

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

OCTOBER
2019

The Snake that Played with Fire

Sakaiminato: Monster Town?

DIY Cosplay

Autumnal Leaf Photography Tips

Gunma Games 2019: A Tale of Villainy, Memory, and Family



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

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

October is here! Autumn is peering around the corner and with that some cooler weather. I even officially put on my first jumper of the season! Although I was up in Gunma's famous mountains, so go figure. With this cooler weather, we can now enjoy outdoor activities without fear of overheating—or worse. If you have never been hiking in Japan before, I urge you to give it a go. Another one of my autumn recommendations is getting a group of people together for an autumnal leaf-viewing road trip. My friends and I did it last year and spent the day going, “Wow, look at that foliage!” It started off with sarcastic undertones but then became 100% genuine. You would be amazed at how long you can stare at orange toned leaves . . . But get out there quickly, as you may blink and they'll be gone!

For November's issue, we have hired new people for our team. I am looking forward to introducing them to you! We will be launching a whole new section for language, covering both topics about learning Japanese and teaching English—challenges which are a big part of our readers' everyday lives. We hope that this new section is helpful to you. If you are interested in contributing to language for November's issue, please email me at connect.editor@ajet.net. Additionally, if you are interested in contributing to Connect but you don't know where to start, please check out our [Facebook group](#) for contributors.

That's all for updates! Now I'd like to share five of my personal favourites from the October issue. The first article is about a local festival where there are snakes, babies being bitten by snakes, and fire—all accompanied by some gorgeous photography. The second article is written by our very own Entertainment Editor about how she (quite literally) stumbled upon a Halloween town in Sakaiminato; it's sure to get us into the seasonal spooky mood. The third article is an in depth article about DIY cosplaying all across Japan and how it manifests differently for each writer. The fourth article is all about autumnal leaf photography tips to get our Instagram photos looking lit. And lastly, we have an article that is dear to my heart: “Gunma Games 2019—A Tale of Villainy, Memory, and Family.” Needless to say, my Gunma games were a little spicier this year. You'll have to read it to find out why!

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Head Editor
2nd Year Gunma ALT

Alice R.

Photo: Tanya McDonald

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"I'm so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying."

– Oscar Wilde

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"Suckin' at something is the first step to being sorta good at something."

– Jake the Dog, *Adventure Time*

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"In the beginning there was nothing, which exploded."

– Terry Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies*

Damien Levi

"Hi my name is Trey and I have a basketball game tomorrow." – Trey

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Ashley Hirasuna

"Does anyone even read these?"

– Ashley Hirasuna

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"You will be different, sometimes you'll feel like an outcast, but you'll never be alone."

– Superman

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"Whit's fur ye'll no go past ye."

– Unknown (*an old Scottish Saying*)

NEWS AND EVENTS

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"The pen is mightier than the sword if the sword is very short, and the pen is very sharp." – Terry Pratchett, The Light Fantastic

Photo: Rhema Baquero (Kobe)



Events Calendar:

October 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

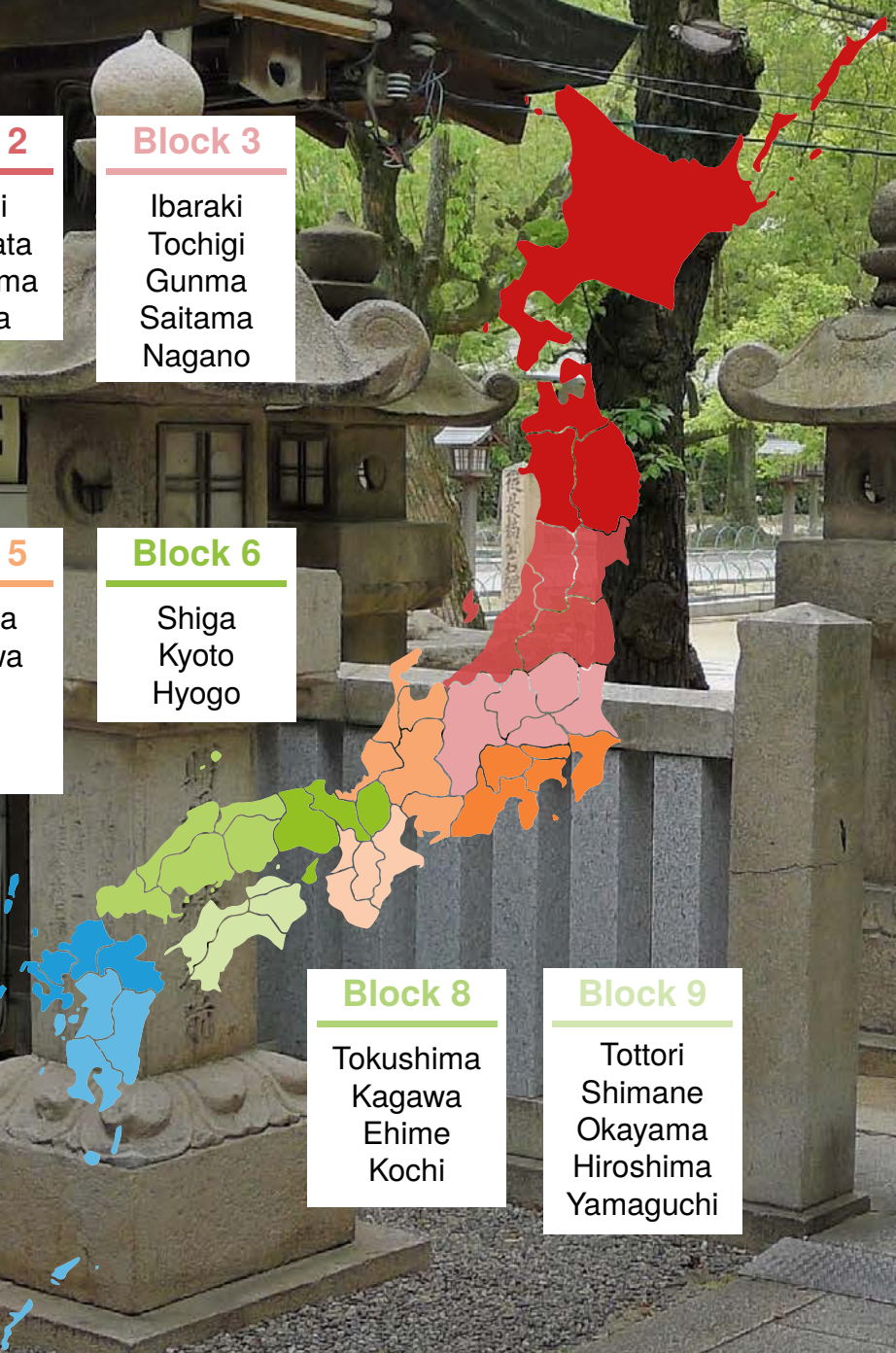
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa





Block 1

Marimo Festival

October 8 - October 10
Kushiro City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sapporo Marathon

October 6
Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

57th Akkeshi Oyster Festival

October 5 - October 14
Akkeshi Town, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Omagari Fireworks Autumn Chapter

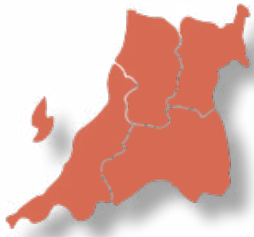
October 12
Daisen City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hirosaki Castle Chrysanthemum and Fall Foliage Festival

October 18 - November 10
Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 2

Nihonmatsu Lantern Festival

October 5 - October 7
Nihonmatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Michinoku Yosakoi Matsuri

October 12 - October 13
Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Fukushima Burger Summit 2019

October 13
Koori Town, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Echigo-Kenshin Sake Festival

October 19 - October 20
Joetsu City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival

October 10 - October 17
Yamagata City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Urasa Chrysanthemum Festival

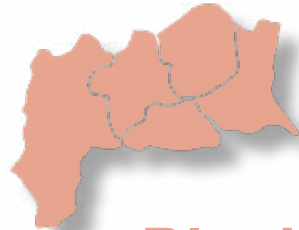
October 31 - November 10
Minami-Uonuma City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Fox's Night Festival

October 13
Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 3

Ina Oktoberfest

October 5
Ina City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kawagoe Festival

October 19 - October 20
Kawagoe City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Toshogu Shrine Autumn Festival

October 16 - October 17
Nikko City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tsuchiura All Japan Fireworks Competition

October 26
Tsuchiura City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tsukuba Ramen Festa 2019

October 12 - October 14
Tsukuba City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 4

Yokohama Oktoberfest

October 4 - October 20
Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kagurazaka Bakeneko Festival

October 13
Tokyo, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Ikebukuro Halloween Cosplay Festival

October 26 - October 27
Tokyo, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

31st Hokkaido Fair

October 3 - October 6
Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

All Japan Local Hero Matsuri

October 5 - October 6
Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

66th Koshu City Katsunuma Grape Festival

October 5
Koshu City, Yamanashi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shimada Obi Matsuri

October 12 - October 14
Shimada City, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 5

Kamioka Hida Lion Dance Festival

October 20

Hida City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Takayama Autumn Festival (Hachiman Matsuri)

October 9 - October 10

Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Horai Festival

October 5 - October 6

Hakusan City, Ishikawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Nagoya Festival

October 19 - October 20

Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Sky Festival Tonami

October 12 - October 14

Tonami City, Toyama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hokuriku Ramen Expo 2019

October 12 - October 14

Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Takefu Chrysanthemum Doll Festival

October 4 - November 4

Echizen City, Fukui Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)





Block 6

Otsu Festival

October 12 - October 13

Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nada no Kenka Matsuri

October 14 - October 15

Himeji City, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Art in Nagahama

October 5 - October 6

Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

38th Kobe Jazz Street

October 12 - October 13

Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kurama no Hi Matsuri

October 22

Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Funaoka Taisai

October 19

Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Jidai Matsuri

October 26

Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 7

F1 Japanese Grand Prix

October 25 - October 27

Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Osaka Castle Craft Beer Holiday 2019

October 11 - October 14

Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Gobo Festival

October 4 - October 5

Gobo City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shika no Tsunokiri (Deer Horn Cutting)

October 12 - October 14

Nara, Nara Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Wakaura Bay Marathon with Jazz (Jazz Marathon)

October 27

Wakayama City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ise Matsuri

October 12 - October 13

Ise City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

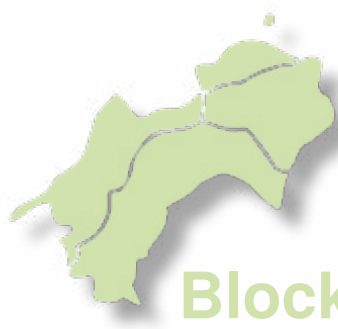
Ramen Girls Festival 2019

Part One: October 3 - October 8

Part Two: October 10 - October 14

Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 8

Sanuki Toyohama Chosa Matsuri

October 11 - October 13

Kanonji City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Osato Hachiman Shrine Autumn Festival

October 20

Kaiyo Town, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Saijo Matsuri

October 14 - October 16

Saijo City, Ehime Prefecture

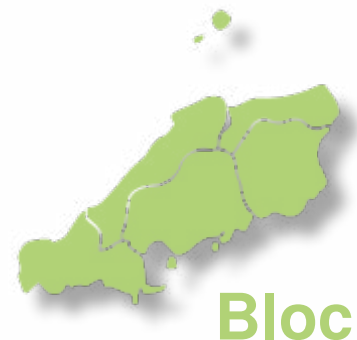
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Niihama Taiko Festival

October 16 - October 18

Niihama City, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 9

Mitokusan Fire Festival

October 27

Misasa Town, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kuse Festival

October 25 - October 26

Maniwa City, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ichiyagadake Bull Sumo Tournament

October 13

Okinoshima Town, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in Japanese and English](#)

Sake Matsuri

October 12 - October 13

Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Takehara Shokei-no-Michi Candle Festival

October 26 - October 27

Takehara City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Shirakami-san Autumn Festival

October 28

Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese and English](#)

Katsuyama Festival - Kenka Danjiri

October 19 - October 20

Maniwa City, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 10

Nagasaki Kunchi

October 7 - October 9

Nagasaki City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Koishihara Pottery Festival

October 12

Toho Village, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

2019 Saga International Balloon Fiesta

October 31 - November 4

Saga City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

YOSAKOI Sasebo Matsuri

October 18 - October 20

Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture

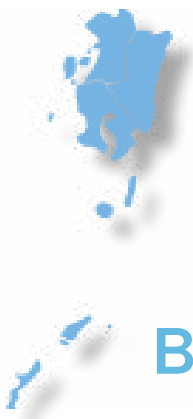
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Imari Ton Ten Ton Festival

October 25 - October 27

Imari City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 11

Naha Tug-of-War Festival

October 12 - October 14

Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Noborizaru Festa Together 2019

October 26 - October 27

Nobeoka City, Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Myoenji Mairi

October 26 - October 27

Hioki City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



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Emily Belding

Rhema Baquero

Rhema Baquero





INA OKTOBERFEST

International Culture Connecting a Local Community

Nathan Vonderahe (Nagano)

What is the story of Ina Oktoberfest? How did this all get started?

Although I am from America, I come from a family with a strong German cultural influence and heritage. I missed that culture of Oktoberfest from back home, so I held a small Oktoberfest party at my house in Ina with a group of eight international friends. In order to make it feel more authentic, I also ordered beer from Germany for that first Ina Oktoberfest event.

The philosophy of the event grew after looking at the history of the original Oktoberfest in Munchen, Germany. It started as a two-week wedding celebration for Prince Ludwig I of Bavaria and Princess Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen, and modern Oktoberfest celebrates Reunification Day, when East and West Germany came back together. So in this spirit, coming together has become the driving philosophy of Ina Oktoberfest.

In the following years, interest for the event grew and the event has had to grow to keep up, doubling in size every year since.

What communities were involved in the founding of the festival?

As I am an expat, in the early years, I talked with many international people such as the JET community as well as a local network of Japanese friends and the Ina English Guide Club.

How has the festival changed over the years? What kind of growth do you want to see in the future?

Each year, new things have been added to the menu. By the fourth year, soft pretzels, grilled sausages, apple strudels, and other iconic German cuisine had been added, to name a few. There were also several different kinds of beer, including some donated by In a daze Brewing, a local craft brewery that opened last year.

Giving an opportunity to showcase local companies, Ina Oktoberfest plans to grow to allow several different types of vendors, including arts and crafts, various entertainments, and even a fresh harvest market. With vendors from the local community and the charm of Ina, we can continue to grow this event every year.

What is new to the festival this year?

This year, the event had outgrown the previous location and had to change drastically to accommodate more growth. With the help from In a daze Brewing and several local restaurants and bakeries, the 2019 Ina Oktoberfest hosted all three of the local craft breweries as vendors and served a variety of food making it a legitimate festival held in Ina Central Park.

This year a raffle was introduced to the event, raffling off items imported from Germany. Games and live music were also added to make it an event for all ages rather than just another beer festival. We also established the



Ina Oktoberfest as a charity event this year, with the profits going back into the community to help local at-risk children.

What do you think is the main highlight of the event?

In Japan, Oktoberfest is synonymous with beer. Ina Oktoberfest definitely highlights the local craft breweries in the Ina valley; however, one goal of this event is to rebrand Oktoberfest to be for the whole family, with a focus on vendors in our community.

We are also proud of the food we offer at the event. Ina Oktoberfest is inspired by German culture and influenced by local culture. To celebrate this philosophy, we make German sauerkraut with Japanese shiso and locally grown red cabbage, which is then served on sausages and pizza.

What goes into putting the festival together?

Creating an event with several vendors takes a lot of time and planning. The top four things you need for an event are: the area, the crowd, the vendors, and a supply schedule.

In order to get the area, you must file paperwork with the city to reserve or in some cases, rent the area. This ensures no overlap in other events, and that the space will be guaranteed to be available for your event; as well as informing the city of when and why a large crowd will be present.

Without the crowd, there is no event. So you must reach out to those who would be interested in your event to inform them and give them a reason to come to the event. This includes talking face to face, web presence, and print advertisements around the local area.

There are two ways to get vendors to join your event, either you ask them or they ask you. For Ina Oktoberfest, some vendors were asked to offer German-related products and as more people knew about the event: other local companies began asking to join.

Knowing what/who will be where when is extremely important for the day of your event. You have to make clear plans, and ensure you have enough staff so that everything is where it needs to be. It's also good to make sure that your staff members have time to enjoy the festival themselves, so hire extra people and take it in shifts.

The founder and host of Ina Oktoberfest is Nathan Vonderahe. He is originally from a small town in America near Cincinnati, Ohio but has lived in the Ina area since 2012 and it is now his second hometown. Ina Oktoberfest is always held on the first Saturday in October. Information about the festival can be found at inaoktoberfest.com or on Facebook at [Ina Oktoberfest](https://www.facebook.com/InaOktoberfest). Please come by Nagano and enjoy the Oktoberfest next year!

Photos: Nathan Vonderahe



THE SNAKE





THAT PLAYED WITH FIRE

Ailsa van Eeghen (Kagoshima)

“3, 2, 1! Staaaaart!” With that, the street erupted into an inferno of sparklers, firecrackers and dancing humans. “This is crazy!” I thought to myself, not for the first time since moving to Japan.

For the next little while, I watched in awe as men danced atop sparkler breathing snakes and women danced below in celebration, deftly dodging the sparks showering them from above.

The *Daijyama* Festival (大蛇山祭り) or ‘Large Snake Float Festival,’ is a celebration held in the city of Omuta (大牟田) in Fukuoka Prefecture. Every summer huge floats decorated in the images of snakes are pulled through town accompanied by wild drumming performances and teams of dancers. Every year since the festival’s beginning in 1961, every effort has been made to make a more powerful snake than the previous year’s. Known as *ojoyama*, the floats are about 10 meters long, 5 meters high, and weigh up to 3 tons. For hours, the teams pull these huge snakes through town, putting on a spectacular show.

Arriving in the late afternoon, I was quickly swallowed by crowds as I headed towards the festival. The sounds and the smells quickly enveloped me, transporting me into that classic Japanese summer festival world. I walked past small mountains of steaming *karaage*, bubbling *takoyaki* hot plates, mounds of *yakisoba* being tossed and flipped, squeezed through the bubble tea crowds and admired the ever-changing *yukatas* as they flashed in and out of sight.

Over the buzz of the crowd, I could hear drumming



and chanting coming from the street. Sliding my way through the mass of people, I found a spot right at the front, fitting in snug between two families. Almost immediately a float rolled past, the sound of the *taiko* drums heavy in my ears. The decorated float looked more like a dragon than that of a snake, despite being in the snake festival. The huge head was swinging wildly, pushed on either side by *happi*-wearing men. The men atop the float were shouting “*Yoi-sa! Yoi-ya-sa! Yoi-sa! Yoi-ya-sa!*” as they raised their arms in celebration. In the belly of the snake were men of all ages. Glistening from the sweat rolling down their bodies, they took turns to play the *taiko* drums, the change so smooth that not a single beat was missed.

The *taiko* playing was captivating. The men would sway from side to side with their arms pulled along by the weight of their bodies, almost elastic-like in their manner. They were holding chunks of wood not much bigger than their hands, which they would effortlessly pull down to the drum all the while still swaying around. At one point one performer, swinging with such momentum, bent over the float railings backwards, before snapping back up, not a single beat missed.

As the sun set, the atmosphere fired up and so did the snakes. Over the loudspeakers, I could hear a countdown begin. The float near us came to a halt and as the snake’s head came to rest, bundles of sparklers appeared out of nowhere. Like that of a fireworks show gone wrong, the float exploded with light and fire and noise. All the men atop the roof started dancing, sparklers in hand, whilst the *taiko* drumming became more fervent. Huge sparks were shooting out of the snake’s mouth as it swung back and forth. The whole thing looked like it could go up in flames at any moment. Chants of ‘*Yoi-sa! Yoi-ya-sa! Yoi-sa! Yoi-ya-sa!*’ echoed all around as the dancing quickened and excitement built. I looked up and down the street and watched in awe as all the other floats came alight too.

As the lights faded, and the dancers’ movements calmed, I slowly returned to reality. People began spilling out onto the streets, much to my confusion. Was it over? Was that the big finale? I jumped the barrier, hoping to get some respite from the cloying stickiness of the crowd.

As I strolled along, enjoying the space, I realized the festival wasn’t actually over. It had just taken a different form.

