

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

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2019

Being Vegan in Japan

Scrum, Tackles, and Goals: Rugbymania Strikes Japan

A Fuji Rock Odyssey

(Re)discover Your Travel Inspo

The Plus Side of Things: Being a Big Girl in Small-Sized Japan

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



CREDITS & CONTENT

HEAD EDITOR

Alice Ridley

ASSITANT EDITOR

Hannah Lukow

SECTION EDITORS

Rachel Fagundes
Linka Wade
Devoni Guise
Caroline Allen
Rashaad Jordan
Jessiete Amerilla
Hoong Shao Ting
Valerie Osborne
Tayler Skultety

CONTRIBUTORS

Missie Yamamura
Vicky Zhang
Karla Valdez
Laura Duvall
Suzanna Powers
Rosi Galvan
Kat McCormick
DeVonna Lauritzen
Nathan Abel
Natasia James
Dayna Andreous
Siobhan Fahy
Hazel Reilly

HEAD OF DESIGN & LAYOUT

Ashley Hirasuna

ASSISTANT DESIGNER

Rhema Baquero

COVER PHOTO

Ashley Hirasuna

TABLE OF CONTENTS PHOTO

Charlotte Coetzee

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

Tayler Skultety
Ashley Hirasuna
Charlotte Coetzee
Dermot Ryan
Samuel James
Emily Belding
Rhema Baquero
Natasia James
Devoni Guise
DeVonna Lauritzen
Suzanna Powers
Rosi Galvan
Kat McCormick
Nathan Abel
Missie Yamamura
Vicky Zhang
Caroline Allen
Rashaad Jordan
Laura Duvall
Karla Valdez
Dayna Andreous
Siobhan Fahy

HEAD WEB EDITOR

Rhema Baquero

SOCIAL MEDIA

Hannah Lysons
Tayla-Paige Van-Sittert

COPY EDITORS

Damien Levi
Isabella Teo

GENERAL SECTION EDITORS

Natalie Andrews
Jeffrey Rock

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- 8 Events Calendar: September
- 18 The Plus Side of Things: Being a Big Girl in Small-Sized Japan by Natasia James
- 20 5 Ways to Improve Sun-Weathered Skin by Devoni Guise
- 24 Being Vegan in Japan by Tayler Erika Skultety, Kat McCormick, Rosi Galvan, and Suzanna Powers
- 32 Dancing, Drums, and a Fiery Finish by DeVonna Lauritzen
- 34 A Fuji Rock Odyssey by Nathan Abel
- 40 September Releases by Rachel Fagundes
- 42 Venus Gurlz “Sticks it” to Asian Stereotypes by Valerie Osborne and Missie Yamamura
- 44 Finding a Seat in the Orchestra that is Japan by Vicky Zhang
- 54 My Wellness by Hazel Reilly
- 56 Staying Fit and Healthy While on JET by Caroline Allen
- 58 Rugby Comes to Japan by Rashaad Jorden
- 62 All the World’s a Stage by Laura Duvall
- 66 Lights, Camera, Action! by Karla Valdez
- 70 (Re)discover Your Travel Inspo
- 72 Sapporo: The City Up North by Dayna Andreous
- 82 I’ll Shoyu Yuasa by Siobhan Fahy

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy first edition with our brand new *CONNECT* team for this year!

I am very excited to show off the work that the new team has created. Our team hails from different parts of the world. Something that I love about our team. Hopefully our differing backgrounds will shine through in the articles that we write and select for you, our readers! We are here to provide you with interesting articles and tips throughout the year. If there's something that you think Connect should do more of please contact me! This year I want to make Connect even more awesome, and I'm sure that the whole team to do their best to create something fantastic to read. If you haven't already checked out the updated meet the team page yet I recommend you do so to get to know everyone a little more.

This month's edition includes an in depth interview with three people about being vegan in Japan, a festival goer's account on Fuji Rock 2019, a keen rugby fan talks about the upcoming Rugby World Cup and the travel section gets us hyped for the year's worth of travel that is possible! These are just a few of the articles that are included in September's issue.

For the people who have recently moved to Japan welcome to your new home for the next year! I wish you the best for the adjustment period. They say that three months in the golden time period for you to feel adjusted. So two months to go! For the people, like myself, moving onto their second year enjoy feeling more confident this year. But, always keep pushing yourself to seek new experiences.

And remember, always stay hydrated and ice water is your best friend during these blistering months!

Alice Ridley
Head Editor
2nd Year Gunma ALT

Alice R.

Photo: Tayler Skultety

ASSISTANT HEAD EDITOR

connect.assistanteditor@ajet.net

Hannah Lukow

"Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you." – Annie Dillard

GENERAL SECTION EDITOR

connect.generaleditor@ajet.net

Jeffrey Rock

"Sarge, with all due respect, I am gonna completely ignore everything you just said."
– Jake Peralta

COPY EDITORS

connect.copy@ajet.net

Isabelle Teo

"One is always nearer by not keeping still."
– Thom Gunn, *On the Move*

Damien Levi

"Country boy, I love you." – Jada Reillee

HEAD DESIGNER

ashley.hirasuna@ajet.net

Ashley Hirasuna

"Imagination is the highest form of research."
– Albert Einstein

ASSISTANT DESIGNERS

Magdalene Kennedy

"Life is a picture, but you live in a pixel."
– Tim Urban

Rhema Baquero

"And in that moment, I swear we were infinite."
– Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

SOCIAL MEDIA

connect.socialmedia@ajet.net

Hannah Lysons

"Would I rather be feared or loved? Easy. Both. I want people to be afraid of how much they love me." – Michael Scott (Steve Carell)

