences spending the holidays in Japan, as well as visiting the world-famous Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route. Do also check out the January 2019 issue for the previous *CONNECT* team's articles on [illuminations in Kyoto](#) and [winter in Kobe](#), followed by the April 2019 article about the [Tokamachi Snow Festival](#) for extra travel inspiration!





But first, here's what Hannah and Catrina got up to in previous winters . . .

Hannah Pettorini



Monkey in Onsen



Relaxing monkey in Jigokudani

Catrina Caira

Otaru Light Festival



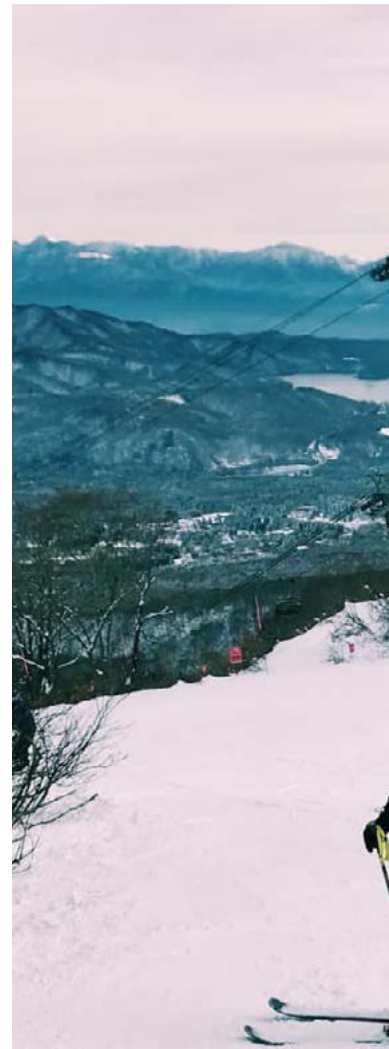
Snow Monsters



Drift Ice

Soukyo Snow Festival





Sad, sitting in a cinema watching *Star Wars* and eating undercooked *kushikatsu* (deep-fried skewers). Those were the ingredients for our not-so-merry first Christmas in Japan. Back home in New Zealand, the silly season was always my favourite time of year: December in the Southern Hemisphere is warm, everyone is on a long break, and Santa wears shorts. It's also the time when I'm surrounded by my extended family, fastidiously decorating the tree with my mum, and gorging on Kiwi classics like glazed ham, pavlova and trifle. This stark contrast led me to vow never to have such a woeful Christmas again.

Fortuitously, it turned out I wasn't the only Fahy residing in Japan.

The following year we were invited to spend Christmas in Lake Nojiri, Nagano, with my uncle and his family. They've lived in Tokyo for fifteen years and my husband and I were more than happy for this familial connection. The prospect of travelling from our mikan dotted countryside to the white blanketed mountains of Chūbu kicked my planning brain into gear. I couldn't wait to make my dreams of a white Christmas come true!

We broke up the 500 km trek north with stops along the way. Our highway bus left from Osaka early in the morning so we headed there the night before as our first pitstop. The long bus ride the next morning was surprisingly enjoyable, but I'd say the best entertainment came from the couple who were getting their drink on at 8 a.m. . .!

suppose it was 5 p.m. somewhere! Our next two stops were in Gifu: Takayama and Shirakawa-go. Shirakawa-go had been on my bucket list for a few years and it did not disappoint. I was hoping to see the *gassho* houses cloaked in snow but unfortunately didn't get the chance—it was absolutely magnificent regardless. Kanazawa was our last stop and we enjoyed forking out 1000 yen for a gold leaf-covered soft-serve, strolling around the samurai area, and of course Kenrokuen. But alas, still no snow.