Lines of people had formed at the heads of the snakes, most with young kids and babies in hand. We watched as a parent handed over their child to one of the men. As the teams sang “*Yoi-sa! Yoi-ya-sa!*” and as the drums began playing, a child was lifted into the mouth of the snake and shaken up and down, its little head bobbing all over the place. I would later learn that it is a form of blessing called *kamase*. The legend goes that if a child is bitten by one of the large snakes, they will live healthy and disease-free for a year. By the looks on some of the children’s faces, it seemed like they would have much preferred to get a cold than be in the snake’s mouth.

Leaving the festival, the sounds of, “*Yoi-sa! Yoi-ya-sa!*” continued to resonate in my ears. For one day every year, the floats are brought to life by the sweat and passion of hundreds of people. For those few hours, I felt like I’d been walking around in another world and now, as the sparklers died down, and the snake came to rest, I was returning back to just another Japanese summer.

Ailsa van Eeghen is a photographer who has been living in Kagoshima Prefecture for four years. She usually spends her weekends with her camera exploring the back roads of Japan, enjoying the wildest festivals and hiking up mountains. You can find more of her pictures on Instagram at @ail.saa and on her website where she writes about her travels.

Photos: Ailsa van Eeghen



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"They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night." – Edgar Allan Poe

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"Fashion is capitalism's favourite child." – Werner Sombart

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Valerie Osborne

Photo: Megan Luedtke



百五十年四月廿二日
法華寺
百廿五

Slaying with a Gentle Hand:

Practical tips for achieving that soft, dreamy feminine Japanese makeup look

Devoni Guise (Saitama)



Japanese makeup style is characterized by how soft, feminine, and natural it is. Of course make up styles can vary, from high fashion to underground styles — there is so much inspiration! — but this article focuses more on the aspect of makeup in Japan that uses more neutrals, a soft blushing red, instead of a fiery one, more gold-pinks less neon-pink, and soft highlights instead of bold contours. Here is a list of tips to get you started to figuring out your own take on Japanese makeup.

BROWNS OR GREYS OVER BLACKS.

When you closely examine eye looks, very rarely do you see black being used to line an eye or deepen eye shadow. Instead, various shades of brown are used to give dimension to the eye. This tip is especially useful with hooded or smaller eyes because black can overpower these eye types and take away from the overall look.

Modern-day eyeliner was originally intended to help with the appearance of having fuller lashes by filling in gaps at the lash root. Keeping your eyeliner closer to your lashes, especially a brown one, your lashes look thicker, and become the focal point of your look instead of the eyeliner (though everyone can appreciate a razor-sharp cat eye!).

Finding the right brown for your skin tone is easy; look at your skin tone and pick an eyeliner 1-2 shades darker than you. For people with deeper, richer tones, I recommend using either the almost black browns or dark dusty blacks/grays. The dusty grays give the same effect as brown, and really makes your eyes pop. Be careful to pick a dark dusty gray and not a silver that won't blend well.

BLEND, BLEND, BLEND, AND BLEND SOME MORE.

To achieve soft feminine looks, you want the colors in your makeup to be seen, but you don't want them to be overtly obvious. This means it is important to blend everything so that you have soft edges between colors, and your foundation melts into your skin and is not just plopped on top. Here are different blending tips depending on skin type and where you are blending:

EYES—a good eye brush is important. For your eyeshadow, you want a brush that is densely packed, so that it can pick up color well. While blending, apply a nice, even layer. You want to avoid brushes that need a lot of pressure to give off product. If you have oily eyelids, a light skin-toned eye powder or cream that is lightly applied to your eyelid will help keep your eye makeup on longer.

FOUNDATION AND CONCEALER—no matter what you prefer, brushes, sponges or—gasp—your fingers, technique is important. Some of my favorite makeup artists espouse the art of *patting* in your skin base and not buffing it in. Patting it in and blending out is gentler on the skin compared to the buffing motion you would usually use, and patting to blend forces you to take more time to blend well. Patting works really well for drier skin types because with more abrasive blending methods, it can make dry skin appear drier.

LIPS—to achieve a soft delicate color, apply your lip product *in layers*. Lip brushes seem totally useless at first glance, *but* not only are they more hygienic than directly putting product on your lip, they allow you more control in application, so you can have a fierce blue-red lipstick and using a brush, apply it so subtly it looks like a tint. Lip brushes make mastering certain techniques easier too, like gradients or feathering lip colors.

DO NOT GO OUT OF YOUR WAY.

In Japan, eyeshadows, blushes, and lip products colors can be so dim. But, if you are going for that Japanese-esque soft makeup look, you have to use unpigmented colors, right? Wrong. You can keep your Western makeup products; you just have to apply in layers and use the right tools. I am a slight cynic this way; I believe a lot of makeup/skincare products are just hype. You do not need to go out looking for special products to achieve a certain look. Use what you have, and invest your time in technique and reusable tools instead. One decent lip product can double as a blush or eyeshadow, if you just focus on how you apply it. In fact, one of my favorite go-to monochromatic looks is done with mid-tier red lip gloss.



HIGHLIGHT OVER CONTOUR.

Contouring and highlighting serve the same purpose: to disguise what you don't want seen and accentuate certain points. For the soft feminine look we are going for, the focus is on the positive, drawing the eye to certain points. Common parts of the face to highlight: bow of the lip, tip of the nose, top of cheekbone, apple of the cheeks, and t-zone. You can pick your favorite combination of highlight points suitable for your face shape.

There are different types of highlighter and you are free to use whatever suits your personal taste and style! Slight glimmers, full-on glitters, gloss highlighters, or plain old petroleum jelly! Applying highlighter is my favorite part of doing my makeup; it can take a boring look into a full beat. Have fun experimenting with highlighter types for your perfect soft look.

There are multiple ways to go about doing makeup. Experiment and find methods that work for your face shape, skin type, and preferences. Have fun developing your own way. Hopefully, this article gave you some insight into that endeavor!

Devoni Guise is a second year ALT living, working, and daydreaming in the inaka of Saitama. In her free time she loves reading, gardening, and studying Japanese and French. Of course, she has a slight obsession with all things beauty and loves exploring different aspects of the beauty industry. You can catch her at her new IG @ [protecthemelanin](#) or at her [Pinterest](#).

Photo: Ian Dooley on Unsplash.com







VOGUE'S

FASHION NIGHT OUT

IN TOKYO 2019

...Could have been my Night-In

T. Harris (Saitama)

Saturday, September 14 was VOGUE's 20th Annual Fashion Night Out in Tokyo, held around the Omotesando/Aoyama area. For those who don't know, VOGUE is a high-fashion magazine that has been around since the late 1800s and is distributed in multiple countries. The magazine is very respected and the fashions it showcases is usually the hottest buzz in the industry. Fashion Night Out (FNO) is VOGUE partnering with different brands to have one night where everyone can enjoy shopping and mingling. This year's theme was sustainability and environmental responsibility. The event took place in Omotesando Hills, a large mall in Shibuya, Tokyo.

I love paging through VOGUE to get a feel for current trends or what is changing in the fashion industry, so when I read about this event, I had to go. Omotesando is a luxe shopping district in Tokyo, and with VOGUE in town interesting things were sure to be happening. . . .

Or so I thought.

I do not want to say that the event was lackluster or poorly done, but I think I had different expectations. In fact, my expectations may have been a little too lofty, and unaware of the actual purpose of the event. I was expecting to see new, interesting, or forward-thinking trends in fashion, but instead walked away with the feeling that FNO was *half-heartedly* meant to entice people to buy something. Overall, the event, in my humble opinion, lacked sustenance. There were highlights, such as the talk with the VOGUE Japan's Editor-in-Chief, Mitsuko Watanabe, but overall I left a little disappointed. Here is a rundown of *my* experience.

**FNO is not a showcase event—
don't expect to see new trends.**

FNO is not an event that has fashion designers or brands showcasing new collections. I came in expecting there to be a lot of focus on sustainable practices in fashion and new clothes with that in mind. Instead, there was some discussion from panelists, but

not much. There were also T-shirts sold with different images relating to recycling or being environmentally friendly.

Instead, it is more of a brand recognition and building event. Meaning, there were a lot of people distributing ads for different stores, and clerks trying to get you to follow their social media or use their hashtag for a small prize. Prizes ranged from specialty boba teas, candy, or small bags. Some stores did offer new releases that matched the sustainability theme, such as Stella McCartney's sustainable Hunter boots. The main part of FNO was the interactions with different Japanese celebrities, the VOGUE Japan's Chief-in-editor, and a performance by [Sekai no Owari](#). The rest of the event was meant to be spent exploring the shops. Which wouldn't have been a bad thing, but as mentioned, besides maybe ten to fifteen shops, there were not many special events, special edition or new releases being sold, or giveaways occurring.

The crowd was not much different than usual.

If you are the type who loves participating in art events to just people watch, such as me, then FNO may have tickled your itch. In general, Shibuya is a very fashionable area in Tokyo, and Omotesando is a luxury street lined with shops like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Valentino to name a few. There is no lack of fashionable people to appreciate on any day of the week. Compared to the average crowd found out and about in Omotesando, FNO did not attract a particularly different crowd to come out. So, if you are big on people watching, you may be better off picking a quiet weekday and enjoying the crowds.

The purpose was confusing.

As I wandered throughout Shibuya and the different roads around Omotesando I became curious as to why VOGUE saw this event as something that had to be done. Through my eyes this was not an event done for the love of fashion or art, but more a chance for

brands to increase their social media followers, build up their recognition, and *hopefully* sell some items. But as I walked around, I noticed that, besides the ten to fifteen stores actively luring people in with small trinkets, the vast majority of stores were empty or almost empty, and it was business as usual for them. The crowd swelled during the build up to the Sekai Owari performance, and then dispersed right after.

For many of these stores, FNO was not helping them attract more attention or sell clothing. In fact, the lack of results (combined with VOGUE's poor planning) led to FNO's discontinuation in New York in 2013 and [systematic shut down in the US](#). People came to just look around and have fun, not to buy anything. If anything, I think this event was more for VOGUE's sake as a way to better establish its own brand voice in Asia. But I wonder how mutually beneficial it is for the small businesses that feel pressured to participate, tolerate the crowds and see no return on investment.

Do I regret venturing out to Tokyo for FNO? No, it gave me a new perspective on the fashion industry and gave me a lot to think about concerning the business aspect of it all. Plus, Shibuya on a Saturday? There are worse places to be. I think if I am to give advice to anyone interested in this event, it would be to stifle your expectations, have a set list of brands you know are participating that are doing something worthwhile, take it easy, and enjoy yourself.

VOGUE's Fashion Night Out will also be held in Kobe on October 19th, Nagoya on October 26th, and Osaka on November 16th-17th. If you attend one of these events please send in your opinion to the event to [CONNECT!](#)

T.Harris is a second year ALT in Saitama. In her free time, she likes to visit museums, watch anime, and browse through fashion magazines.

Photos: T. Harris





Cosplay

[Kazpei] Naun

the practice of dressing up as a character from a film, book, or video game, especially one from the Japanese genres of manga or anime.

Photo: Brooke Lark on Unsplash.com



CREATING THROUGH COSPLAY

Costumes aren't just for Halloween for six cosplay-loving expats

Apart from the plethora of sugary sweets and spooky stories, Halloween is probably most notorious for one thing: costumes. Originally a practice used to ward off ill-intentioned spirits, even the most skeptical of us still like to partake in the long tradition of dressing up for Halloween. While we may no longer feel the need to confuse ghosts and ghouls, there's something about putting on a new identity for a night that continues to attract us. It's just plain fun. But for some, donning a costume isn't reserved solely for chilly nights in late October. Rather, dressing up is a year-round passion and creative outlet. Dressing up becomes an art form. This type of devoted costuming has become a huge part of Japanese pop culture, called cosplay, short for costume play.

Cosplay has spread far outside the borders of Japan to become a popular hobby worldwide. Cosplay gives fans an outlet to celebrate their favorite characters through dress-up, while also serving as an inspiration for creative output. Many cosplayers don't simply wear a costume, but spend countless hours painstakingly creating an ensemble in order to transform into their most beloved fictional characters. Being a huge part of Japanese pop culture, it's no surprise that many expats in Japan are dedicated cosplayers. *CONNECT* has asked six current and former cosplay-loving expats to share their experiences:

Creating Cosplay & Community



Rhema as Katsuki Bakugo from My Hero Academia.

Rhema Baquero (Kobe)

When I started cosplaying in 2012, my main concern was accuracy. I worried I would not appear “authentic enough” if I did not cosplay a Black character. To no surprise, I had difficulty finding a character that fit me. While deep into another run of Fullmetal Alchemist, I came across the [automail fitted Paninya](#). With only a few weeks left before the comic convention, I set to work looking through the sparse screen grabs of the character’s arm.

After late nights of hot glue burns and X-acto knife slips, I created a working, fitted automail arm made from plastic yard sale signs, metallic vinyl and elastic. I enjoyed being in a costume I made with my own hands, and conversing with mega nerds, but what I really enjoyed was figuring out how to craft the costume. From that point on, I dove deep into the creative side of cosplay, transforming our second bedroom in America into a fully stocked sewing and building workshop.

I am NOTORIOUS for waiting until the last minute con crunch to start crafting my cosplays, but ahead of that, I am shopping for fabric, wandering the aisles of the hardware store, and picking up items at dollar stores. I enjoy looking at a prop and piecing together a way to bring that 2D thing to life. If you name a character, I am already deconstructing their look in my mind.



Rhema (as Kratos from God of War) and husband Marc (Zoidberg from Futurama) cosplaying for their engagement pictures.

Cosplay is an artistic hobby where I can be creative and use my mind in inventive ways. I love being in this subculture, but there is a problem in the community when it comes to the [treatment of people of color](#) (POC). We are often ignored in top cosplayers lists and passed up by pro photographers on con floors. We are told we should be OK with blackface, brown face and yellow face. We're told we are not accurate because the skin we are born in doesn't match the character. We are not the character, but the Black, ghetto, or Muslim version of the character. So many Black cosplayers have shared screenshots of people calling them the n-word [insert character name] and [other slurs](#). Can we not also safely be the characters we admire?

Over time, I found my confidence and the need for body-specific authenticity faded.

However, the negativity can still be off-putting. Not being able to see yourself in something you love can be discouraging. Despite all of this, marginalized groups have come together within the community to lift each other up [out of obscurity](#). There is a whole world of us, and you'll see that we too are thriving. Follow us on social media and say hello when you see us at conventions. Look into other cosplayers of color, [physical ability](#), [body types](#), [sexualities](#), and even [religions](#).

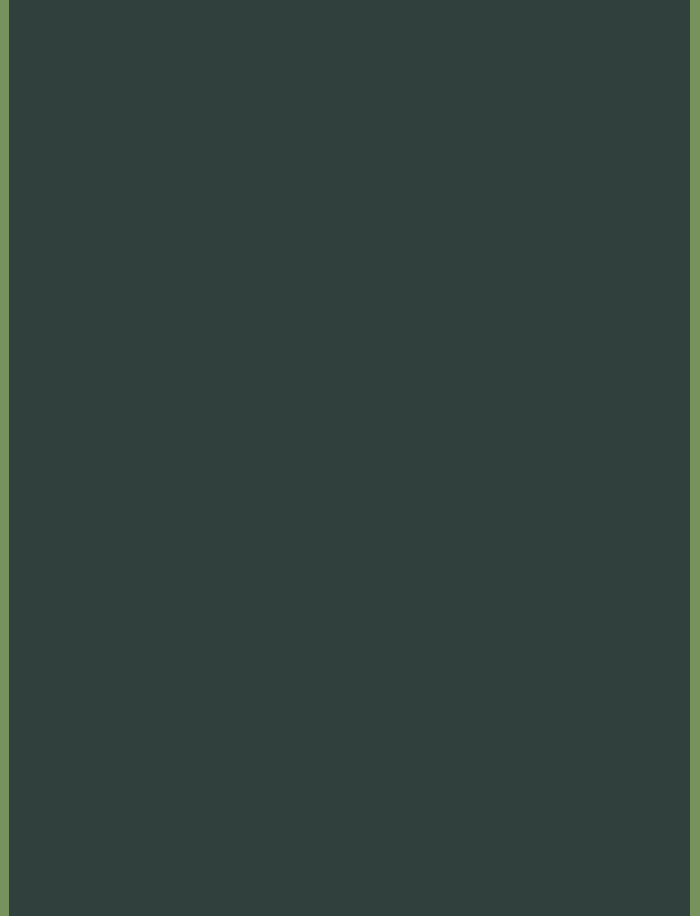
I am fortunate to have a partner who jumped into (read: was pulled into) cosplay with me. I make his costumes and he transforms with them. Marc is regularly stopped for pictures by fans of the personas he portrays. During our honeymoon in Japan, we attended the International Tokyo Toy Convention at Tokyo Big Site in our Majin Buu and Piccolo cosplays. In our pink and green body paint, we stepped inside and immediately noticed we were the ONLY cosplayers among thousands of Japanese

people trying to enjoy their toy previews. But in the train stations and throughout the convention, we were constantly stopped for conversation and pictures by people who seemed excited to see us.

Four years into cosplaying, I found best friends in Courtney, Darla, Hunter, Jasmine, and Lynn, whom I have bonded with over cosplay-making slumber parties, dancing across the con floor, and previously feeling like islands in our subculture.

Living in Japan offers a whole new set of cosplay challenges. Fortunately, I found friends within the JET community, and we are determined to costume together soon. This year, I'm debating between Miles Morales and Bakugo for the best holiday of the year. Knowing me, I'll start crafting our costumes at the last minute. I am just excited to continue to have people around me who are just as excited about cosplay as I am.

Rhema Baquero is a 2nd-year ALT in Kobe who teaches at the junior high and elementary levels. Over the past seven years, she has cosplayed in America and Japan as comic book, anime, video game, and original characters.



Rhema has found a community through cosplay (here seen posing as characters from *A Centaur's Life*).

Getting Crafty with Cosplay

Sarah and friends cosplay as characters from Steven Universe.



Sarah Markee (Wakamatsu)

Since childhood, I have loved dressing up. At home, I would pretend I was Sailor Moon while watching the anime. I also had fun dressing up for Halloween at my school, and trick or treating in the neighborhood. I went to the Renaissance Festival every year with my family and we would all dress up in full costumes, like princesses and pirates. In my senior year of high school, my sister and her boyfriend

took me to an anime convention with their friends. I had a Kairi outfit from Kingdom Hearts 2 that I bought on eBay and owned some dirty pink Vans shoes. It was my first real cosplay, and though I did not have every piece of her outfit “perfect,” it was so much fun to see everyone all dressed up in character. I was in awe of the really extravagant cosplays. You could tell that so much work had been invested into these masterpieces.

It was from that moment that I knew I wanted to get serious about cosplay. I wanted to really look like the characters, not sort of look like them. I started following cosplayers on YouTube, DeviantArt, forum boards, and eventually on Facebook and Instagram. However, I wasn't very crafty despite my interest in art. I didn't know how to sew, make durable pieces that weren't too heavy, choose prop materials, or even how to apply makeup! But I challenged myself to learn. With every cosplay, I get better and learn more tricks. Once I cosplayed with a group of friends. We were stopped over and over throughout the day for pictures. It felt good to be appreciated. People complimented the hard work I put into my wig styling, makeup, and outfit. I was someone who inspired others! And so I keep looking for more ways to get involved in events, learn new techniques, and cosplay more. My next goal is to make a music video, and to try to craft foam armor that looks real! Thank you for following along, I hope I've inspired you to cosplay too! Please be on the lookout for [MimiKon36](#) on Instagram for my cosplays and other art outlets!

Sarah Markee is a first-year ALT at a junior high school in Aizu, Wakamatsu. She's originally from the state of Michigan in the USA.



Sarah as Aqua from Kingdom Hearts.

Capturing Characters through Collaboration



Adrienne Nicole (Shizuoka)

I try to be the adult I needed in my own life at age 13. I'd like to think that my younger self would think I'm pretty awesome now. A part of that is my cosplay. Just because I'm over 30 doesn't mean I have to pack away the things that make me happy. Fictional characters can still bring me joy, and now I have the financial means to bring them to life. However, it's far more important to me to embody the essence of the character rather than look identical to them. I can be a brunette Tsukino Usagi, or a blue-eyed Princess Leia.

Most of my costumes are sourced from vintage garments. My Princess Leia dress is a vintage wedding dress from Spain. My Ahsoka Tano costume is an altered disco-era dress with some accessories I already owned. Props such as lightsabers and Sailor Moon wands are commercially available. Other specialty items outside of my skill set are sourced from some great professionals on Etsy. A few of my gowns were made by a seamstress in a Shakespearean production group.



I've had to learn many skills, from airbrush and special effects makeup to wig weft sewing. My specialty is doing special effects makeup. While makeup might not be 'art' to some, it's what I love doing. I love being able to change my face to embody the character. For example, the slit mouth woman is a careful application of liquid latex, shreds of toilet paper, and melted 100 yen shop lipstick. (Thanks, YouTube!) The Ahsoka makeup is stenciled airbrush makeup. I had to study the character guild from the television series, design, then cut the stencil in multiple segments. I had to teach myself how to use the airbrush equipment, and how to mix and apply the makeup. My Princess Leia makeup came about from studying the original makeup sheet from the film's makeup crew.

I've also had to find ways to work around my limited use of my left arm and shoulder. Last

year, I was struck by a car while crossing the street in Shizuoka, and my injuries were rather devastating. After five months of physical therapy, three times a week, I was finally able to pick up both of my lightsabers and pose the way I wanted. The changes to my face have been upsetting as well. Honestly, Illaura is the only person who can make me look good in a photograph. She's very lovely and generous with her willingness to edit out my scars when I'd rather not see them,

Illaura Rossiter (Chiba)

I do a lot of work regarding cosplay creation, and photography, both on my own and with Adrienne. I began cosplaying for Kumoricon in Oregon in 2008. I go for 100% character accuracy in my own costumes which involves a lot of screen shot-ing, pattern drafting, and testing on the cheapest available fabrics before I finally begin my final product. When working with Adrienne, however, I find myself looking at vintage clothing and trying to figure out how to match the provided clothes to her image of the character.

Working with Adrienne, we have taken our cosplay out for a spin in various settings, from parks to the cosplay studio Haco Stadium in Tokyo. At first, in choosing what cosplay to make or wear in Japan, I was very worried about sticking out. But people have always been amused, happy, or curious about our cosplay and photographic works, so I have been able to more freely choose my cosplay.

Outside of tailoring Adrienne's cosplay, and my own costumes, my main work has been in the cos-tography realm. Doing this type of work has really pushed me as a photographer to learn new skills and techniques, not only for taking photos, but also for editing. Unlike other types of

although I'm trying to get better about how I feel. Our next big cosplay will be Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes, partly as an homage to my now titanium-filled left arm.

Adrienne Nicole is originally from the United States. She was a JET in Shizuoka from 2011 to 2016 and still resides in Japan. You can check out more of her cosplay on her [Instagram](#) @moon_moon_purinsesu.

Photos: Illaura Rossiter

photography, I feel it is very important to really "know" the character I am shooting. It's not simply a matter of posing and shooting, but knowing how the character might act, their famous poses, iconic scenes. Understanding how they carry themselves is vital to capturing not only the cosplayer, but to portray them as the character.

Illaura Rossiter is from Oregon, USA. An ex-JET (2014-2019) from Shizuoka, she has recently transplanted to Chiba prefecture. You can find more of her work on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) at @irossiterphotography.



Left: Illaura cosplays as Kaylee from Firefly.
Right: Illaura and Adrienne together as human Luna and Princess Serenity from Sailor Moon.



Finding the Right Material (and Acceptance)



Adriana Garcia (Hokkaido)

Being placed in Sapporo for JET, I had access to cosplay specialty stores and an Animate all within the same building. Not trusting Japanese sizes, I was determined to make my own costumes if needed like I did back home. I was first given the run-through on how to use a sewing machine when I was twelve and took off from there. And so, I started cosplaying in Japan when I found a sewing machine in a thrift store for 2500 yen. Though it was missing a presser foot and only had one bobbin, it worked great—perhaps my best impulse buy ever. Due to time constrictions, I was dependent on the Kanariya fabric store chains. There was a four-story Kanariya downtown near Odori Park which had a huge selection. This building was near the cosplay shops which had wigs and wig accessories. This was great for last-minute accessories but I was always too cheap for that. In fact, Daiso was also a great place for certain color thread, fabric scraps, elastic, and general sewing accessories.

Adriana keeps in character as Ariel from The Little Mermaid.

I am THAT cool anime-loving English teacher by day, but what my students don't know is that I cosplay by night! I am currently a first-year elementary and junior high JET in Kyoto City. I attended my first anime convention in 2009 not knowing what cosplay was, and when I found out that it was a thing people do, it absolutely blew my mind. I'd always enjoyed dressing up during Halloween, but didn't realize it was something I could do for more than one day out of the year!



I've cosplayed casually since, but have become more serious about it in the last year. As a cosplayer who is a person of color as well as LGBT, I've become more aware of discrimination and harassment in the community in recent years, and work to be an advocate for acceptance, change, and making cosplay a safe and enjoyable space for all. Cosplay is not only a form of self-expression and a creative outlet, but also a form of therapy for me after going through some especially rough years. When it sucks to be you, it's nice to be someone else for a few hours or a day, and it's truly a hobby of joy. Through cosplay, I bring joy not only to myself but to others, and that's what keeps pushing me further. I'm sure it's a similar feeling for some of you out there too!

Even though I'm in Japan now, I want to continue to slay the cosplay game! I have cosplayed on Halloween before, during my study abroad at Waseda University in 2016. I went to the Shibuya Halloween celebration as Sailor Venus. The most touching moment was a little Japanese girl seeing me in the street and shouting, “母ちゃん、見て! セーラーヴィーナス” — “Look, Mom, it's Sailor Venus!” As someone who has been called

“inaccurate,” “the black version,” or even racial slurs while cosplaying, it was meaningful to know that in essence, the color of my skin SHOULD'N'T and DOESN'T dictate what characters I can and can't be. I AM Sailor Venus, and I made that little girl's night.

As for this Halloween, I am looking at being Nezuko from (Demon Slayer). I feel blessed every day for getting to live in Kyoto and can't wait to do some amazing cosplay photoshoots throughout the different seasons, especially this fall!

I cosplay characters from anime, video games, and American cartoons/webcomics—basically any character that resonates with me. Some of my favorite series to cosplay from are Steven Universe, My Hero Academia, Kakegurui, She-Ra, and Lore Olympus. I am most active on Instagram as [@miss_suju](#), and can also be found on Twitter as [@miss_suju_cos](#). I've gotten to befriend so many people from around the world through cosplay, so if you see this, shoot me a DM, I promise I don't bite!



Amadara Oguara, AKA Miss Suju, is a first-year elementary and junior high JET in Kyoto City. She's of Nigerian and Native American descent and originally hails from Seattle, Washington, USA.

Slaying the Cosplay Game

Amadara Oguara (Kyoto)

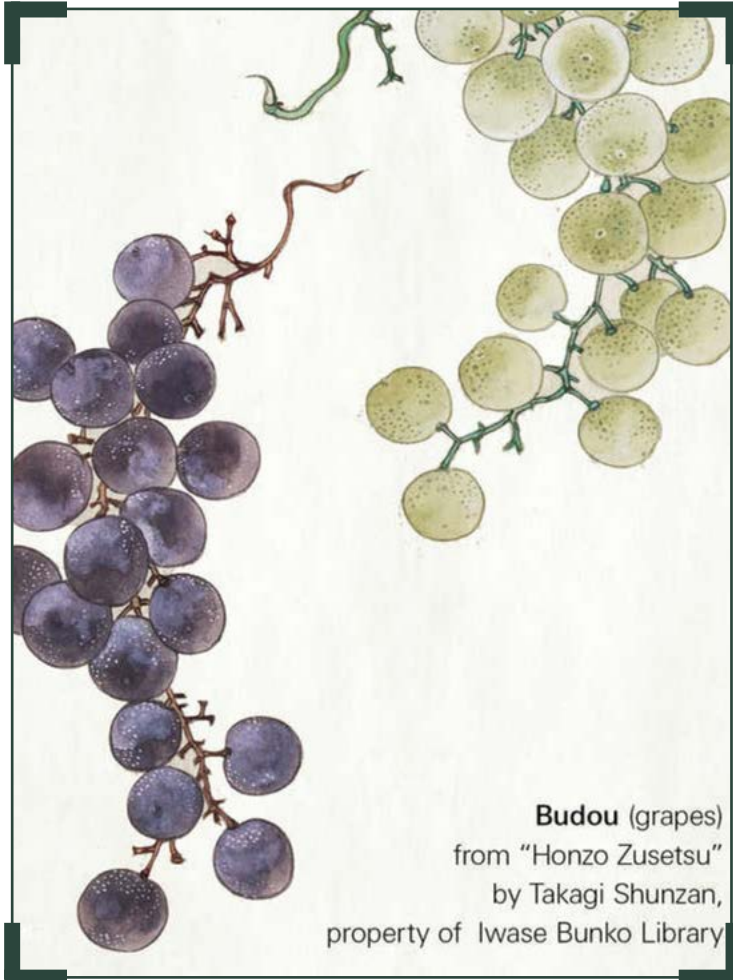


Left: Amadara as Toga Himiko from My Hero Academia.
Right: Amadara as Catra from She-RA.
Cover: Amadara becomes a gem as White Diamond from Steven Universe.

Living Seasons

There's an App

Veronique Hynes (Nara)



Nothing gives me Japan FOMO worse than finding out about some amazing event . . . a week after it is over.

Hiking through a mountain covered in azaleas in May, catching fireflies in June, eating *mochi* under the stars at a moon-viewing party—these are all uniquely Japanese experiences that I missed out on my first year in Japan because I didn't know about them.

Japan has thousands of different seasonal experiences and it is impossible to keep track of them all.

That's why the Utsukushii Kurashikata Institute created 72 Seasons, an app that offers a week-by-week report based on Japan's ancient calendar, which was divided into 24 seasons, and the aforementioned 72 micro-seasons.

Every five days users will get a very detailed breakdown of the micro-season, from what kind of weather we can expect, to which fish or vegetable is currently at its peak. It even features illustrations and a haiku about the season.

At the time of writing this article, we are at the end of *hakuro* or "White Dew," which lasts approximately from Sep. 7 to 11. It's the perfect time to plan a harvest moon-viewing party and to eat peaches and *kabocha*, the Japanese winter squash.

The Utsukushii Kurashikata Institute is a joint initiative between the advertising agency Dentsu and publishing company Heibonsha. Following the ancient Japanese calendar lets people appreciate the subtle changing of the seasons, "allowing you to enjoy an ancient yet refreshingly new way to feel the year progress, unhindered by precise dates and times," according to their [website](#).

lly for That



網打の脘なげちらす月夜かな
坂本朱拙

*ami-uchi no
hiji nage-chirasu
tsukiyo kana*

Sakamoto Shusetsu



While I wouldn't say that 72 Seasons is a must-have, it is very informative for a free app. It is nice to know why my local izakaya has been serving *sudachi* in so many of their dishes lately, and that Pacific saury is best served heavily salted and grilled whole.

It is also very pretty to look at. The many photos and illustrations are beautiful, and if 72 Seasons feels more like scrolling through a PDF version of a coffee table book than using an app, it's because it essentially *is* the PDF version of a coffee table book, published by Heibonsha in 2013.

That being said, users of the app should prepare to read some awkwardly-translated English.

For example, the app explains that the weather during the "White Dew" micro-season is "still relentlessly hot during this time, but at least we can gain some cool feelings from the name of this season."



72
Seasons



White Dew

Ancient people decided that the dew forming on plants had a cloudy appearance, and was a sign for the switchover from summer to autumn. The afternoons can still be relentlessly hot during this time, but at least we can gain some cool feelings from the name of this season.

It also describes how saury prices decrease in autumn thusly: "the price goes south, and this is a favorable arrangement for the stomachs of the common people."

All in all, it's worth checking out, and if you are travelling to Nara, I do recommend checking out 72 Seasons Nara, as it offers a ton of super helpful information about the prefecture.

72 Seasons is available for both IOS and Android devices.

Veronique Hynes is a third-year ALT from Ottawa, Canada. She is enjoying all the perks that come with living in Nara prefecture: the deer, proximity to nature, persimmons, and the deer.

Photos: 72 Seasons



The Enigma of Butoh

Kyoto's Dark Dance

Laura Jones (Nara)

It was a Thursday evening in late August and I had been in Japan for about a month at that stage. My friend told me that they had an extra ticket to see a performance called *Butoh*. I hadn't a notion about what it was. When I asked, they told me that Butoh or "the dance of darkness," as it is widely known, began amid the transitional disarray of post World War II, 1950s Japan. They described it as a dance style like nothing Japanese people had ever seen prior to that point—with its darkness, so raw in nature, shocking a wholly conservative Japan. This was enough to spark my interest and off we went to experience this unknown form of dance.

We arrived at the performance space around dusk. The building was a tiny, old storage space or *kura*, according to the [venue's website](#), built sometime during

the Edo period. The site also proudly states that the Kyoto Butohkan, nestled in Kyoto's Sanjo district, is the only performance space dedicated solely to this style of dance. There were low lanterns lighting the narrow path to the old building and we were shepherded past a heavy wooden door into a small, dark tatami room. I was shocked, as performances to me usually meant that a stage was involved, but this was not the case. We removed our shoes and sat on the floor in true Japanese style. The room sat only eight people in total, and even at that, it was a little cramped.

Just before the performance, the ushers shut the door, enveloping us all in utter darkness. I remember feeling a fit of giggles threatening to engulf me as I reached for my friend in the darkness, unsure of what to expect. We sat like that in the darkness for what seemed like an eternity.

I expected my eyes to adjust to the darkness but they didn't and I was blind, completely dependent on my other, heightened senses.

I heard a sound from above, a musical instrument that sounded like a mix between a harp and a violin—a *koto*, I later found out. The music produced had a haunting quality to it and only acted to further enhance the sensory experience of being blinded by the darkness. A single spotlight illuminated the figure of a woman. Her face and body were completely covered in what looked like white paint and I watched as she descended the staircase from above.

My eyes adjusted to the bright light and I saw her clearly as she reached the bottom of the stairs. She was naked apart from a cloth that was tied around her groin. She appeared to be in her 60s or 70s. Despite her age, her body was toned, obviously a dancers body, and I couldn't tear my gaze away as she started to move and sway in a way I had never seen before as the *koto* plucked out its hollow tune.

She contorted her body in a manner that was simultaneously grotesque and beautiful, it was unlike anything I had ever seen. I was hypnotized by her slow, intentional movements that seemed to get faster and more powerful with the increasing rhythm of the ghostly melody. The lights changed from white to blue to red. Moments of naked, wrinkled, vulnerability warping into an image of absolute hell. She continued in this way for some time, boldly looking into the eyes of audience members, telling a story with her contortions—from slow and controlled to desperate and manic as the music became frenzied.

At the brink of the mania, she threw her head back to reveal blackened teeth and let out a tortured shriek. Every hair on my body stood up on its end and you could hear the collective gasp of the other inhabitants of the room who, at this stage, I had forgotten were there. She collapsed in a heap on the floor of the tatami room.

To me, she told the story of birth, life, death and the physical and emotional hardships that are weaved throughout. I was in awe of the way she seemed to use every part of her body inside and out to do so. I was entranced, hypnotized and in a state of shock and disbelief at the terrifying beauty of what I had just witnessed.

“ At the brink of the mania, she threw her head back to reveal blackened teeth and let out a tortured shriek. ”

After the performance, the house lights were turned on, transporting us back into reality. I met eyes with my friend and we were both unsure of what we had witnessed but so happy we had come. There was an opportunity to take a picture with the performer, Ima Tenko, afterwards and my friend and I timidly approached her to get one. It was so strange seeing this person who, just moments before, was seemingly inhuman, now talking and smiling like a normal woman. The hour-long

train ride home was filled with our best interpretations and commentary. I will forever be grateful that I took a chance on this dark, unsettling, yet beautiful style of dance. It was an experience like no other and one that I am unlikely to ever forget.

Laura is a third year ALT PA working on the JET Programme in Nara Prefecture. She hails from Ireland, the land of craic (not drugs) and Guinness (not actually a fan). She struggles through her days now as a ramen and bread loving celiac in the land of noodle shops and 100 yen bakeries on every corner.

Photos: Laura Jones
Wolfgang Sterneck on [Flickr](#)
Patrick Shannon on [Flickr](#)



OCTOBER RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

MOVIES

October 4

- Joker (2019)
- John Wick:
Chapter 3 - Parabellum (2019)
- Lying and Stealing (2019)
- 7 Days in Entebbe (2018)
- Believer (2018)

October 5

- Homestay (2018)

October 11

- Yesterday (2019)
- Crawl (2019)
- Border (2018)
- Upgrade (2018)
- The Truth (2019)
- 15 Minutes of War (2019)
- The Third Wife (2018)
- Return of the Hero (2018)
- Gogol. Nachalo (2017)

October 18

- Maleficent:
Mistress of Evil (2019)
- Robin Hood (2018)
- A.I. Rising (2018)
- Gully Boy (2019)

October 19

- Adam's Apples (2005)

October 25

- Gemini Man (2019)
- The Queen's Corgi (2019)
- T-34 (2018)
- 2.0 (2018)

October 30

- Annabellum:
The Curse of Salem (2019)

GAMES

October 1

- Sniper Elite 3 Ultimate Edition (Switch)
- 80 Days (Switch)
- Ghost Recon Breakpoint Gold/Ultimate
early access (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Destiny 2: Shadowkeep (PC, PS4, Xbox
One, Stadia)
- Destiny 2: New Light (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Yu-No: A Girl Who Chants Love at the
Bound of this World (PC, PS4, Switch)

October 2

- Warsaw (PC)

October 3

- Paranoia: Happiness is Mandatory (PC)

October 4

- The Tiny Bang Story (Switch)
- Ghost Recon Breakpoint (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered
(PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

October 8

- Concrete Genie (PS4)
- Call of Cthulhu (Switch)
- Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince (PC, PS4,
Xbox One, Switch)
- Trine: Ultimate Collection (PC, PS4, Xbox
One, Switch)
- Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair (PC,
PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

October 10

- Mistover (PC, PS4, Switch)
- We Were Here Together (PC)
- Reky (PC)

October 11

- Grid (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Citadel: Forged With Fire (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

- Frostpunk: Console Edition (digital) (PS4, Xbox One)
- AeternoBlade 2 (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Doraemon Story of Seasons (PC, Switch)

October 15

- Zombieland: Double Tap – Road Trip (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Children of Morta (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- The Eyes of Ara (Switch)
- Overwatch (Switch)
- The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Complete Edition (Switch)

October 16

- Little Town Hero (Switch)

October 17

- Uragun – Steam Early Access (PC)
- Monkey King: Hero is Back (PC, PS4)
- The Fisherman: Fishing Planet (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Travis Strikes Again: No More Heroes Complete Edition (PC, PS4)

October 18

- Digimon Story Cyber Sleuth: Complete Edition (PC, Switch)
- Raging Loop (PS4, Switch, PC)
- A Hat in Time (Switch)
- Pig Eat Ball (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Plants vs. Zombies: Battle for Neighborville (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

October 22

- The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel 3 (PS4)
- WWE 2K20 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

October 25

- TDusk Diver (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Into the Dead 2 (Switch)
- MediEvil remake (PS4)
- Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- The Outer Worlds (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

October 29

- Disney Classic Games: Aladdin and The Lion King (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Vampyr (Switch)
- Devil May Cry 2 (Switch)
- Resident Evil 5 (Switch)
- Resident Evil 6 (Switch)
- Yakuza 4 Remastered (PS4)
- Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz HD (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Atelier Ryza: Ever Darkness & the Secret Hideout (PC, PS4, Switch)

October 31

- Luigi's Mansion 3 (Switch)
- Sparklite (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Court of Ashes (PC)
- Secret Government – Steam Early Access (PC)
- Spirit Hunter NG (PC, PS4, Vita, Switch)
- Stranded Sails – Explorers of the Cursed Islands (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Moons of Madness (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

Sources:

<https://imdb.to/2PiCSee>

<https://bit.ly/2LeenQe>

NO ONE COMES HERE—EXCEPT FOR THE MONSTERS

Exploring Sakaiminato

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

"You didn't come here for the monsters?" he asked, puzzled. His head cocked slightly, eyebrows raised. "No one comes here—except for the monsters."