The final leg of our journey to Nojiri was pure magic as the snow finally began to fall. It was wonderful to be met by family at the train station and welcomed into a cosy

Dreaming of a Christmas



Christmas atmosphere. We wasted no time in getting a traditional Christmas underway. As soon as we had placed our bags down, we were whisked out the front door to join the neighbours (all international residents) in carolling by candlelight. Growing up going to midnight mass, I was surprised to realise that I didn't actually know any of the lyrics beyond the first verse! After this storybook scene, we retreated back into the cabin for warmth and an overdue catch-up.

On Christmas morning, we awoke to wool strung everywhere. I felt like Catherine Zeta-Jones in "Entrapment" (am I showing my age?) edging my way through to the living room to find out what on

earth was going on. I was informed that this is called a "string maze" or "webbing" and the objective is to find your gift at the end of the string. It was good fun winding and weaving around the furniture and each other to see what Santa had delivered overnight. I was very happy that even though my husband and I are dancing around thirty, we weren't too old to be left off the good list. A gorgeous brekky and a real espresso topped off the morning as we enjoyed the panoramic views from the living area over the snow-trimmed lake. We deviated slightly from our traditional Christmas routine as we took a short drive north into Niigata to hit the slopes before slaloming back into Nagano to resume the festivities.

The star of the day was Christmas dinner. I was astounded that there was a full-sized oven that had come all the way from the United States. Even more astounding was the supersized turkey that appeared out of that magical contraption! We celebrated in the warmth of the cabin but most importantly, the company of family. My dream for a white Christmas had come true.

Siobhan is a third-year ALT living in Yuasa, Wakayama with her husband. Hailing from New Zealand where excellent coffee can be found everywhere, she is still coming to terms with its scarcity in Japan. To distract herself, she kickboxes and plans the heck out of a holiday. Find her on Instagram @seizeandfumble.

All Photos: Siobhan Fahy

White Christmas

Christmas in Nojiri

Siobhan Fahy (Wakayama)



A No Ne

When my boyfriend visited me in Japan for the holidays last year, we knew that we wanted to stay at a *ryokan*, or a traditional Japanese inn, together. We decided that we wanted to spend New Year's at a *ryokan* in [Kawaguchiko](#), a famous resort town with picturesque views of Mount Fuji.

We arrived late at night in Kawaguchiko and snagged a taxi. There were many hotels and restaurants near the station, but the taxi took us away from all that commotion. Earlier, I had called the owner of the *ryokan* that we would arrive late, and she immediately yelled "NO ENGLISH!" in response. I was starting to



Not-so-traditional New Year

Annelise Wilp (Saitama)

that our ryokan getaway was not going to turn out like we thought.

We arrived at the ryokan, which only spanned two floors with probably less than ten rooms, and paid for our accomodation. Soon, we found that the toilets were barely functioning. It was also winter, and the chill went straight through the walls. Teeth chattering, we googled restaurants to no avail. The ryokan turned out to be in a pretty isolated area, and most restaurants were closed due to the holiday. Finally, we found a place called [Dino Diner](#). I didn't picture having American diner food on New Year's in Japan, but

we were cold, hungry, and eager to leave the old ryokan.

The diner turned out to be one of the best places I've eaten at in Japan. Even though I had an avocado burger as my last meal of 2018 (nothing wrong with avocado burgers, of course), the irony of sitting on the floor Japanese-style in an American diner made it a memorable experience.

After dinner, we made our way back to the musty ryokan to watch the countdown on a tiny TV which didn't add much to the room. Rather than watching the ball drop in Times Square, we watched