This was, I must confess, a somewhat disconcerting thing to hear as I was checking into my hostel, in rural Japan, alone.

I blinked.

"Ahh . . . *what* now?"

I had, in fact, come to the small coastal town of Sakaiminato because it was close to Daikonshima Garden, where I planned to meet a friend for a peony festival the following day. I knew little about the area, right on the border between Tottori and Shimane, but had decided to take advantage of a long weekend and do some exploring. My brief research had found a nice castle in Matsue I could visit, Izumo Teisha shrine further down the coast, and a few lovely onsen scattered about the area.

No one had said anything about monsters.

But my hostel owner informed me that I could view *yokai*—spirits, fairies, demons, and monsters of Japanese folklore—all through Sakaiminato, and who am I to turn down the call to adventure?

As it turned out, I had stumbled upon one of Japan's odd little anime towns. Sakaiminato had been the childhood home of Shigeru Mizuki, one of Japan's most beloved, respected, and influential manga artists.

Among his many works, he penned the popular series *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, which is credited with bringing yokai and traditional folklore to pop culture prominence after World War II, and has apparently influenced everything from *Pokémon*, to *My Neighbor Totoro*, to *Pacific Rim*. Sakaiminato, clearly looking to draw in some tourism, leaned into this connection—and Japan does not do anything by halves.



Walking through downtown Sakaiminato is a surreal experience. One hundred bronze statues line the streets, each depicting a creature or character from Mizuki's work. Some are small enough to fit in your hand, others large enough you could sit in their lap. Some look like twisty dragons; disembodied horse heads; woven sandals with long, licking tongues; spindly little men with blank faces and thin, reaching arms. Some have—less recognizable shapes. All of them are incredibly detailed, lively, and wonderfully weird. But the monsters don't stop there. There are paintings and murals and cut-outs! They've got monsters on the trains, monsters on the vending machines, monsters on the police station, on the cabs, in the restrooms, on manhole covers! The street lamps all look like eyeballs, rising in clusters on long stalks. Souvenir shops and candy stores sell all manner of creepy treats. Children skip down the street snacking on monstrous snacks and trailing clouds of eyeball balloons floating weirdly behind them. An enormous, red-eyed skeleton looms over a children's playground where toddlers, or eh—twenty something year old JETs—*ahem*—can slide down the back of a wriggling ghost.

And then there's the museum. Dedicated to educating the public about Shigeru Mizuki's life, art, and the yokai he so dearly loved, the Mizuki Shigeru Museum is worth a visit. I was able to get an English audio tour, which I would highly recommend. Mizuki had an interesting life: he grew up learning all about the secrets of the Unseen World from his governess. He lost an arm in World War II, which affected his drawing style and left him with very distinctive linework. He was politically outspoken and an advocate for peace. He won two Eisner awards. Settings from his life are depicted in large dioramas in one section of the museum—with various yokai lurking in the backgrounds throughout. The museum contains some of Mizuki original art and illustrations, and a chance to learn about his more political or biographical work. And of course, there are plenty of monster murals, figures, and photo opportunities. Outside the museum various monstrous mascots, characters from the comics, appear to entertain the crowds and take pictures with the tourists.



As I trotted back to my car at the end of the day, past a (family friendly) haunted house, clutching my various *omiyage* and souvenirs, I couldn't believe my luck at stumbling across this little town. Even without being previously familiar with the *GeGeGe no Kitarō* manga or its creator, I was completely taken in by the town's pervading sense of fun. The yokai depicted throughout the Sakaminato are authentic enough to be of interest to anyone keen on Japanese folklore, mythology, or horror, but cartoony enough that they are accessible to young children. They really just committed completely to the monster theme and went all out with it, creating a whimsical, macabre, and totally immersive experience that you would only ever find in Japan. As the town is gearing up for Halloween, which they apparently celebrate with great gusto, I would definitely recommend a visit.

Rachel Fagundes is a third-year ALT in Okayama Prefecture. She likes cats, naps, cat naps, Japanese festivals, and good books.

Photos: Rachel Fagundes



“

The Halloween scene in Tokyo has become the stuff of legend. Whether you are a horror loving american missing your favorite holiday, or an expat from another country wanting to know what all the fuss is about, Tokyo is the place to go this October! Halloween aficionado Emory Pace is here with her list of top tips for how to enjoy Halloween in Japan throughout the month.

”

— Rachel Fagundes



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF HALLOWEEN IN TOKYO

EMORY PACE (TOKYO)

1

CHECK OUT THE CLUB SCENE EARLIER IN THE MONTH

As Halloween has picked up in popularity in Japan, so have the numerous clubs that host Halloween themed parties starting from October 1st (sometimes in September). The infamous club scene in Roppongi is a great place to start. Shibuya has also joined in on some club events directed at Halloween celebrations. Many of the bars and clubs will offer discounts for attendees in costume. Others might even offer photo spots to Instagram the night out with friends. Since the age old rule of “stop dancing by midnight” has been overturned indefinitely, clubs tend to get packed pretty quickly. So if you do have on a costume, make sure you secure anything you wouldn't want to lose on the dance floor. Most clubs have storage space or lockers, and be sure to keep a small clutch purse with you around the club.

The grand club AgeHa throws a wild Halloween party and offers discounts to guests in costumes. AgeHa happens to be one of the biggest clubs in Asia, with a booming dance and international scene. With a huge building and multiple dance floors, this is the club to go if you're looking to spread out, enjoy yourself, and grab a bite to eat. Since many clubs start their main events quite late, my advice is to be prepared to stay out all night until first train. If you can dance the night away for 6 straight hours, this is definitely the option for you!

2

BOOK YOUR VISITS TO THEME CAFES IN ADVANCE

Another popular activity are the numerous theme cafes located in Tokyo. Most cafes stay open all year, but the creepy ones tend to book up quickly in October as Halloween approaches. From getting locked up in the Alcatraz E.R. Cafe, or being romanced in the Vampire Cafe, there are a lot of opportunities to get into the fun.

What about those expats who want a more authentic yet creepy Japanese experience for Halloween? Well don't worry! Japan is not short of superstitions or ghosts! Yurei Cafe will fill your Japanese ghost needs. The word *yurei* refers to a spirit who is filled with hate or resentment or who died in a violent way (Hi Juuon!). This cafe comes complete with waitresses dressed in white burial kimonos serving you the finest in gory dishes.

If you're in the mood for something a bit more *kawaii* then the Kawaii Monster Cafe is for you. This family friendly spot is full of nothing but colorful fun galore! From the food to the decorations, your eyes will never be bored. Kawaii Monster Cafe offers special performances on their signature centerpiece carousel with their monster models. During the month of October, they tend to switch up their menu to be extra delightful and spooky! While going to the cafe may seem like any day could be Halloween, the Kawaii Monster Cafe will be sure to turn things up for the occasion.

3

MAKE A COSTUME

Okay you might now ask yourself, “Sounds great but what about costumes? Halloween is the one day out of the year where even the strictest salarymen let loose with their friends and show off their minimal to excellent creativity. If you want to DIY up a costume, the best places to start are definitely the recycle shops and secondhand stores all over Japan. You can find great base pieces to alter, sometimes for less than ¥100! Speaking of cheap, 100 Yen Stores have got you covered! It’s the BEST way to pull out your inner artist with supplies that won’t break any wallet. If you’re not the creative DIY type, don’t sweat it. There are lots of costumes ready to wear. Daiso carries a lot of costume pieces and even complete sets for a cheap yet spooky night. Your Halloween heaven will have to be DonQuijote. From makeup to costumes, and even over the top decorations—DonQuijote is here for you. There are a ton of costume options for every budget.



4

LOGISTICS OF SHIBUYA

Halloween falls on a Thursday this year. While this may seem like a downer for all of us waking up early on Friday, this has never managed to discourage many from spending a great Halloween out and about in Shibuya. People will start roaming around Shibuya most nights leading up to Halloween, especially the weekend before since a lot of parties will be operating. Halloween is absolutely the most crowded time of the year, which creates a lot of fun as well as a lot of havoc. Since Halloween isn’t a national holiday, all public transportation will run at a regular scheduled pace. All of the trains and buses will stop running around 23:00~24:30 and will be extremely crowded with people still trying to come out and celebrate Halloween in Shibuya.

When arriving:

I would recommend showing up anytime before 19:00 if possible. The subways will be crowded after 17:00 with commuters and party goers alike all over Tokyo—but especially around Shibuya. Last year my friends and I grabbed a taxi into the edge of Shibuya. One thing to keep in mind is that taxi drivers CAN and WILL refuse you service if your costume causes them concern. Since a lot of taxi drivers are older men, Halloween is something that is not familiar to them (yes I was definitely refused service last year). If you live in Tokyo a bus might also be an excellent option, but again be prepared for the traffic flow to stop as the roads close at around 19:00.

Going home:

If you're like me and work every day of the week (#TeacherLife), Then I cannot stress this enough: DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST TRAIN. The crowds will be MASSIVE which will result in being shoulder to shoulder with a lot of new friends in costumes trying to navigate safely and in a time efficient manner. What may take a 10 minute walk on a usual day around Shibuya station will definitely change to 30+ minutes on Halloween night. Every year the authorities seem to be more prepped and organized, and as good as that sounds, it tends to work against us. I'm guessing there will be a big possibility of police closing several station entrances and exits around the Halloween crowds so please be prepared.

Staying the night:

The BEST option is to stay in the city as close to the celebrations as possible. Shibuya has a lot to offer for lodging, none of which is very cheap. Love hotels are a great option for access to the street party fun, but often book extremely quick and sometimes may not allow you to go in and out like a regular hotel. Business and capsule hotels are also a great option, but again book up quickly in the day. More official hotels and AirBnBs might be the way to go if you have the time and budget to do so. That being said, since Shibuya Halloween has continued to grow internationally in fame you will be competing with a lot of tourists for those spots. I recommend you book a hotel MONTHS before Halloween if you are serious. Hotels are also the best option if you are going together with friends, since a lot of business and love hotels do not allow friend groups to stay in their rooms.

The party will last all night! So by the time you check out, you'll be guaranteed to see the scary aftermath of the biggest street party in Japan. As crazy as it gets, there are actually a lot of people in costumes taking time to help volunteers clean up the area so that Halloween may continue in Shibuya without disruption.



BE PREPARED FOR TOURISTS, REVELERS, AND CREEPERS

Huge crowds of tourists from around the world flock to Shibuya to admire and take pictures of all the costumes. The massive amount of tourists can be a bit annoying because it becomes a huge gawking event instead of people actually willing to participate. There is no official time to show up; however, most people will be heading to Shibuya right after class or work ends. The streets stay open to traffic as usual until around 19:00. After that, the police open the streets up to party-goers and it becomes quite crowded. With the new alcohol ban going into effect, I suspect this will do very little to curb the party-goers and may result in people showing up already very intoxicated.

The Shibuya city police do not enjoy Halloween, and I can't blame them. But even with all the craziness, few arrests are made each year. Those crimes usually range from fighting, theft, nudity, severe intoxication, and even sexual misconduct. Last year definitely made headlines and likely caused negative long term effects on how the authorities will monitor and handle Halloween in Shibuya. Reports of violent conflicts (including multiple videos of a truck being overturned by both Japanese and foreigners) have led the mayor of Shibuya to consider putting a "pay to play" in place as well as a ban on public drinking on the night of Halloween.

7

HALLOWEEN IS ALL AROUND

Halloween is now in full swing all around Japan. Getting in the spirit early is essential to get as much out of October as possible. There are a lot of ways to enjoy Halloween in Japan. Since Japan has begun fusing Halloween into its culture, it's always a nice idea to keep your eyes open for opportunities to indulge in the holiday. You can find adorable Halloween snacks and goodies around the city (Mister Donut never disappoints). Supermarkets and grocery stores will even set up huge Halloween displays to get customers excited about shop to shop trick or treating. I have even seen multiple florists selling big orange pumpkins perfect for carving. So go ahead and jump in on those spooky decorations and treats. Regardless of where you're from, you won't feel too far from home this Halloween.

Emory Pace is a teacher, artist, and model for the creative city of Tokyo. After graduating from Northeastern State University in the historic capital of the Cherokee Nation in Tahlequah, Oklahoma with her degree in Fine Arts, she relocated to Japan. Originally from Yokosuka, she has continued to reside in Japan for 5 years. In 2018 Emory established her brand 'EÄPart' and continues to produce art as well as help out with multiple events in the Tokyo fashion scene. You can find her on instagram at www.instagram.com/emorypaceart/.

6

LEAVE THE LITTLE ONES AT HOME

Halloween is a fabulous family-fun holiday! But the Shibuya party is definitely not. While back home Halloween revolves around children enjoying candy and costumes, I DO NOT recommend bringing your children out to celebrate the festivities once it gets dark. I've been seeing more and more parents dressing up and bringing their families out to take pictures with other party goers. A lot of these families are tourists from other Asian countries who maybe didn't anticipate how wild it could get. Due to the sheer volume of people filling up about five blocks around the station, there can be a lot of risks to smaller humans. Children can be accidentally stepped on or pushed over. Add to that, intoxicated people in costumes they can't see super well out of and yea . . . better to take the little ones home when it gets dark.

But worry not! There are many MANY other family fun events running all through the month of October. Parents are all too excited to dress up their little ones to take a ton of pictures. Since trick or treating is a concept still in the works, many families in Tokyo will attend Halloween parades and marches. The Halloween Parade in Kawasaki has been very successful for the past several years and have intentions to continue this year as well.



LIFESTYLE



WELLNESS EDITOR

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Caroline Allen

"Be sure to enjoy language, experiment with ways of talking, be exuberant even when you don't feel like it because language can make your world a better play to live." – Lisa Taddeo

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Rashaad Jordan

"It Ain't Over Until It's Over." – Yogi Berra

Photo: Magdalene Kennedy





Photo: Simone van der Koelen of Unsplash.com

When it comes to looking after your health and wellbeing, avoiding an unplanned pregnancy is a big one. But what options can you avail of in Japan?

The pickings are slim, I'm sorry to say. Japan came late to the contraception game. Very late, in fact. The reason for this is quite complicated, but let's look at the ins and outs of the history of birth control in Japan.

A Condensed History of the Pill in Japan

Birth control pills contain hormones—usually a combination of estrogen and progestin—that prevent ovulation in people with ovaries. There are many varieties of birth control pills with different hormone balances, but for simplicity's sake, we'll refer to all contraceptive pills as “the pill.”

The pill was approved for release in the United States in 1960, but for most of its history, the pill was neither legal nor available in Japan. In fact, it took nearly four decades for the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare to approve the pill in 1999.

Why is this? One reason may be that following the outbreak of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, doctors were reluctant to prescribe a pill that would make condoms



What Birth Control Options Do I Have in Japan?

Content Warning: This article discusses abortion and stillborn children.

Caroline Allen (Tottori)

unnecessary for preventing pregnancy. Anything that made people less likely to use condoms was not seen as a good thing.

As abortion has long been tolerated and available in Japan, there is also a suspicion that doctors didn't want the pill to cut in on their profits. Many Japanese doctors also believe (still, in the year 2019) that hormonal contraception is disruptive to a woman's natural cycle. The belief that the pill is unnatural and damaging is the result of years' worth of propaganda targeting the pill.

Despite efforts by the medical community and others to dissuade users of the pill, many Japanese people *did* use an old 60s-era form of the pill, complete with high dose side effects. People wishing to prevent pregnancy had to acquire and take contraceptive pills illicitly; at that time, the pill had only been approved for use in treating menstrual disorders, not preventing pregnancy.

Regardless of the reasons for the decades-long outlawing of the pill in Japan, it's interesting to note the effect of

inaccess to hormonal contraception on Japanese women, especially in the workforce. In Western countries, the pill has affected what kind of careers women choose. Once the pill became available in the United States, especially to unmarried women, women began pursuing different and unprecedented types of university degrees. With delayed fertility, women could choose careers in medicine, veterinary science, architecture. In Japan, the pill was legalized much later and remains an unpopular birth control option today. Perhaps that's one reason why there are far fewer Japanese women working in fields might require them to delay starting a family.

The good news for all uterus-having people in Japan is that you *do* have options.

The Options

1. Condoms

This is by far the most popular means of avoiding pregnancy in Japan. It is believed that around 70% of all Japanese couples looking to avoid pregnancy use the male condom. There's not much difference between Japanese and Western condoms. According to a Tokyo Savvy article about condoms, Japanese condoms are generally "52-54 millimeters in girth (the average Western condom, 53-55 millimeters)." So essentially, there's next to no difference.



Condoms can be bought in drug stores or stores such as Don Quijote. They usually come in packs of 1-3 (from 300-500 yen) with boxes of 5-10 condoms costing about 500-1500 yen. There are several brands available and you might or might not be familiar with them. The most popular brand is Sagami followed by Okamoto and Jex (3). They come in all kinds of sizes, with some being very thin and others thick. Some have extra lubrication, others have warming gel. Basically, you're spoiled for choice.

There are two main types of pills on offer: monophasic and multiphasic. Monophasic means that there is a steady dose of hormone distributed throughout the month. Multiphasic means that the dose of hormones changes. Monophasic pills always come in 21-day packs (that means you take a week of placebo pills, or nothing at all; this gives you a fake period or "withdrawal bleed"). Multiphasic pills can come in 21-day or 28-day packs.

What brands are available? The most popular monophasic pills are Marvelon (マーベロン) and Ortho M-21 (オーソM-21). The most widely used multiphasic pills are Triquilar (トリキュラー), Ange (アンジュ), New Phase (シンフェーズ), Ortho 777 (オーソ777), as well as Marvelon (マーベロン). This Savvy Tokyo article covers the situation very well (4).

For those who can't travel to see a doctor in person, a new solution may now be available in the form of an online service. Japan Health Info can help foreigners use an online consultation form for the pill (5). The consultation fee is 3240 yen, plus 540 yen for the appointment fee. The pill itself costs 3240 yen/month and you can request up to a year's supply at a time.



2. The Pill

You might have been surprised to read that the pill was only legalised in Japan in 1999 and, compared to Western countries, it is used by comparatively few women. There are a few different reasons for this, one being, of course, that Japan has a huge incentive to boost its population. The pill is not usually covered by insurance either. That means you will need to pay out of pocket for it. The only type that is available is the low-dose version and your doctor might be reluctant to prescribe it to you. Be persistent. It costs around 3000 yen a month.

3. Natural Family Planning

This is surprisingly popular. You might not want to risk this one, but many women swear by it. Some estimates put the number of Japanese women using this method of contraception at 9%. If you're interested, you must be trained properly by a specialist in NFP. Unless your Japanese is pretty fluent, that might be hard to come by. You can also use a newfangled device like Daisy or an app like Natural Cycles. Please note that both have their critics. An article in the online publication Surviving in Japan discusses the kinds of basal thermometers that are available in Japanese drugstores (6).

4. The Morning-after-Pill

A few things to note: 1) It is not available over the counter, as in most other countries; 2) it is hugely, massively expensive (like 10,000 yen); and 3) there might be a few pursed lips and raised eyebrows (but look, who cares?). I've been there, done that and didn't have to buy the T-shirt, thank God.

What you'll need to do is this: go to a women's health clinic. You will need to explain that you want the morning after pill. This will probably involve filling out a form. Then you will have a consultation with an obstetrician who will hopefully prescribe the morning after pill to you. The available types are: Planovar (combination) and Norlevo (progesterone only). The former is a shade cheaper.

It should be noted that there has been a petition made to make the morning after pill available over the counter. It was started by Kazuko Fukuda, the chairperson of [#nandenaino](#), a movement in Japan aimed at disseminating knowledge about and providing access to contraceptives. The Japanese Family Planning Association also supports Fukuda's petition. However, at the moment, it requires a doctor's prescription.



5. Intrauterine Contraceptive Devices (IUDs)

IUDs are technically available but not popular. The available types include Multiload and NovaT. There is an excellent overview of the process of getting an IUD inserted while in Japan on [Surviving in Japan: \(7\)](#) The cost can range depending on the type, but it's generally between 30,000 to 50,000 yen. Apparently the hormonal Mirena coil is also available but it is a little more expensive, at 80,000 yen.

6. Other Types of Birth Control

These are basically unavailable in Japan. Speaking from experience, for a long time I relied on the Nuvaring that my mother sent me from Ireland as it is not currently available in Japan (though there was a piece in the annual sex edition of Anan that covered it). Some have even resorted to getting friends to send them what they need in the mail without indicating that it's medicine.

7. Abortion

It's not birth control per se, but it's important to mention while we're on the topic. Abortion is legal in Japan, with restrictions. It is always surgical in nature which means that unlike in other countries, you can't take a pill to induce it. Abortion has been legal in Japan for a long time now. Since 1949, in fact. Some estimates put the number of abortions performed in Japan at 300,000 per year.

That doesn't mean that abortion is super easy to get, however. You will need to stipulate that there are serious social or medical reasons why you cannot continue with the pregnancy. You will also need to get the father of the baby (in reality, it can be any man, even a male friend or coworker) to sign a consent form.

It isn't cheap either. For pregnancies up to 10-12 weeks, the procedure can cost around 100,000-200,000 yen and often has to be paid for in cash. Savvy Tokyo has a wonderful overview of obtaining an abortion in Japan as an expat and what to expect, including stories from other women who have been through the same experience [\(8\)](#). If you find yourself needing to go down this route, know that you're not alone.

8. Pregnancy Tests

Pregnancy tests come in packs of one or two and usually cost around 800 yen. You can find international brands such as Clear Blue, which comes with a helpful box of English instructions, not that it's rocket science to pee on a stick.



Mizuko Kuyo

I wanted to include a short note on the Buddhist tradition of *Mizuko Kuyo*, because I remember being moved, almost to tears when I first heard of it. In every country there are women who decide not to continue with a pregnancy, for whatever reason. Since the 1970s, people in Japan have practiced a special ceremony to honour this reality. All over the country, there are shrines to the souls of children who were never born. The term Mizuko, literally “water baby” refers to a stillborn or aborted child. In

Japanese mythology, it is believed that children who die before their parents are suspended in limbo, not capable of crossing the Sanzu river from this life to the next. The parents of the child have this ceremony to accrue enough credit for the child to make it safely to the afterlife. The would-be parents of an aborted baby can install such a jizo statue and adorn it with red knitted hats and scarves. It’s a way of honouring the soul of a child who couldn’t make it to this world. You can read about the practice here [\(9\)](#).



Useful Resources

1. [Toho Clinic](#) - A popular clinic with an English-speaking female doctor who is familiar with foreign patients
2. TELL Japan has a wonderful resource page that covers everything from daily life to medical emergencies. Here is their page on pregnancy and abortion: [TELL Japan Pregnancy Options](#)
[Japan Health Info](#)
This is a useful service that provides expats living in Japan with a list of English-speaking healthcare that is available to them.
3. [Savvy Tokyo](#) - A great website that is specifically aimed at foreign women living in Japan.

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7. <http://bit.ly/30CanNL>
8. <http://bit.ly/30GobqL>
9. <http://bit.ly/30GDVtu>

Birth Control Glossary

Contraceptive Pill	経口避妊薬	けいこうひにんやく	<i>keikouhininyaku</i>
Birth Control Method/ Device	避妊具	ひにんぐ	<i>hiningu</i>
Abortion	妊娠中絶	にんしんちゅうぜつ	<i>ninshinchuuzetsu</i>
OB-GYN	産婦人科医	さんふじんかい	<i>sanfujinkai</i>
Gynecologist	婦人科医	ふじんかい	<i>fujinkai</i>
Gynecology	婦人科	ふじんか	<i>fujinka</i>
Uterus	子宮	しきゅう	<i>shikyuu</i>
Cervical Cancer	子宮頸癌	しきゅうけいがん	<i>shikyukeigan</i>
Antibiotics	抗生物質	こうせいぶっしつ	<i>kouseibusshitsu</i>
Cervical Cancer Screening / Pap Smear	子宮癌検査	しきゅうがんけんさ	<i>shikyugankensa</i>
IUD	子宮内避妊器具	しきゅうないひにん きぐ	<i>shikyunaihinkigu</i>
Morning After Pill	モーニングアフター ピル		<i>mooninguafutaapiru</i>
Pregnancy Test	妊娠検査	にんしんけんさ	<i>ninshinkensa</i>



WHITE ASHES

How it Feels When You
Can't Stop Thinking
About the Past—
And How You Can Rise

Anonymous

Why Moving Abroad Can Make Anyone Vulnerable

It's natural instinct for humans to seek a sense of belonging, and being a foreigner in Japan can make it feel like that's impossible. Add other stresses, emotions, and traumas on top of that, and it becomes quite a heavy load to carry on just one set of shoulders. It might even be enough to break a person. It almost broke me. I'm sharing my story in hopes that someone going through something similar can relate to my experiences. There is light at the end of even the darkest tunnel.

When your mental health is in decline, it doesn't bleed or bruise or turn a strange color. The signs are far more complex than that. Maybe it's debilitating fatigue that no amount of coffee or sleep can get ahead of, or the loss of motivation for simple tasks like cooking and cleaning. It could be a devastating sense of apathy that makes you care less about your job and more about the next time you can get plastered. Maybe it's realizing that no matter how far you run, you can't escape the random things that remind you of the bad thing that happened that you can't talk to your family about. It can manifest physically, like rapidly gaining or losing a lot of weight, or compulsive substance use, or finding large chunks of hair at the bottom of your shower—but these somatic signs are symptoms of a deeper problem. A problem of the mind, the heart, the soul.

And when you are experiencing these problems while living in a foreign land, no matter how familiar you are with the language and customs, at the end of the day you're faced with daily reminders that you're different from the people who surround you.

Content Warning: this article discusses sexual assault and abuse along with depression, anxiety, substance abuse and eating disorders. For help and support, please consult the resource list at the bottom of the article.

From the editor: We're all vulnerable to falling into unstable and unhappy relationships when we first move to a new country. We're often not well-versed in the local culture, illiterate, and completely on our own. It's easy to fall in with people who do not have our best interests at heart and, with our cultural, societal and moral axes turned upside down, sometimes we do not even recognize these relationships as unhealthy. For this author, the relationship had a tragic outcome but, with the right support, she began the process of getting better.

My Background

Before I even graduated from university, I had already battled substance abuse issues, depression, and anorexia. I look at photos of myself from my university days, in shock, disgust, and an overwhelming sense of sadness. But, in the end, I was able to finish my degree with honors and an undergraduate thesis publication. The worst of it was behind me, right? After moving to Japan, however, things spiralled downhill rather quickly. I had never addressed the low self esteem, poor coping mechanisms, and depression I had struggled with in childhood and in university.



A summer fling had left me completely heartbroken the day before I moved into my tiny new apartment in rural Japan. I didn't speak Japanese and I had no friends. For the first few weeks, I didn't even have internet or a working phone connection. I was utterly isolated in an empty apartment in an unfamiliar place unable to even call my mother. *I was completely vulnerable.* It only took a few days after my initial arrival for him to get his claws on me.

The Man Who Sank His Claws Into Me

He was another expat in the same teaching program, handsome enough and a bit older. On day three in my new town, he asked me to sleep with him. Feeling absolutely nothing inside, I agreed. I had little attraction to him and felt numb to the experience, but I was grateful for the human contact and distraction. He seemed infatuated with me, and that made me feel a messed-up sense of security. I began spending all of my free time with him. After a week, he told me I was his girlfriend now, and I passively just let it happen. I didn't really care at first, but after a while I slowly began to develop more and more of a dependence on him. I mistook it for love, but love isn't constantly being terrified of being alone. Love isn't obsessive and clingy. Dependence is.

The Relationship That Turned Toxic

After a month, he stopped being the awkwardly sweet and earnestly attentive guy who seemed to be infatuated with me. His true self gradually came to light. His words to me became meaner and meaner. He was constantly showing me that he was stronger and smarter and better than me, and that I *needed* him because I was dumber and weaker and incapable of making it on my own in this country. It was like boiling a frog. I didn't have the self esteem to realize how deeply manipulative and wrong he was. I internalized his words until I actually *became* dumber and weaker and incapable of making it on my own. His put-downs escalated into full blown control over random parts of my life. He would dictate which side of the dinner table I should sit at, or what I could and couldn't eat. He would joke that I had Stockholm syndrome for staying with him. He would joke about how he would murder me. He berated and criticized me at every opportunity. He'd make blunt comments about my body that cut like a knife. What started as playful spanking escalated into vicious slaps that left red hand prints on my body. I repeatedly told him to stop and that it hurt, to which he'd reply, "What did you expect?"

He Isolated Me From Others

I had only made two friends in Japan, and I hid from them how terrible he was to me. He told me that they weren't my real friends, and that I was blind if I didn't see that. I was so dependent on him and in such deep denial about how bad it had gotten that I continued spending all of my time with him, and waiting for the nice guy from the beginning to come back. But that guy wasn't real, and things just continued to get worse. It all came crashing down six months in, during the last night I ever spent with him.

The Darkest Moment in Our Relationship—The One That Almost Broke Me

We had been fighting. He was talking about how much he supports Donald Trump. He's from a distant conservative country. I'm an American woman of color with half a brain. You can probably figure out how that conversation went. I was so viscerally angry and disgusted, but swallowed my feelings. I don't like conflict, and I generally push my feelings aside to avoid it in all of my relationships. We went to a bar and had a quick drink, where he began unsolicitedly criticizing my Golden Week plans, saying I was shallow for visiting two different countries for just a few days instead of dedicating a longer period to one. That I only cared about checking items off of a list and that I didn't care about the places themselves. I was again offended by these comments but after putting up a minimal fight, I just let it go again.

Late that night, we got back to his place. A week earlier, he had asked me if I wanted to take Japanese lessons with him, which I eagerly agreed to. I thought it would be a good way to add some positivity into our relationship. But when we got to his place, he told me he was going the next day without me. He told me he didn't know why he asked me to join him because he didn't want me to go with him. I finally broke down and started crying. He offered a weak apology and went to sleep. It was late, so I decided to stay the night. I turned away from him and fell asleep in tears. I was woken up a few hours later by his hand groping at me. I was shocked and still half asleep. I laid there, unsure of how to stop what was happening. I glanced at the clock. It was after 3 AM. His clumsy, unwanted foreplay soon escalated. He climbed on top of me. I felt my mind glaze over, and my soul leave my body. I felt numb inside, but in a different way from the first time we slept together. I just waited for him to finish, and then I drifted back to sleep.

The Aftermath

He left me shortly after that, realizing he had gone too far. I was left all alone to pick up the shattered, bloody pieces of everything that had happened. I was unable to get out of bed for a week. Takeout containers and dirty laundry littered the floor. I was in physical pain, running a fever, and completely incapable of leaving my bed. I had to process what happened that last night in the wake of losing everything that had created the cruel illusion of security I had become dependent on. I felt like I was outside of my body. It was as if I was watching myself from far away. I'd look in the mirror and not recognize the face staring back as my own. I understood logically that it was me, but I had the distinct sensation of staring at a complete stranger.

After a week, I had no choice but to return to work. I was sluggish, apathetic, and overwhelmingly exhausted. I look back and wonder how I got through the day. I would return home and go directly to bed with a shot of vodka or four. I felt like I had lost everything.

I didn't know who I was in Japan without him.

Recognising That it Was Rape

It took a month before I even registered what happened that last night as rape. I had, after all, been completely unconscious when he started. I had been crying. I had gone to sleep not wanting to sleep with him. I hadn't wanted it the entire time it happened. I never reciprocated anything he did. He never asked if it was okay, or if I was okay. He just took what he wanted, rolled over, and went back to sleep. I started blaming myself for what had happened. I should have gone home that night. I should have told him to stop. I should have pushed him off of me. But in the back of my head, I knew that none of those things would have been an option for me. *When you are repeatedly put down by the person you depend on, you aren't strong enough to cross them.* When that person hurts you, you take it. When they leave you, you break. I was trying to collect the burnt up debris of my broken soul, but every time I tried to pick up the pieces they crumbled into hopeless white ash. They disintegrated into nothing.

I Had to Hit the Bottom to Get Better

I felt like I was dying. I started having nightmares. I'd be in bed, physically paralyzed. The shadowy figure of a man would slowly begin to approach me. I'd try frantically to make my body move. I still recall the sensation in my limbs as I desperately tried to move them. I couldn't get away. I couldn't even scream. And the shadow just kept coming closer. It was the same dream every time. And the nightmares didn't end when I woke up. Seeing certain things that reminded me of him would send me back to feeling outside of my own body. A sinking, nauseating dread would take over until there was nothing left. I'd become too numb to even be afraid. I finally reached out to others. I needed help. I wasn't going to make it. And that's when it started to get better.



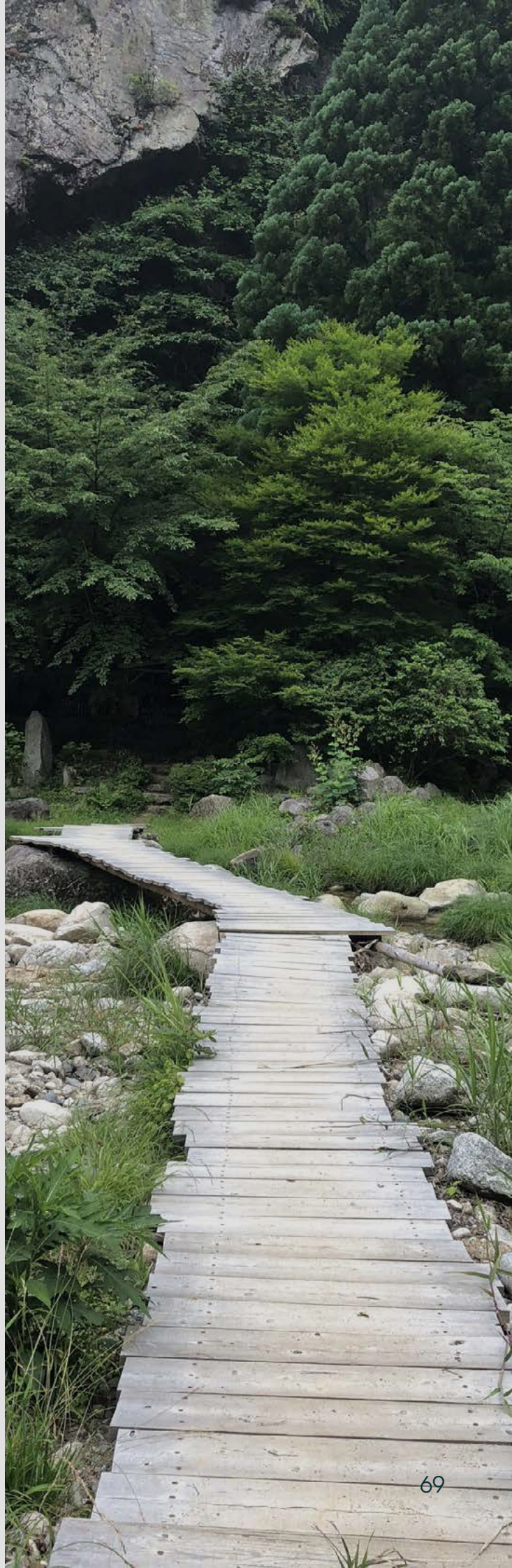
Finding Hope in the Form of Friends

I met them two excruciating months after he left me: the people who would save me. They were just so . . . happy. They were a big group of friends who lived about an hour away from me. They came to Japan at the same time as me, and had been friends from the beginning. And they welcomed me to their group with open arms. It was March then—cherry blossom season. A time to celebrate rebirth. Without even knowing what had happened, they gave me a place to stay with them. It was the first breath of fresh air I had experienced since I started living here. I began spending my weekends with them. There was a carefree sense of generosity that characterized the group, and I felt my old self slowly begin to reemerge. I shared with a few people what had happened. I saw their hearts break for me. I realized that they cared about me—they cared about me a lot. And they reminded me of something very important, something I hadn't experienced in a very, very long time. They reminded me how to have fun. We would go out on adventures to explore our rural prefecture, and find all of the beautiful hidden gems it had to offer. We'd have parties and travel and sing karaoke. I remembered that once upon a time, I had been a vibrant, funny person. That person started to come back. She rose from the most hopeless of white ashes.

Things Aren't Perfect

I'm not saying that making good friends and having fun solved everything and my life is perfect now. Certain things still trigger me. I'll still get nightmares now and then. I still have to see him around, which sends anxiety and fear shooting through my body. The lack of mental health resources in rural Japan, especially for foreigners, makes it nearly impossible to seek professional help. I can't talk to my parents about this, because what happened to me here is basically a parent's worst nightmare. I am still too ashamed to tell them that their little girl was raped. I can't do that to them.

I still struggle with my self esteem, and am constantly fighting the inner demons that tell me I'm worthless and ugly. It's a battle for me not to look in the mirror and instantly pick out the things I hate about my appearance. It's hard for me to feel beautiful. I am sometimes worry I am too damaged and too broken to experience real love. That the girl with the nightmares and the self esteem issues and the random triggers is unlovable and doomed to be alone. These are real fears and real insecurities I continue to fight against every single day.



Your Hardships Don't Define You

I don't starve myself or drink alone anymore. My support system has a lot to do with that. It helps me fight back against these fears so that I no longer have to be a slave to them. It reminds me that what I went through didn't damage me, it made me stronger. It made me capable of handling anything. It made me wise and it made me powerful. I went through an abusive relationship in a foreign country after a long battle with depression, anorexia, and substance abuse.

And yet, here I stand.

I stand tall, with my head held high and a smile on my face. I am not damaged goods—I'm just a person who has been through some rough times, and overcame them. I try to stop and remind myself that I'm more than just what I've been through, that there's more to who I am than trauma and fear and pain.

I'm a vibrant, passionate person with a lot to offer. I love early modern philosophy, nineties hip hop, and classic literature. I make my friends laugh, and put smiles on my student's faces. I have a deep appreciation for beautiful nature, good jokes, and lively parties. I try my best to be kind and generous to the people I love, and to reach out to help people when I can. I try to remind myself that someone worth loving wouldn't turn away because of what I've been through. That someone to stand by would accept these parts of my past, and be kind and gentle to me so that I never have to go through something similar ever again.

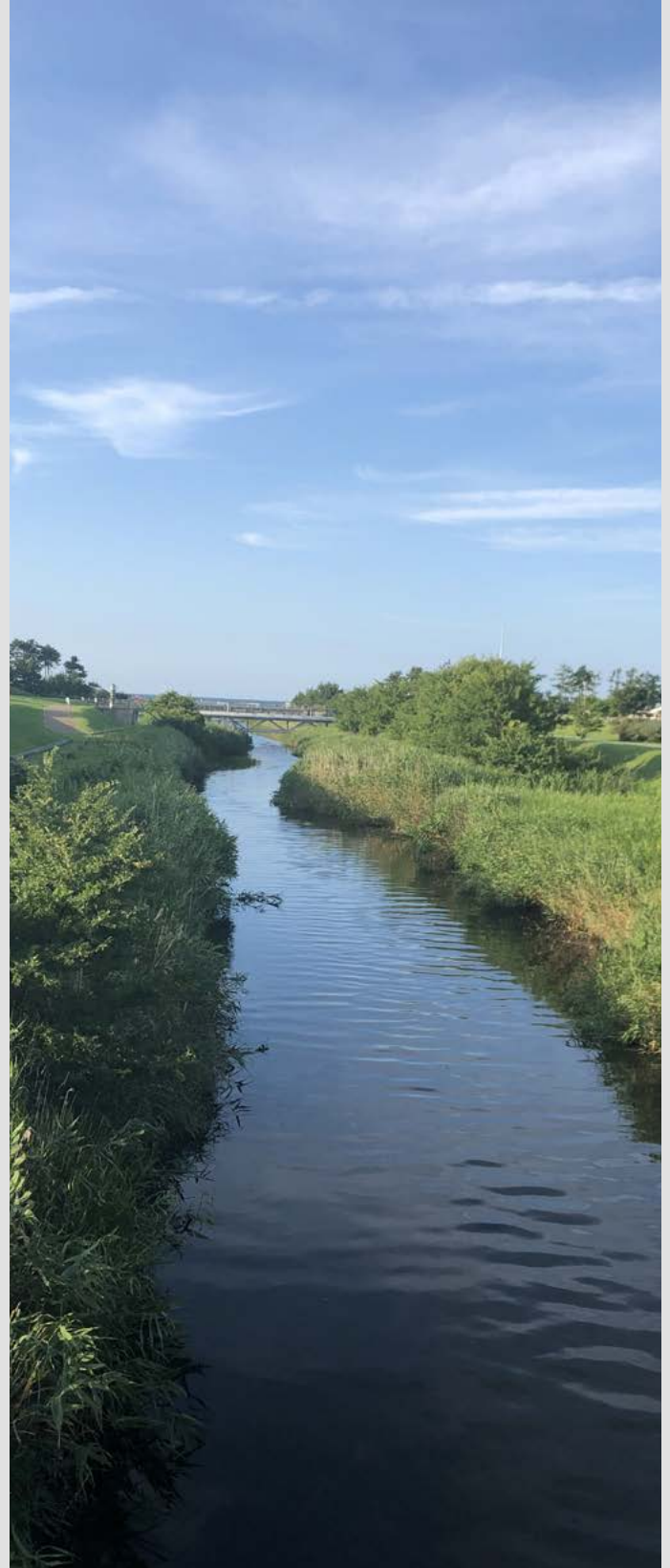
Being uplifted by others is vital to overcoming the dark side of human existence. Being surrounded by people who care about you, and make every effort to empathize with your journey and your pain while sharing their own with you is essential to our survival. We shouldn't carry our burdens ourselves. Good people with pure intentions can help us bear some of the weight, and we can help them with their burdens in return. No one is meant to go through life alone.