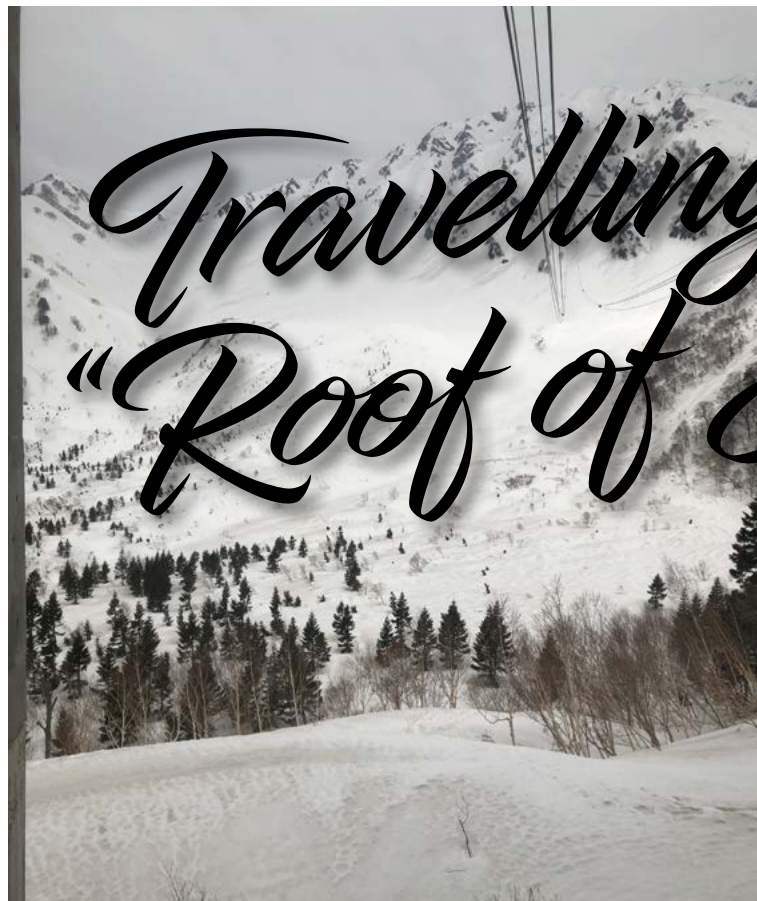
"Ninja Warrior" and a compilation of Japanese boy bands ring in the new year.

When 2019 finally arrived, we heard the other families in the ryokan yell "Happy New Year!" in English. Though I thought my sake would freeze over, my boyfriend and I did a celebratory "kampai!" Snuggled up in the futon, our faces hot from sake, we slumbered into the new year.

Annelise Wilp is a second-year ALT placed in Saitama. She is originally from Chicago and enjoys reading, writing, and trying to get started on her future bestselling novel.

All Photos: Annelise Wilp





Travelling to the "Roof of Japan"



Amy Lim (Nagano)

Coming from Singapore where it's summer all year round, I've always been fascinated with snow, especially snow-capped mountains. Being posted to Omachi City in Nagano Prefecture was a dream come true—I wake up looking at the outline of the Japanese alps from my bedroom window every morning, and Omachi being one of the two gateway cities to the only alpine route in Asia is another huge plus point for me.

The Tateyama Kurobe [Alpine Route](#) is also known as the "Roof of Japan". It crosses a mountain range some people call the Northern Alps between Toyama and Nagano Prefectures. To me, the greatest attraction is the snow wall at Murodo, where the highest station in terms of elevation (both bus and train) in Japan is also located. The area receives some of the heaviest snowfall in the world, with the accumulation of snow getting as high as 20 metres.

In spring, snow-cutters drive and carve through the snow, creating a special route surrounded by snow walls.

Unfortunately, thanks to the difficult process of creating the snow walls, travelling along the route comes with a heavy price tag. With the [cheapest return ticket](#) from my place starting at 11,000 yen, I had been putting it off until my friends from Singapore decided to visit me in April of this year. Without a car, there was a limit as to where I could take them and so it was finally time for me to check the alpine route off my bucket list.

My friends from Singapore, used to 365 days of summer every year, were surprisingly not as nervous as I was about them wearing sneakers to walk on the thick snow. The day before the trip, I dragged them out to the biggest supermarket, about a 30-minute walk from my house, to get some cheap snow boots. In the end, we all decided they should risk it rather

than paying 3000 yen each to get something which they might use only once. I was used to the cold weather after living in Omachi for nearly 10 months, so I gave them both the thickest down jackets and the warmest heat-tech that I had. I also piled a couple of *kairo* (heat packs) on them and brought shoe spike attachments along just in case they needed them.