Life is Messy but Friendship Will See You Through

When August came and it was time for some of the people that had become family to me to go home, it was a blow. But I knew I would be okay again, that life would go on and I'd be able to laugh and smile again. I knew I'd be okay because I met them in the first place. Even though it was hard to say goodbye, the joy, kindness, and generosity they offered me at my lowest point helped me become strong enough to handle hardships again. They made all the difference for me. People . . . *people* are what make life worth living. They can hurt us, and cause us to suffer. But people are the reason we're able to get back up when we've been knocked down.

Life is messy, and no one makes it out alive. Everyone has their own journey, and everyone has accumulated their

own wounds along the way. Keep good people close to you to help you bandage up your wounds, and let yourself do the same for them. Quality relationships and strong bonds, however they may manifest, are everything. They are the lifeblood of human existence. They determine whether we rise from the ashes of our pain, or crumble and disappear into the wind. Reach out to your loved ones and let them help you. Rise.



If you have been the victim of sexual violence or are in an abusive relationship, please contact the TELL Lifeline at 03-5774-0992 (open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day).

TELL ([Tokyo English Life Line](#)); English support services available, including counselling.

Other resources for victims and survivors of relationship violence:

Sexual Assault Relief Centre ([SARC](#)); English support is sometimes available. SARC staff can help arrange this.

[Police Prefectural Consultation Telephone numbers](#); English language support is unlikely to be available.

[Hokkaido/Sapporo Support Group](#); Describes police procedure when reporting assault.

[The Japan Legal Support Center \(Houterasu\)](#) Houterasu provide legal consultations in English for a small fee.

[The Japan Federation of Bar Associations](#) Tel: 03-5312-5850; Legal consultations are available in English.

[Victim of crime support guide](#) produced by Japanese Ministry of Justice; This guide provides information in English about legal process and what to expect if you have been the victim of a crime in Japan, including rape and sexual assault.

[AMDA International Medical Information Center](#); Tel (Tokyo): 03-5285-8088, Tel (Kansai): 06-4395-0555; English is available; open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday; Medical referral service.

[Tokyo Metropolitan Health and Medical Information Center Foreign Language Assistance](#); Tel: 03-5285-8181 (9 a.m. to 8 p.m.), Emergency Interpretation Service 03-5285-8185 (Weekdays: 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.; Weekend/holidays: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.)



Running Changes Lives; It Changed Mine

Roger Berman (Tokyo)



I became a runner at 2:49 p.m. on Friday, March 11, 2011—the exact time the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami struck.

I arrived in Japan in 1984 and went through a fairly routine existence of spending two years learning Japanese whilst teaching part-time to pay my rent. In 1989, I began a career in character and brand licensing utilizing my newly acquired Japanese-language skills to act as a business bridge between Japan and my native

UK (yeah, I know it sounds rather lofty but I was a bit idealistic in those days!). I married, had a family, adopted a Buddhist worldview, started my own company and am now living a satisfying life. When my mother-in-law passed away, we bought a family cemetery plot with our family surname inscribed in katakana on the stone. So, unless anything beyond expectations happens, I will spend the rest of my days—alive and then dead—in this adopted land of residence.

Reassessing Life

The events of 3/11 happened as I was approaching my 50s. I was in the Akasaka business district of Tokyo and as the quake struck, I was the only person to instinctively hunker under a table at a Doutor coffee shop while the Japanese patrons in the store sat in their chairs looking through the large glass windows as the tall buildings swayed. Then a few days later, as the doom and gloom atmosphere prevailed with the government and TEPCO struggling to contain the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, I visited a hotel in central Tokyo to receive iodine pills for my family from a British Embassy emergency team. Luckily, no radiation cloud came to Tokyo and we all survived.

One thing that stuck in my mind about 3/11 was a TV news report about bedridden patients at an old-age care facility on the Tohoku coast who were swept away with no survivors. Of course, there were many other harrowing experiences of death, suffering and, positively, survival, but to me, the thought of being bed-ridden and unable to escape in an old-age home in Japan lingered with me more than anything else. Statistically, it is a real possibility I might end up in such a situation in my advanced years. That scared me (and still does) and so I decided to keep healthy, fit and mobile for as long as possible—and seriously be able to escape a tsunami!



Running to the Rescue

Running was the life-changing answer.

I joined Jindajji Runners Club, a local Japanese running club in June 2011. Fast-forward to today and I have completed six full marathons and numerous half marathon and shorter distance races. I am not a fast runner, more of a “back-of-the-pack” type, but I am proud to have always completed my races without “DNFing” (did not finish). The best piece of advice I was given by a veteran runner was to always smile, not grimace, no matter how hard the race was. Simple and effective.

Running has also provided me with an opportunity to provide life-changing opportunities to others.

One of them is the Knights In [White Lycra](#), a Tokyo-based international group of people who ‘get fit and give back’ through charity sporting and leisure activities. Since its founding in 2013, KIWL has raised over ¥60 million for Japanese charities, primarily aiming to improve the lives of abused and neglected children living in care in Japan. Its flagship fundraising activity is an annual four-day, 500-kilometer group bike ride through multiple prefectures and ending at a children’s home.

For running, I organize the annual KIWL Go-Go Charity Run. It’s not a race but is an untimed run that finishes at a kids’ care home in Kawagoe, Saitama where we are greeted by the children we are raising funds for. Go-Go aims to bring together runners of all levels so

we have a 55-kilometer ultra-distance starting in Tokyo, a 21-kilometer half marathon distance and an easier 10-kilometer course. All the run courses are along the banks of the Arakawa and Iruma Rivers, finishing at a water park. Participation is open to anyone—and we more than welcome *CONNECT* readers and JETs to the event. More details and event registration [here](#).

The sporting activities of KIWL have benefited two amazing charities that work to better the lives of kids in care. One is [Mirai-no-Mori](#), a nonprofit organisation that creates outdoor nature programs such as summer and winter camps for abused, neglected, and orphaned children in Japan, supporting their growth into happy and successful young adults. The other is [YouMeWe](#), another nonprofit that helps children growing up in institutionalized homes to become fully capable and financially independent young adults. YouMeWe does this by teaching the children skills such as digital literacy, communication skills, and connectedness with others in the community and around the world through mentoring programs and online exchange programs.

Funds raised this year by KIWL and its Go-Go Run will benefit YouMeWe’s programs. If you can’t participate in the run, I encourage you to check out the activities of YouMeWe and Mirai-no-Mori and consider volunteering for them to help change disadvantaged kids lives for the better.

parkrun Comes To Japan

Another aspect of running that has changed my life is [parkrun](#).

parkrun started in 2004 in the UK and is a free volunteer-led event where people can run, jog, or walk a timed 5-kilometer course. It has become part of a Saturday morning routine for over six million registered participants worldwide. Its success is due in part to its openness, diversity, simplicity, sense of community and engagement as it encourages people of all ages and abilities to take part. parkrun is a great first step for beginning runners and a smart weekly performance check-in for advanced runners. Walking is absolutely fine too and the volunteers will be there to support and encourage the participants' efforts, however long it takes to complete the 5-kilometer course.

[parkrun japan](#) kicked off in April 2019, making Japan the 21st country to join the parkrun global family. Its first event was held at the [Futako-Tamagawa parkrun](#) in Tokyo and now parkrun is expanding around Japan. Futako-Tamagawa parkrun is my local parkrun where more than 100 people turn up weekly. When I don't run, I volunteer, because without the volunteers there would be no parkrun. A nice thing about our location is that it takes place on the Tama River, and because Futako-Tamagawa is an easily accessible location from central Tokyo we regularly get "parkrun tourists." These are people whose home parkrun is in another country or location and have

purposefully come to tick a Japan parkrun off their list of venues. As a result, at the post-run coffee in the parkside Starbucks, we get to meet interesting people from all over the world and hear their parkrun stories.

parkrun running and volunteering has given me a sense of purpose—to get more people who think that they could never be active to become active and lead a healthy lifestyle.

Running has also introduced new adventures and possibilities into my life including trail running, which feeds into my love of the mountains, and triathlon. I am aiming to join my first triathlon challenge in 2020 (an appropriate year for sporting activities!). I run and cycle and am now learning to swim—a challenge I find enjoyable. If you had asked me 15 years ago if I could ever see myself doing the things I do now, it would have been a categorical no. But running does seem to make the seemingly impossible, possible.

Roger Berman is president of Tokyo-based ZenWorks, a lifestyle and sports brand licensing agency and consultancy that has worked with major companies such as Kikkoman, Benesse Corporation and TV Tokyo Communications. Roger is passionate about helping others—whether it is through work, family, volunteering, travel or sporting activities. He relishes adventure and new challenges and at 57 he is confident this old dog will continue to learn new tricks for many years to come.



— Gunma Games 2019 —

A Tale of Villainy, Memery, and Family

Aidan Koch (Gunma)

When you move to a new place, it can be hard to find new friends. It's hard enough when you move across the country, let alone across the world. I've been here in Japan for about a year, and in that time, I have made many friends and discoveries to enliven my time here.

But with each year comes fresh faces to Gunma, and they do not have those same connections. So recently, a few other Gunmans and I carried on a tradition of friendly competition to help everyone get to know each other.

The goal was the Golden Cabbage, but the prize was the friends made along the way. This is the story of Gunma Games 2019.

Setting the Scene

Gunma Games has been an annual tradition of the Gunma Area JET Organization, or GAJET for brevity's sake, for seven years now. GAJET is all about bringing people together to make Gunma feel like home. I joined the 2019 staff to lend a hand.

It's not common knowledge outside of Gunma that there exist four different regions: Tone-Agatsuma, Seibu, Chubu, and Tobu. In addition to the executive positions, there also exist representatives for each region. I sit on the committee as Tobu's representative, and my main purpose is to motivate my fellow Tobu-ites to attend GAJET events.

Talking Up Tobu's Heart

Petty inter-region rivalries exist but during Gunma Games, they tend to be at their most volatile. After all, there's nothing better than a day of competition to stoke the flames of contention. Tobu, as the reigning champions of 2017 and 2018, was the region to beat.

Due to its large size, Seibu always has players who are unable to join any games, and it's common to see their members defect to other regions for a better chance to play. The 2018 Gunma Games saw a Tobu victory, though the team only had seven Tobu-ites—another nine Seibu-ian defectors had joined them to make the odds fair. Similar circumstances brought about the 2017 victory.

This year however, I wanted our victory or defeat to be our own. It was my responsibility to whip up Tobu's fighting spirits. We would have the most heart at the games, if not first place.

Rallying & Tallying the Troops

From the first meeting with all of the new Tobu-ites, I was on the warpath. I promoted the games relentlessly, to the annoyance of many people. But I didn't care. I wanted to see us go out there and give it our all, regardless of what comments the Peanut Gallery might hurl our way.

Upon game day, the fruits of my labors were readily visible. 2018 saw seven Tobu-ites take the field. 2019 saw twenty.

Seibu outnumbered us 3:1, but Tobu saw more than 60% of its JETs in attendance, the highest participation rate of all regions. That is not to say, however, that we had an easy time competing.

In the final week before Gunma Games, I extended my fire-starting rhetoric to the rest of the prefecture in a uniquely 21st-century fashion.

Making Memes by Many Means

While relaxing at home on a Wednesday night, a mischievous thought crept through my head: why not post a meme to make this a bit more fun? With due haste, I drafted a simple post for the Gunma ALTs Facebook page, a cheeky elbow jab aimed at Tobu's upcoming opponents:

Inferior Regions:
Can't you just give us a chance?

Tobu:



And with that the levees broke. I soon shared a second meme, and within the hour another ten more had been created. Pride, provocateur-ish proclivity, and a dichotomic desire for controlled chaos had propelled me into a spiral of Tobu Trash Talk.



Before the night was over return volleys had been sent, though they were primarily impartial. While some were made by fellow Tobu-ites, the greatest ones instead ribbed the sudden and unprecedented deluge of memes on a normally quiet communal page.

Seibu:
We have all the people, so we must be better than you

Also Seibu:

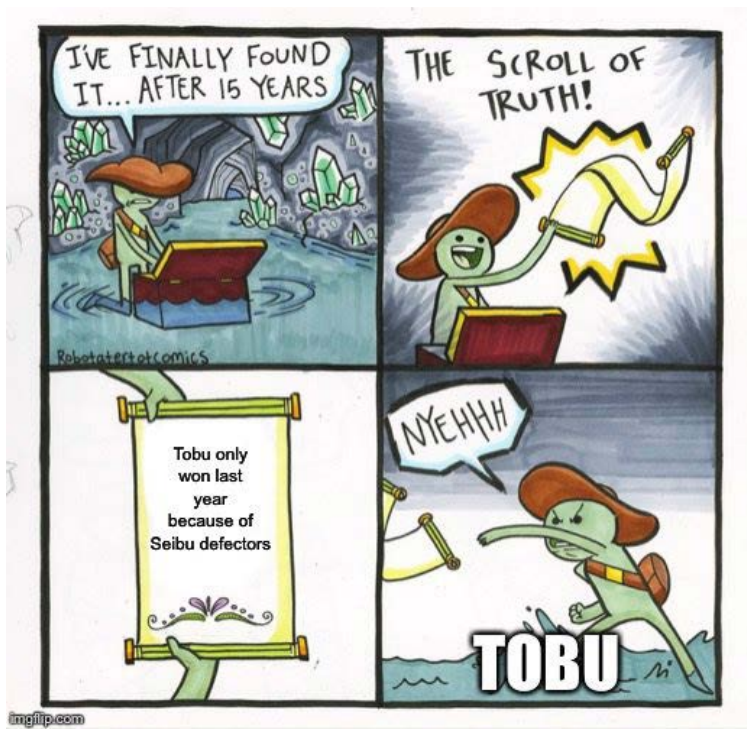


It was the next morning that the counter attacks began in earnest.



Make Memes, not War

Mathew Masters, GAJET Treasurer and Seibu-ian, declared himself my rival, and he joined with Marissa Danielsen, a compatriot of his, to match me in battle. What began as a flash in the pan had set the forest ablaze, an occasion that brought together all Gunmans.



I couldn't let this stand unchecked, and I soon responded with similar memes, again helped by my fellow Tobu-ites.



People not even attending the games observed the Meme War. As if a prelude, we were able to talk some trash but still grow comfortable with each other. Eventually, amidst the chaos, a sense of togetherness came about.



Wholesome memes supplanted the aggressive ones, and we were able to laugh at the absurdity of it all. For all of our talk, we were still going to be friends at the end of it, probably even better than before.

To look back on all of this as “Patient Zero” was a funny feeling. I had started a cause that everyone rallied behind, even if I had to put my pride on the line for it.

Meaningful Memes into Meaningful Moments

As the pyromaniac who ignited and tended the fire, I, and Tobu by proxy, would be the target of all other regions’ ire. Memes became rallying cries, and when the day came to walk the walk, there was an electric tension in the air.

After three days of battle in the hearts and minds of the Gunmans, it was time to fight upon the fields of Takasaki. For four hours we battled across concrete, grass, and sky, falling, rising, rallying, and screaming until finally the Golden Cabbage was awarded to the victor.

Seibu

We went out and gave our best, but on that day it wasn’t good enough. Despite two prior championships, this time we placed fourth. Dead last.

Afterwards, people broke my balls about how I must feel bad about talking a big game only to choke, but I responded in a way that surprised some of them: I smiled and said I didn’t care. Which some may not believe, but it’s the truth.

One person told me that he respected how I had motivated an entire prefecture to come and partake. Another mentioned that it might be good to learn to keep my voice down. Yet another said that I suck and should feel bad (thanks, Vincent).

However, I was glad to receive each comment. It meant that I had made them feel some kind of way, and that was more than enough. I felt like I was talking to my family, and that was what really made it all worth it.

Family through Villainy

I cannot speak for anyone else, but for me Gunma Games is about more than a gold spray-painted papier-mâché cabbage. Gunma Games is about all Gunmans coming together in friendly competition, pushing each other to beat each other.

We have come to the heart of Japan from all over the world, and relying on each other it makes it easier for us to be strangers in a strange land together. Summing up that type of relationship in a word is difficult, but “family” truly feels the most apt.

And if I have to get egg all over my face to help create that relationship, then I will be sure to bring the first dozen.

Aidan Koch is a second-year JET in Kiryu-shi, Gunma-ken. As an active member of the JET community, he has helped plan GAJET events and independently interviewed fellow Gunmans on his blog, [Memoirs of a Gaijin](#). He likes to write, meet new people, and travel whenever he can, so being in the heart of Honshu makes them all quite easy. Always happy to study Japanese, or share a drink and conversation, he does his best to keep himself busy.

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Hoong Shao Ting

"Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower." – Albert Camus

Photo: Tanya McDonald





MAMA MO IN SET



Nestled in a laid-back neighbourhood in Setagaya is a small, unassuming apartment, identical to all the apartments surrounding it. You wouldn't think that inside that apartment, 26m² in size and tucked

into a two-storey complex, there is an entire other world unfolding—one filled with enchanted forests and cursed cities, brimming with continents and countries steeped in a rich history of empires, wars, and heroes. One which houses a plethora of different faiths and cultural beliefs that either meld harmoniously or collide viciously . . . One where even your life depends on the roll of a die.

MGIC AND MSTERS TAGAYA

Natalie Andrews (Tokyo)

IN THIS CASE, A PARTICULAR 20-SIDED DIE.

Yeah, that's right, all you nerds out there know what I'm talking about—Dungeons and Dragons (D&D for short), a tabletop fantasy roleplaying game in which a seven-dice set is used to determine whether your declared actions will succeed beyond your wildest dreams, or fail so drastically that instead of attacking the enemy, you trip and impale yourself upon your own sword. The plot follows wherever your imagination takes you, which could be to an ancient underground citadel carved from sorcery, where every step is fraught with danger . . . or to your local tavern where you can attempt to hit on all the patrons and woo the waitress with shoddy card tricks.

The apartment where all these thrilling, *totally not nerdy* events unfold belongs to Stephen Hemmer, an American ALT on their third year into the JET Programme. I was invited to join Stephen's D&D group and became curious as to how they entered this hobby. Initially, Stephen said they'd been participating in tabletop gaming sessions since college, delving into a wide variety of extremely edgy-sounding games like 'Geist: The Sin-Eaters' and 'New World of Darkness.' It seems once one goes down the rabbit hole of tabletop gaming, it's hard to stop. "Some friends in my hometown learned I became nerdier in college," Stephen said to me, "and they wanted to try D&D." And so, Stephen started running—or, 'DM-ing'—their own sessions (DM stands for Dungeon Master).

Stephen brought their enthusiasm over to Japan where D&D became an avenue to gather people together and build friendships that have lasted even after members departed for their home countries. Stephen puts it less delicately—"I wanted to force people to interact with me on a weekly basis. So I made them play 'Chronicles of Darkness.' And then my friend wanted to run D&D, so we played that. The group liked it, so we played more of it."

As I'm one such person who's been newly enlisted into this weekly interaction, suddenly I find myself thinking those words are vaguely ominous.

D&D sessions are filled with ups and downs, I find. The most difficult aspect seems to be lining up everyone's schedules up so everyone's able to

meet, but the highlights come through playing the game and finding unexpectedly creative ways to overcome obstacles. One such experience involved a gnome and a dwarf stacked up in a trench coat, pretending to be Totally Normal and Chill in order to get information from a bandit hideout.

For those wanting to flex their creative muscles, Stephen thinks D&D is good creative practice, particularly because they try to write daily. D&D scenarios serve as perfect prompts, even if pacing has to be adjusted and certain events have to be changed. The vast variety of different character types you can choose, ranging from elusive, mysterious dark elves to brash and idiotic barbarian dragon-people, allows you to examine human (or nonhuman) nature from a wholly different perspective.

You'll get the opportunity to tap into your imagination and stretch it beyond its limits. The heart of D&D lies in its intrinsic creative nature—while other media like novels and movies offer vast worlds to dive into, it's D&D that nudges you to fill in the gaps yourself and build your own world and characters, each with a unique reason for being. Sentence by sentence, die roll by die roll, each player can harness the power of storytelling and be an active creator instead of a passive consumer.

But the most positive factor is clear when I ask Stephen what benefits creating D&D meetups has had. "I keep up with a group of friends consistently. It's also a good excuse to make new friends when the old JETs leave." The answer is short and to the point, but when we continue to talk Stephen's affection for their friends is clear, especially when we discuss the ones who have recently left Japan.

In the end, D&D has more benefits than creating a home away from home (away from home) where you can beat up dirty goblins and extort hapless nobles with your friends to your heart's content.

For those who live by themselves, regular D&D sessions provide that dose of socialisation that gives them a break from the monotony of everyday life. It's all too easy to fall into a cycle of isolation, especially when you've moved here in Japan from overseas and your days start to revolve around commuting from work to home, and then to work again.



It's a great way to meet people and establish solid friendships. What better bonding method than the threat of certain death? And, depending on who's there, you could even put a spin on your playstyle by incorporating language exchanges. Soon you might find the Japanese words for "cursed quarterstaff" come to mind more readily than "good morning."



If you live in a bigger city, there's likely to be a few tabletop gaming groups around—check your local Facebook groups or Meetup and there's sure to be something around. For those of you living in smaller areas, it's possible you may have to gather your own group and start from scratch. Fear not, there's plenty of resources out there for novices. Part of the appeal of D&D is that it's very beginner-friendly, and there are experienced players like Stephen who are always willing to lend a hand.

Also, it's fun to blunder your way to the finish line together, casting spells that hit either absolutely zero damage or obliterate your opponent—and half the city—into dust. So why not take the leap, roll the die, and create some Dungeons and Dragons yourself?

Natalie Andrews is a first-year JET still exploring the tangled concrete jungle of 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. A lover of writing, editing, and drawing (badly), her life is a work in progress, so her blog [Journal of a JET](#) is still getting its feet on the ground. One day . . . one day she'll have something on there.

Stephen Hemmer, who offered their insight and experiences for this article, is a third-year JET based in Tokyo. They help run the Tokyo JET Artists' Group and spend most of their time trying to get their friends to actually make some art. You can find some of Stephen's short stories and art pieces on [Wordpress](#).


Photos:
Natalie Andrews
Ashley Hirasuna



MAKING SPACE FOR CONNECTION

A chat with Meetup organiser
Kerry Drew

Natalie Andrews (Tokyo)



Relocating overseas is an incredible adventure, but it can also be a lonely experience, especially after you're settled into your new home. There's a difficult process to go through when you want to extend your social roots a little more but you're unsure on how to actually do so. That's where the internet comes in handy! If you've turned to looking online for events that'll get you out of the house, you may have heard about a site called [Meetup](#).

Meetup is an excellent site for people to create or join hobby or interest-focused groups, whether that be hiking outings, book clubs, programming groups, or cooking lessons. You can get off your butt and get involved in local community events, explore the outer reaches of your city, or huddle with others in a cosy cafe to do some writing. The fundamental nature of Meetup is that it offers like-minded people the chance to connect with each other—which can be the key to settling down in an unfamiliar country.

I was able to talk with Meetup organiser Kerry Drew about his group "[Omatsuri Japan](#)" and how it gets both foreigners and locals more involved in Japanese culture and history as well as giving them the opportunity to bond with each other. An expat from America, Kerry has been living in Japan for a total of nine years, and "Omatsuri Japan" has been around for the most recent three and a half of those years!

Q. What got you interested in Meetup.com?

A. After coming to Japan, I wanted to form a band, so I started a folk-jam Meetup, with only marginal success. Despite sending out a list of tunes, and links for members to practice, nobody did, so it was chaos, and the banjo player was annoyed because I asked him not to drink whisky until after the session.

But I persevered. . . . I then started a "Jug-Band" Meetup, and we kept it going long enough to perform a set of music at the annual Yokohama Jug Band festival before it fell apart.

A. My main group (of the three we're allowed as organisers) is called "Omatsuri Japan." I didn't really start it, but adopted it, since the original Japanese organiser held only five or six Meetups before quitting. I don't think he knew how to design Meetups people wanted to attend. Since Japanese festivals and culture are a hobby of mine, I thought maybe I could keep it growing, and besides, there were already 350 members. So, I thought, why not try?

Q. Why did you start "Omatsuri Japan"?



Q. What's your favourite Meetup event/activity to hold (or has been your favourite)?

A. I particularly like the two annual Sawara Shinto cart festivals in Katori-shi, Chiba-ken. Sawara was famous in Edo times for producing the very best shoyu, sake, and miso, and continues to do so! This picturesque town full of beautiful old Edo, Meiji, and Taisho-era buildings is located out in the green countryside along the riverside, over an hour by train from Tokyo.

The summer and fall festivals originated in the 15th century and feature amazing ornate carved wooden festival carts carrying 3-4 metre-tall lifelike figures of historic or mythological characters, as well as a team of drummers, flute players, and other musicians who ride below.

Accompanied by beautifully garbed, fan-waving, singing dancers, they roll through the streets and along the canal of this beautiful preserved Edo-period merchant town.

Besides the amazing floats, music, dancing, wonderful street food, and arts and crafts, being in an environment of beautiful, old-fashioned shops, bridges, shrines, houses, the willow-lined canal, and other features which are NOT located in a fibreglass theme park, really helps to create a feeling of being in another time.



“ I think we need such experiences to feel our place in the greater scheme of things. ”

I hold annual Meetups for the summer and fall Sawara festivals in mid-July, and mid-October. (Our next festival Meetup in Sawara will be held on October 13th!)

Q. What has been your most memorable experience?

A. Some of the Shinto and other festivals which feature beautiful, elaborate carts, or wonderful shrine buildings stand out. The famous festival in Kanagawa where a particularly colourful and somewhat outrageous fertility idol is paraded between the Shinto Shrine and a large Buddhist temple stands out in particular (yes, it's the so-called Kanamara "Penis Festival"), because due to the festival theme, people are put in a good mood and seem to behave in playful ways in which maybe they wouldn't during their everyday life.



Q. What do you believe the benefits of your Meetup group are?

A. As a Meetup organiser, I get the benefit of learning more about my adopted country of Japan and the chance to share what I've discovered with others. Being an expat, finding friends, and enjoying fellowship with people of all kinds is important, and I think many members feel the same.

Some of my Japanese members say they appreciate my Meetups because they're learning fascinating things about Japanese culture and history from me, and I take that as a great compliment!

People who come to our Meetups get to explore, learn, and socialise in a low-pressure situation, often outdoors, where they're free to chat, mingle, explore, and wander around as they choose. Making new friends, and re-encountering folks they may have met at another Meetup gives folks a chance to bond over time, and many of them socialise outside of the group after that. When I see them having fun together on social media, sometimes I feel left out. Boo-hoo!

Q. Any advice to expats in Japan who want to get involved in their communities, whether that be a big city or a small town?

A. Yes, join a Meetup in your area, attend your group's Meetups regularly, help your organiser, or if you're in a small town, consider starting a Meetup of your own.

Small communities in Japan and their traditional festivals are dying by attrition due to the exodus of younger people to the big cities, so "rural revitalisation" is extremely important! One way to do this is to bring people out of Tokyo and other big cities to participate in the country festivals, thereby contributing to the local economy so it flourishes.

“ *This is one of my missions in doing Meetups in more rural communities.* **”**

Japanese communities unite around *matsuri* (Shinto festivals) and *odori* (seasonal dances). They are quite welcoming to anyone showing a sincere interest. Attend local events and participate!

Some towns often have no adult men available to carry the festival *mikoshi* (portable Shinto shrine) either because they're working, or uninterested, so only women, kids and old men are left. Help them!

If you're in a small town, and your local Meetup isn't flourishing, volunteer to help the organiser by doing publicity, tell your friends, spread the word on social media, make suggestions, and ask the organiser in what other ways you might contribute to the growth and success of the group.

These are the kinds of members I need more of!





Kerry Drew is an expat who first came to Japan in 1991, again in 2007, and since 2011 has been well and truly settled in Japan as a resident! For many years he worked as a designer-craftsman, but since moving to Japan he has mostly been working in the field of education, whilst carrying out cultural research, writing, and giving tours. He's always looking to share Japan's rich culture and history with anyone, whether they be tourist or local—just hop on over to his Meetup group *Omatsuri Japan* or check out their Facebook page *Omatsuri Japan Plus*! When asked his age, his response is, "What's that? I'm old enough to have arthritis, but young enough to keep going."

Natalie Andrews is a first-year JET still exploring the tangled concrete jungle of Tokyo. A lover of writing, editing, and drawing (badly), her life is a work in progress, so her blog *Journal of a JET* is still getting its feet on the ground. One day. . .one day she'll have something on there.

Photos: Kerry Drew

Someewhere Over the Rainbow?

An LGBTQ+ JET ALT's
perspective on living in
rural Japan

Brett Borthwick (Tottori)

Note on language: I use the word "queer" as a reclaimed umbrella term, in addition to LGBTQ+, as I don't want others to feel left out by the limitations of the acronym. It is not intended to be harmful or offensive.

Photo: Marion Michele on Unsplash.com

My name is Brett. I'm a second-year Senior High School ALT on the JET Programme and I live in a small city nestled in Japan's western countryside. I also happen to be gay. I remember the first day I spent in my city. My lovely supervisor collected me from the airport and after helping me with administrative procedures we were walking to a restaurant to have dinner together.

"Brett-sensei, do you have a girlfriend?"

It was an innocent enough question, and one that I should have been prepared for.

"Nope."

LGBT Representation in Japanese Media



My answer came out more pointedly than I would have liked, but at least it was true. The awkwardness hung in the air between us and I thought about hastily adding some justification, but none came. Even though the topic changed to something else, my own silence continued to ring out in my head as we continued walking.

If you're not LGBTQ+ yourself, you may not fully grasp the fear around coming out in Japan. Although there is no history of major hostility towards "sexual minorities," a slow undercurrent of queer narrative omission and lack of representation erodes at the wellbeing of LGBTQ+

Within Japanese media, it is possible to see LGBTQ+ people, but it seems that they are just a spectacle, a humorous moment of comedy relief amongst the heavy topics of a talk show. The more outlandish, the more outrageous, the more alien, the better. This further supports the narrative that queer people are completely different from the "normal" Japanese population. A classic example of this is the infamous Hard Gay.

Masaki Sumitani is an actor who played the role of leather-clad Hard Gay on TV shows. The main premise was to do random acts of charity for unsuspecting bystanders, accompanied by signature pelvic thrusts and singing Ricky Martin songs while wearing a PVC fetish outfit. It should be noted that Masaki Sumitani is not gay and is in fact married to a woman and has children. While humorous at first glance, the role does more damage than good to the representation of real queer people.

Matsuko Deluxe is another name that is popular within LGBTQ+ media. He is an essayist, columnist and TV personality known for cross-dressing and pro-gay remarks. Although greatly successful and at the forefront of political debate, it seems that his

appearance possibly leads to him not being taken seriously. This is the flip side of the flamboyant, hilarious image we are allowed to see on Japanese TV. Coupled with the hyper-sexualised yet comical depiction of queer people, such as the infamous Hard Gay, you could say that queer people are the butt of the joke (ha-ha). At first glance, you might see many a queer person in the mainstream media, but there is a pressure on these actors and comedians to subscribe to a recognizable expression of queerness which does little more than perpetuate stereotypes of outlandish appearances and bizarre behaviour.

Thankfully, small steps towards diversity are being taken in the entertainment industry. Last year, the reality TV show Terrace House made headlines when it opened its doors to openly bisexual trainee make-up artist Shunsuke Ikezoe. He attended Tokyo Pride in April this year and is quite involved with promoting LGBTQ+-related causes with his online following.



Small Steps Taken but Big Strides Needed



Another obstruction to long-term life stability is that there is very little legal protection for LGBTQ+ people in Japan, meaning there are few legal options available when faced with discrimination in such areas as employment, education, housing, and health care. You could effectively be fired from your job for not being straight. A notable exception to this common reality is a [new ordinance](#) in Tokyo that forbids the discrimination of LGBTQ+ people, a measure taken in preparation for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. As you may know, the Japanese government provides spousal visas for married partners of foreign workers who come to Japan. However, these visas are only valid for heterosexual marriages. So what rights do married same-sex partners have when it comes to moving to

Japan? Essentially, none. Same-sex relationships are not recognised in Japan. However, there is sort-of a way around it by having your spouse apply for the “designated activities” visa. More information about the process can be found [here](#).

I think that many Japanese people assume that they have never met an LGBT person. This probably comes from a mix of not wanting to believe that close friends (or maybe even—shock—they themselves) could be gay, and LGBTQ+ people being too afraid to come out. This fear, coupled with societal pressure to marry at a young age leads to fake heterosexual relationships and even sham marriages. One night last year I went with my friends to the one nightclub in my inaka town with my friends.

There was a small group of people there and we got talking to them, I struck up a conversation with a guy there who was a similar age to me. Slowly the innocent talking turned to flirting and then he suddenly started to talk about (gay) sex. While this was happening, I noticed his (female) friend sitting next to him seemed bored so I tried to change the subject and involve her.

“Is that your friend?” I said, hoping to include her.

“Oh, that’s my girlfriend!” the guy brightly replied.

I was shocked the first time this happened, but not the second.

Bright Lights of Hope (and the Big City)

If you live in a big city, you might have more luck than I have meeting someone. There are plenty of LGBTQ+-friendly spaces to meet others. You might even be lucky enough to have gay clubs nearby where you can be yourself. You might meet Japanese people (or other foreigners) who are open about their sexuality and want to date. Osaka has hosted the Rainbow Festa since 2006, providing a safe place for people to meet and have fun. Tokyo Pride also offers a chance to connect and celebrate with foreigners and Japanese alike.

In the countryside, such options are very few and far between, or simply don’t exist. As a gay man, I can say that the hiding, lying, and isolation has taken its toll on my mental health and I’m often left feeling tired and withdrawn from other ALTs and Japanese friends who don’t share similar experiences. What makes it worse is seeing LGBTQ+ JETs in other, more bustling prefectures have an amazing time. I guess it’s just part-an-parcel of that beloved ESID (each situation is different) phrase.

But do not fear! Despite popular belief, there are queer Japanese people in your town or city. Because most people are afraid to publicly come out, you will probably have a better chance of meeting them through dating apps. I’ve dated a few Japanese guys here and I have also been fortunate enough to meet some amazing and open-minded Japanese people and foreign friends who accept me for who I am.

Where to Turn for Support

If you find yourself struggling to be who you are, there are resources, organisations and helplines available to help you.

Web Resources

- Stonewall: the JET LGBTQ+ interest group provides an email list, information about coming out, videos, and information about queer events in Japan.
- TELL: a dedicated counseling service aimed towards the international community in Japan.
- JETAANY: a PDF file filled with useful information relating to many aspects of life for LGBTQ+ JETs.
- Queer and Women's Resource Centre (QWRC)

Phone Numbers

1. Tokyo English Lifeline Lifeline (TELL):
035-774-0992
2. Tokyo English Lifeline (TELL) Counselling:
034-550-1146
3. AIDS Helpline: **0120048840**
4. HIV & Human Rights English Information:
 1. *Tokyo*: **03-5259-0256**
(Saturdays 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.)
 2. *Osaka*: **07-2043-4105**
(Saturdays 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.)
5. Suicide Hotline:
 1. Tokyo: **035-286-9090**
 2. Osaka: **064-395-4343**
6. AJET Peer Support Group:
050-5534-5566 (8 p.m. to 7 a.m.)



Originally from England, Brett Borthwick is a second-year ALT living in Tottori Prefecture. When he's not working, Brett enjoys sampling Japan's finest liquors (read: Strong Zero) and discovering new prefectures to explore. Can often be spotted on a Peach Airways flight whenever there's a three day weekend. A true Renaissance man, Brett is also interested in Spanish language and culture.

Photos: Brett Borthwick

About Autumn

Every Leaf is a Flower



Hoong Shao Ting (Nagano)

It's October and the temperatures are dropping. The leaves are starting to change colour up north and, if you haven't started planning yet, it's high time to work on that *momiji-gari* (lit. autumn leaves-viewing) trip! Here are some of the top spots per region, based on rankings from Koyo Walker:

Chukoku

18. Okutsukei (Okayama)

Early~Mid Nov

19. Miyajima Momijidani Park (Hiroshima)

Early~Mid Nov

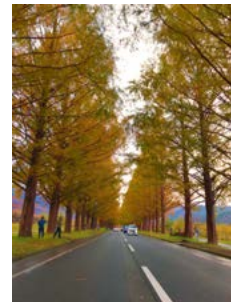
Kansai

17. Arashiyama(Kyoto)

Late Nov~Early Dec

16. Metasequoia Namiki Avenue (Shiga)

Late Nov~Early Dec



Shikoku

20. Kankakei Ropeway (Kagawa)

Mid~Late Nov



21. Mt. Tsurugi (Tokushima)

Mid~Late Oct

Hokkaido

14. Kenrokuen

Early Nov



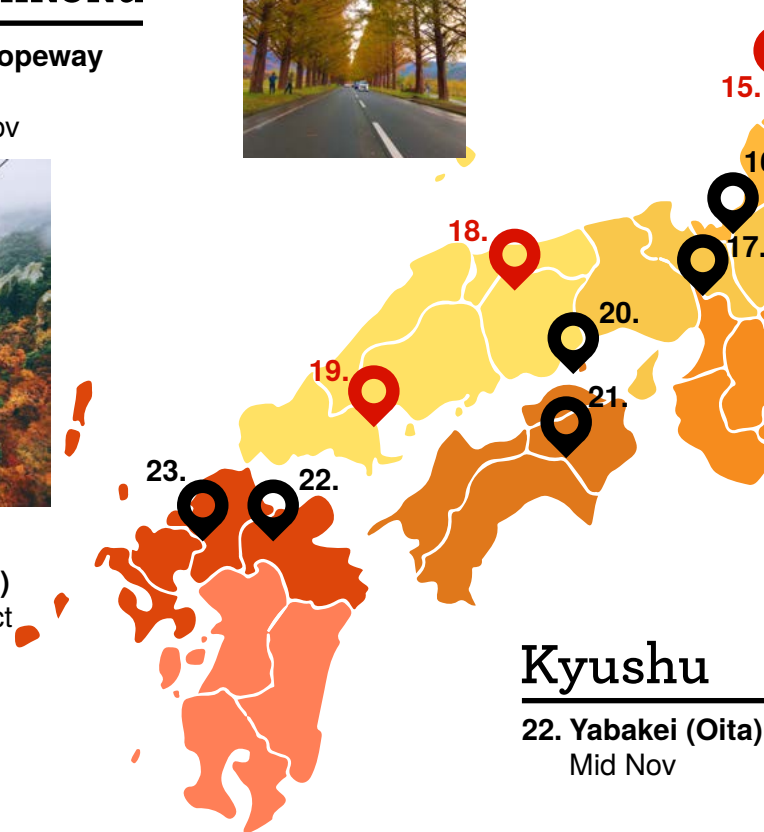
15. Tateyama

Late Sep

Apart from Maple Leaves?