Being a schedule freak, I decided we should all take the [earliest bus](#) so we could take our time to sightsee. Travelling to Murodo requires five different modes of transportation and I was a little worried we might be too tired. However, the 40-minute bus ride from Shinano-Omachi Station to Ogizawa was amazing, with the view changing from *sakura* trees to leafy-green ones and then snow-covered pines. There was a long wait to get onto our second mode of transportation at Ogizawa, as it was the first Sunday since the route opened for 2019. It was crowded with tourists from all over the world, but being



Japan, everyone was patient albeit excited.

The destination, Kurobe Dam, was impressive. It's the tallest dam in Japan—the second “number 1” in Japan that this scenic route boasts. It was a cloudy day, so the view wasn't as great, but I can imagine what it would look like on a clear sunny day. If you're visiting in spring or summer, you may be able to see the dam letting out water at 10 tons per second. We walked on the pathway across the dam (which took about 20 minutes) then took a cable car to Kurobedaira, where there's a nice little lookout area. From there, you can see the beautiful landscape of the mountains. The cable car, which runs through a tunnel and even has its stations underground so that it doesn't affect the landscape, is the only fully underground cable car in Japan.

The next mode of transportation with the best views was the Tateyama Ropeway. From the inside of the car, you can see

breath-taking views along the route. It's possible to observe the snowy, mountainous landscape without obstruction because the ropeway has no support towers along its 7-minute ride, supported only by ropes through its 1.7 km route. My legs were shaking a little while travelling along the ropeway, but luckily we managed to get a standing space near the windows and were able to enjoy the scenic view.

When we reached Daikanbo, at 2316 metres above sea-level, the views were even more spectacular and because we were there early, the observation deck was not as crowded as expected. We then boarded the trolley bus that runs across Mount Tateyama to get to Murodo. Without hiking up to the peak of Mount Tateyama, Murodo is the highest point along the route accessible by public transport. On a clear day, you can even see Mount Fuji from the peak of Mount Tateyama. Tateyama, along with Mount Fuji and Mount Hakusan, was one of Japan's

three holy mountains from the 17th to 19th centuries. Seeing hot water springing from the ground at Jigokudani (Hell Valley) made people think they were looking into the underworld, so the peak of Mount Tateyama overlooking the valley of hell represented heaven. People believed there was a god residing on Mount Tateyama, and climbed the mountain hoping that their souls would go to heaven after their death.

The snow wall was 16 metres high that day, and it wasn't as cold as we thought. Stepping off the bus and looking up at the walls under a cloudy sky reminded me of a scene from the Game of Thrones, and the crowd of tourists felt like the White Walkers—if not for their colourful down jackets. Nevertheless, we had a pleasant stroll and took a short break at Tateyama Hotel, eating wasabi croquette (famous in Omachi) and soba (Nagano's specialty), before returning to our starting point.

I have friends who have done the alpine route in both summer and autumn, and they say that the views are drastically different. There are several hiking options from the hotel onwards, such as to Shomyo Falls, the highest waterfall in Japan, or to visit Jigokudani Onsen (Hell Valley Hot Springs) as the pilgrims did in the old days. With all the different seasons and alternative routes to explore, I think I will be back again to finish crossing the route, across to Toyama.

Coming from Singapore, a tiny city-nation in Southeast Asia, Amy is always trying to prove her worth as an ALT while figuring out what she can and wants to do with her life. Right now she's just enjoying life as best as she can by watching Netflix and playing computer games like Cities Skylines and Sims 4, when she has free time.

All Photos: Amy Lim



Charlotte Coetzee

CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

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

ARTICLES

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

SPOTLIGHT

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

COMMENTS

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

PHOTOS

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

HAIKU

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

COMICS

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



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