Yes, *momiji* may be the most iconic, but autumn has so much more to offer! Here are some to look out for/fill your tummies with:

- Ginkgo (銀杏・いちょう)
- Cosmos (コスモス)
- Sweet potatoes (さつまいも)
- Matsutake (松茸・まつたけ)
- Mackerel pike (さんま)
- Chestnuts (栗・くり)



Kyushu

22. Yabakei (Oita)

Mid Nov



Hokkaido

- 1. **Shiretoko**
Early~Mid Oct
- 2. **Jozankei**
Early~Mid Oct



Kyushu

14. **Shirayama (Ishikawa)**
Mid~Early Dec



13. **Yamanaka (Toyama)**
Mid~Late Oct

Tohoku

- 3. **Oirase (Aomori)**
Mid~Late Oct
- 4. **Mt. Kurikoma (Iwate)**
Late Sep~Mid Oct
- 5. **Naruko Gorge (Miyagi)**
Late Oct~Early Nov
- 6. **Bandai-Azuma Skyline (Fukushima)**
Early~Mid Oct



Photos:
Naomi Bridgeman
Laura Egan
Ketaki Katdare
Jojo Tan
[Jasmine T.](#)
Hoong Shao Ting

Kanto

- 7. **Nasu Highlands (Tochigi)**
Early~Mid Oct
- 8. **Ozegahara Marshlands (Gunma)**
Late Sep~Early Oct
- 9. **Showa Memorial Park (Tokyo)**
Early~Late Nov

Koshinetsu

- 10. **Kawaguchiko (Yamanashi)**
Mid Nov
- 11. **Senjojiki Cirque (Nagano)**
Late Sep~Early Oct

Tokai

- 12. **Korankei (Aichi)**
Mid~Late Nov
- 13. **Iwayado Park (Aichi)**
Mid Nov



- 23. **Kamado Shrine (Fukuoka)**
Mid Nov~Early Dec

AUTUMNAL LEAF PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

Megan Luedtke (Fukui)



Photo: Yoann Siloine on Unsplash.com

1 SHOOT TIGHTER, NOT WIDER:

In fall photography, it is tempting to shoot a wide-angle image in an attempt to capture all of the surrounding scenery. Having a wide-angle shot is nice, but if all of your pictures are wide they will start to look the same. Shooting a tighter, closer shot allows you to give each image its own detail and personality.

- A photographer's best zoom is their feet.
- Try to get as close or as far as you want to the subject to frame your image.
- This is not always possible but typically provides the clearest image at the distance you want.

2 MAKE THE COLORS YOUR SECOND PRIORITY:

You would assume that the No. 1 goal of fall photography is to capture the color, no? But color is only part of what makes a good image. Good composition is a highly important factor and can make or break an image, so first, focus on the image's framing and let the fall colors naturally enhance your photo.



3 BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR DRAMATIC LIGHTING:

Fall colors can be especially stunning when paired with dramatic lighting. Shoot shortly after sunrise or before sunset to create great dramatic lighting, and shoot with the sun to your back so that the light is always illuminating your subject!

- Check the weather to see how it will affect your lighting.
- Rainy or cloudy weather is not necessarily going to mean bad lighting, it is just a different challenge.
- Decide what mood you are looking for in your photography and then watch the weather to try and obtain the desired natural lighting.



4 LOOK FOR CONTRAST:

Fall colors are beautiful on their own, but will stand out even more if you are able to frame a photo with high contrast. For example, shooting a golden and maroon forest against the backdrop of a dark mountain makes the yellow and red of the trees that much more vibrant.

*Megan is based in Fukui Prefecture and is one of **CONNECT**'s assistant designers. Follow her on Instagram [@meg.lue](https://www.instagram.com/meg.lue)*

Photos: Ketaki Katdare

The Auspicious Pines of Daitoku-ji

David Atti (Chiba)





“Remember, a lot of these kids are just hothouse flowers,” my Uncle Ed said confidently, in his paternal tone.

“Yes, and you are the mighty pine!” My Uncle Sam added with conviction.

These were my uncles’ last words of encouragement following several rigorous mock-interview sessions in their Chelsea apartment. The specter of my official JET Programme interview looming the next day was exciting, albeit, terrifying. My dream job was at stake, starting a new life teaching English in the Land of the Rising Sun.

The competitive nature of the JET Programme, as well as my own perceived shortcomings, made me doubt my uncles’ remarks about “mighty pines” and “hothouse flowers.” After all, there were far more qualified applicants than myself interviewing. Many of these “hothouse flowers” were in fact fluent Japanese speakers with astronomic GPAs. The whole process could be daunting at times. Nevertheless, stranger things have happened, even in Japanese history. I drew inspiration from Japan’s Warring States Period or the *Sengoku Jidai*. Oda Nobunaga was known as “lord fool” before vanquishing his enemies on the ruthless path to becoming “the first great unifier of Japan.” I thought to myself, “What is a simple job interview compared to a herculean feat like that?” After giving my best effort, shortly thereafter, I would read my acceptance with incredulity and bliss.

Nearly a year later, I climbed in a taxi outside of Kyoto Station to escape the city’s December winds. The driver typified the quiet dignity of the Old Capital. I asked that he take me to Kenkun Jinja, a quiet Shinto shrine resting at the summit of Mt. Funaoka. The older cabbie flashed a quick smile, seeming curiously amused with my request. I suppose he hadn’t expected this coming from a blond-haired, blue-eyed, American in his twenties. I was determined to pay my respects to my inspiration, Oda Nobunaga, whose spirit is deified at Kenkun Shrine. The driver recommended I visit the nearby Daitoku-ji Temple. He told me that the late Nobunaga was honored with a grand funeral ceremony lasting seven days at Daitoku-ji. I bowed, thanked the cabbie and he sent me on my way with a hearty “*Sayonara!*”

It started to rain over Northern Kyoto as I walked from Kenkun Shrine to Daitoku-ji. The temple gently unveiled glimpses of itself through the fog, appeasing my curiosity as I inched closer. Beyond the walls of Daitoku-ji, a legion of mighty pines beckoned me in, as if they had long been expecting my arrival. Morning dew lay still on their verdant needles. My uncles’ words echoed in my head once more, “*You are the mighty pine!*” As I looked up at the pines again, I couldn’t help but smile.



At one point, I was mistakenly shuffled in with a native tour group and tried my best to follow the guide's rapid Japanese. I was led to the dry landscape garden of Daisen-in, one of many sub-temples found on the grounds of Daitoku-ji. I paused to look at "Turtle Islet" and "Crane Islet," where sand, stones and earth were arranged to resemble the two animals. The literature of Daisen-in reveals, "From ancient times the turtle, which seeks the bottom of the ocean, has symbolized to the Japanese the depths to which the human spirit can sink, while the crane in flight symbolizes the heights to which the human spirit can soar." As I stared intently into the turtle's likeness, I reflected on my own time dwelling on the ocean floor. My father wouldn't live to see my 18th birthday or attend my high school graduation. Sadly, I was forced to endure his suicide in March of my senior year. My Uncle Ed stepped up as a father figure and graciously paid my college tuition. I struggled during university but persevered to earn my degree. I then shifted my gaze to the crane's image. When facing the crane, one can't help but reminisce about past glory and high achievement. The crane also serves as a source of inspiration and optimism for the future.

These days, the JET Programme continues to be a surreal adventure of quixotic proportions. A moment in my time here that is undoubtedly embodied by the crane would be the chance to study martial arts in the heart of the Japanese countryside. In the dry landscape garden of Daisen-in, life's moments of sorrow peacefully coexist with those of triumph. Here was a tangible illustration of both the happiness and pain that I had experienced in my life.

The turtle and the crane may seem incompatible, but they share an eternal friendship, celebrated in the center of the Zen garden at "Treasure Mountain." This infinite bond signifies "the union of Heaven and Earth, joy and disappointment, which comprise the elements of human experience." The turtle and the crane are not diametrically opposed beings, rather, together they epitomize life's journey. I now meditate on this lesson before competing in martial arts. Victory and defeat are just words uttered by men that mask the true value of experience.

After savoring a cup of tea inside, I bought a small calligraphy canvas with the poem "A Song of Gratitude" written by author and head abbot of Daisen-in, Soen Ozeki. I sent it back to my family in America as a gift. After my serendipitous winter visit, I vowed to return to my newfound mecca in the spring.

In late April, just days before Emperor Akihito would abdicate the Chrysanthemum Throne, ushering in the new Reiwa era, I made my pilgrimage back to Daitoku-ji. This time accompanied by a friend and tour guide, Kaori-san. Erudite and shockingly indefatigable, Kaori-san had



given my family a splendid tour of Kyoto when they visited me in Japan. Together we had the rare opportunity to enter Nobunaga's moratory temple, Soken-in. I paid my respects to the great *daimyo* once more, bowing my head in reverence at his grave. We walked leisurely to our last stop, Daisen-in. This time Kaori-san rapidly translated the Japanese into English so I could understand everything in great detail. Inside we had the pleasure of meeting abbot Soen Ozeki in person. I told him my "mighty pine" story with Kaori-san acting as an interpreter. The abbot was very kind and explained that his sect of Buddhism, the Rinzai school, believed pine trees to be auspicious omens, symbolizing longevity and endurance.

Inside Daisen-in there is a hanging scroll with elegant calligraphy that reads, "*shōju sen nen no midori.*" This roughly translates to: "pine trees keep green for thousands of years." The pine may not be the most spectacular plant in the world of botany, especially when compared to Japan's beloved, fleeting cherry blossoms or the emperor's chrysanthemum, but still, these old trees have virtue and qualities "hothouse flowers" lack. Notwithstanding the cruelty of nature or the hands of time, mighty pines live on. I thought of this and sent a replica of the scroll back to my uncles in New York. My last day in Kyoto, I returned to Daitoku-ji alone for one more visit. In the final hours of the Heisei era, Soen Ozeki signed my temple stamp book with a message in Japanese kanji, "For if I cannot endure today when and where will I?"

Daitoku-ji is not nearly as popular as Kyoto's UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as Kiyomizu-dera or The Golden Pavilion and yet, this temple has been my favorite destination in my travels thus far. Meeting the taxi driver outside Kyoto Station led to a wealth of Japanese history, culture and spirit. Sometimes, living in a foreign country can feel isolating. Nevertheless, my stars aligned at Daitoku-ji as the pines gently whispered, "You're right where you're supposed to be."

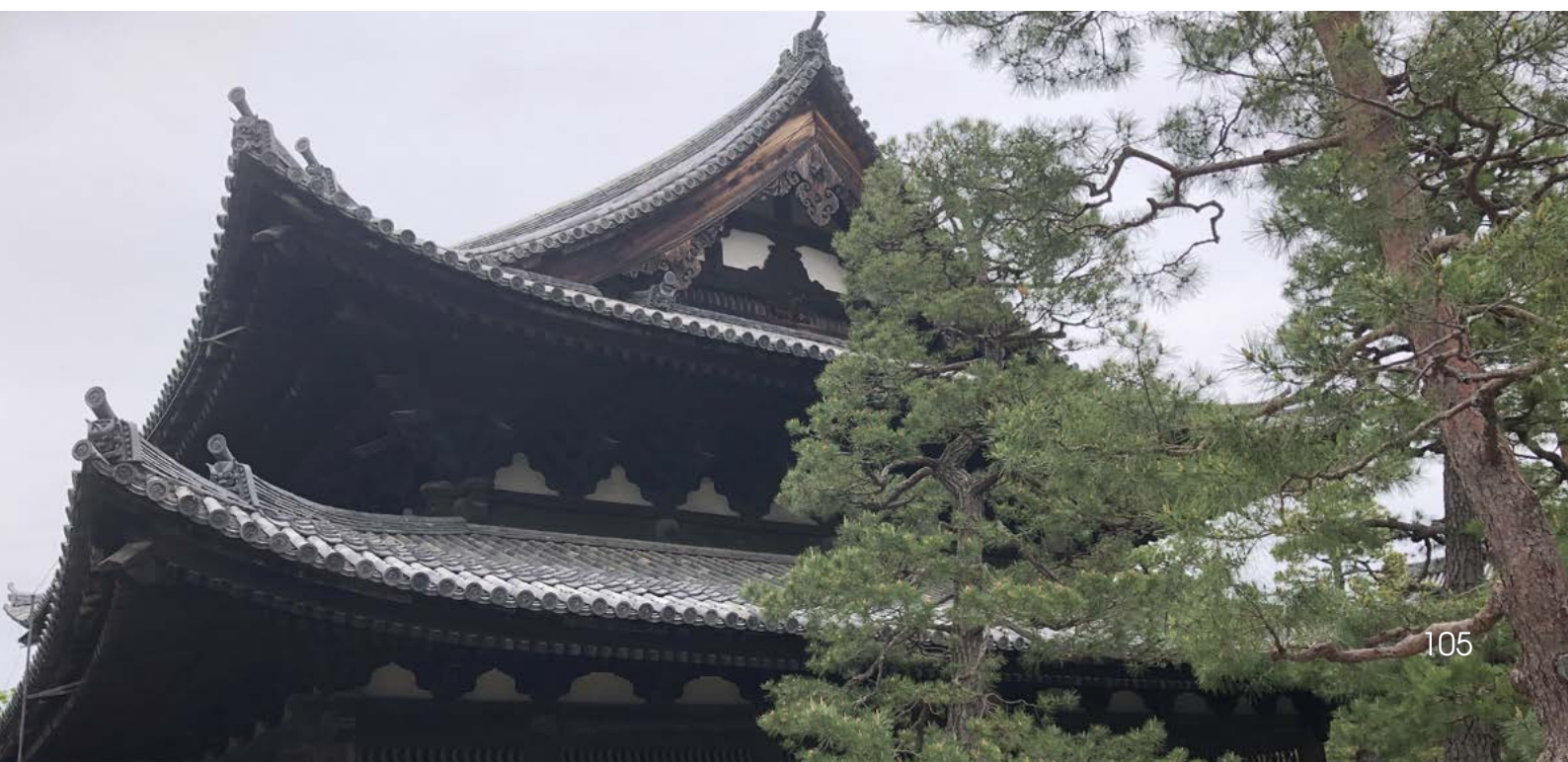
David Atti is currently a second year JET in Kamogawa City, Chiba. He graduated from SUNY Geneseo with a degree in American Studies before coming to Japan. Atti would like to express special thanks to Kaori Miyahara of Kyoto Private Tours by Japan Wonder [Travel.com](http://www.wondertravel.com).

Funaoka Grand Festival

19 October 2019

The Funaoka Grand Festival celebrates the life of Oda Nobunaga, a *Sengoku* warlord and patron deity of Kenkun Shrine. The *Funaoka Taisai* is held every year on October 19th marking Nobunaga's triumphant procession into Kyoto on the same date in 1568.

Photos: David Atti



A woman and a man with face paint peeking from behind a tree trunk. The woman on the left has white face paint, red around her eyes, and a blue mustache. She is wearing a white t-shirt and floral pants. The man on the right has white face paint, red around his eyes, and a blue mustache. He is wearing a black shirt. The background is a lush green forest with a white building visible on the left.

OZE: SOBA UP AND GET YOUR PAINT ON

Clare Braganza (Fukushima)



Have you heard of Oze National Park? If like me, you've newly arrived in Japan, you probably haven't. It's technically within day-tripping distance of Tokyo, but it's so deeply situated amongst forested valleys and gushing rivers that it's no easy trip. Fortunately for me and a few other Fukushima JETs, we got the chance to go on a monitor tour to the *inaka* of Minami Aizu. In a monitor tour, participants take part in surveys or feedback in exchange for a free or discounted tour. What followed was a weekend of *soba* and *onsen*, including the odd experience of walking through a village of 600 people with painted-on eyebrows and faces full of white paint. But first, the journey there.

I'm from England—a part that's flat and full of sheep—so my eyes were peeled to the window as our coach navigated hairpin turns and bridges so narrow

that, from where I sat, it looked like there was nothing but thin air between me and the white rapids below. There was even one part of the river that dropped clean away beneath us, and I glimpsed a house perched on a rocky outcrop far, far below. I didn't want to know what would happen if it flooded.

We passed through a series of dark tunnels before emerging in a forested valley with a wide river running through the middle. Suddenly, there were houses and shops—civilisation! This was Hinoemata, a humble village of 600 and home to the traditional theatre of *kabuki*. The village is also home to a wonderful group of people who showed us how to make *soba* noodles, which was harder than it sounds. Our hosts showed

us how to stir and roll out the dough comprised of buckwheat flour and hot water, then let us try cutting it into thin strips with a big scary knife. One by one we gave it a shot, and soon realised that as soon as we held the knife it refused to glide and instead tore at the delicate slices of *soba*. I was particularly bad. My guide had to hold my hand, which reminded me of when I was a child and my mum couldn't trust me with a knife. But I was glad for the help since we actually had to eat the *soba* for lunch. Despite a few large chunks, slurping up cold *soba* on a hot day is always satisfying.

If I thought making *soba* was hard, what came next was even harder: putting on *kabuki* makeup. For those who don't



know, kabuki is a traditional form of Japanese theatre, dating from as far back as the Edo period. It was performed exclusively by men—even the princess roles—and the makeup was designed to be dramatic and elaborate. To recreate this fetching look, we were given tubs of wax to smear over our faces and protect our skin and shown examples of classic kabuki makeup. These included the protagonist, usually represented by a dramatic flair of red and black; the antagonist, with terrifying eyebrows; the comic relief, who sported a unibrow and a blue moustache; and finally the princess, which I chose (because it looked the easiest).

Hinoemata has a unique claim to its kabuki heritage. The tradition has been passed down



through generations and is still performed to this day on its ancient stage. If you find yourself watching a kabuki play in Hinoemata, you'll be watching skilled farmers and ordinary people, not famous actors. These locals helped us apply the white base, before smearing red around our eyes, on our lips, and drawing on strange black eyebrows. Once we'd all thoroughly laughed at each other, we headed to the stage itself.

The setting was magical. Picture an amphitheatre, except the seats are moss-covered stone steps rising into a tall pine forest, and the stage has a thatched roof. To top it off, a Shinto shrine is nestled in the forest, making it feel like somewhere taken straight out of a Ghibli film. If that was the atmosphere when it was just us taking photos, I couldn't imagine what it'd be like when

an actual play takes place. I will be back.

I was abruptly brought back to reality as we—a large group of foreigners with ghostly faces and comical eyebrows—walked down the main street to our hotel and cars stopped to look at us. Our hosts at the *ryokan* were lovely and welcomed us in typical Japanese fashion, but I could see them biting back laughter. The thing about faces is that everyone can see yours except yourself; I headed up to my room in blissful ignorance.

After a lovely evening in the onsen and a night of deep sleep, we set off bright and early for Oze National Park. I'd expected Japan's usual summer heat and suffocating humidity, but we were blessed by the weather gods and found ourselves putting on jumpers and fleeces. It was 19 degrees Celsius and clouds blocked the

sun—perfection. The muffled sunlight added an extra level of atmosphere as we climbed up through the forest. The air smelt of damp pine and the freshness you only get away from towns, and pale lichen—or monkey shackles, as the Japanese call them—hung from overhanging branches. Boulders were scattered around the forest floor, a reminder of the volcano looming in the distance. It last erupted 600 years ago, sending boulders crashing down. I'm very glad I wasn't around back then.

Soon we reached Ozenuma Lake and the marshland surrounding it. I previously associated marshes with mud and lost wellington boots, but this one was gorgeous. Long grass dotted with flowers of white, pink, yellow and purple spread into the distance, broken only by boardwalks. These days it can be hard to find such a large stretch of unspoilt nature, and I would recommend Oze to anyone just for that view. There was nothing but us and the herons. Our guide told us that in autumn the entire green landscape would become a fiery orange. Another reason for me to return.

I could have stayed in Oze for days, but work—and our coach back home—beckoned. Driving back down the mountain and through towns with 7-Elevens was a shock. I wanted to return to Oze's still forests and gushing rivers. But at the same time, I felt refreshed. Oze is protected and off the beaten track. It will still be there when I return.

#fukushima_oze

For more, please follow me on my [blog](#)!



Clare is a first-year JET in Fukushima, aka Lucky Island, and hails from a small town in the south of England. She's a pathological book-buyer, a habitual daydreamer, and loves matcha a bit too much.

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

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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.

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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.

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