NEWS AND EVENTS



EVENTS EDITOR

connect.events@ajet.net

Linka Wade

"Oh Lord, heal this bike." – Good Omens

Photo: Dermot Ryan (Kobe)



KOBÉ-PORT

神戸港開港150周年記念 カワサキワールド
KAWASAKI WORLD

NYK LOGISTICS

K LINE

PORT OF KOBE

Events Calendar:

September 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

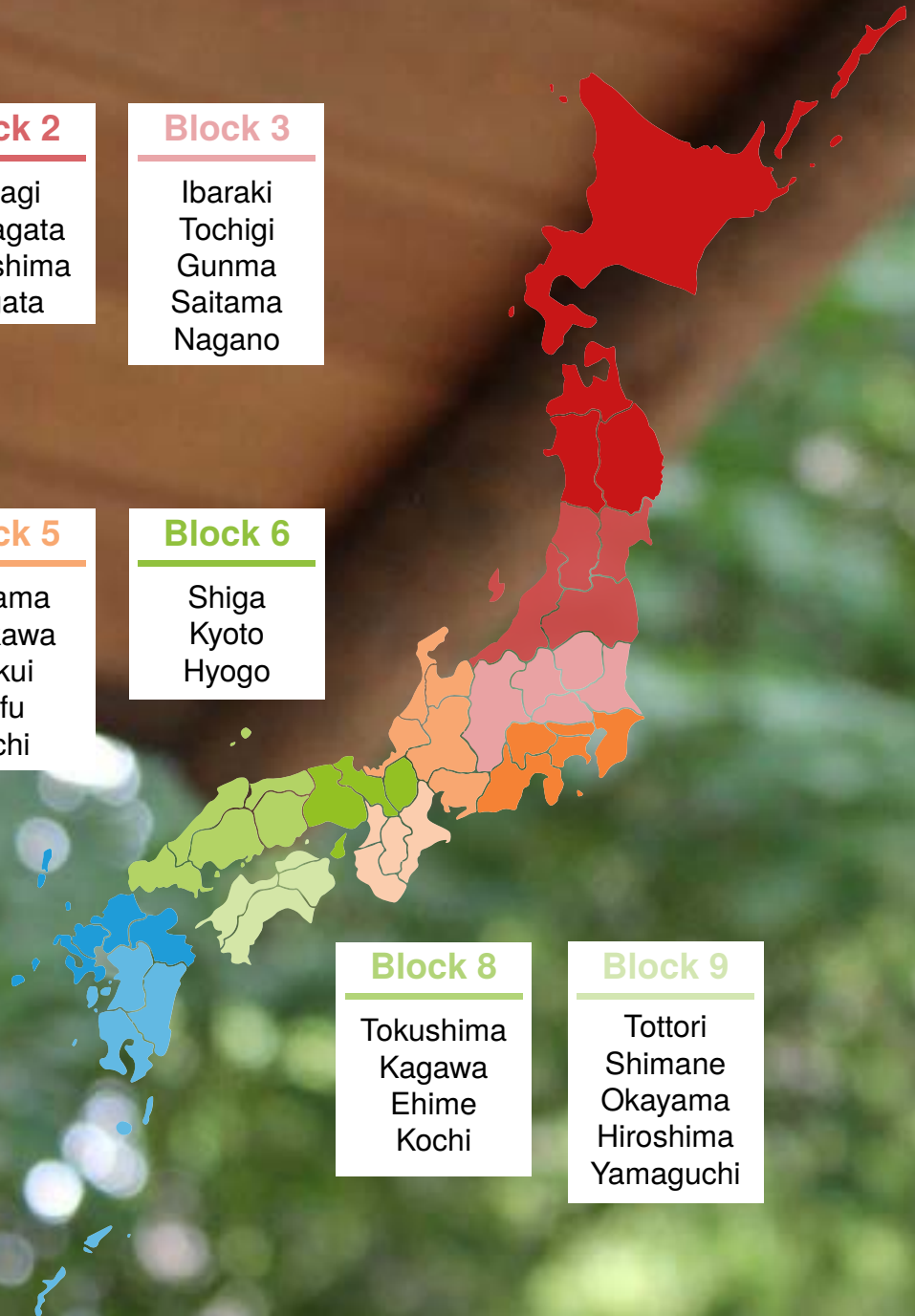
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa





Block 1

Misawa Air Base Festival

September 8

Misawa City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Sapporo Autumn Festival

September 6 - September 29

Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Hakodate Gourmet Circus

September 7 - September 8

Hakodate City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Osama Wine Festival

September 15

Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

North Hokkaido Food Festival

“Tabo Marche”

September 14 - September 16

Asahikawa City, Hokkaido Prefecture

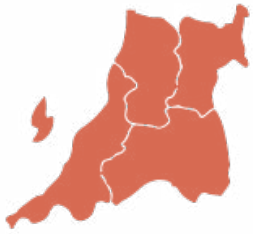
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Morioka Autumn Festival

September 14 - September 16

Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 2

Soh-Odori Festival

September 14 - September 16
Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Yoita Jyugoya Festival

September 13 - September 15
Nagaoka City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Jozenji Street Jazz Festival

September 7 - September 8
Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Sendai Oktoberfest

September 12 - September 23
Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nihon-ichi no Imoni-kai Festival

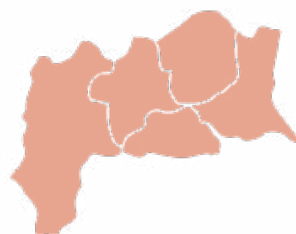
September 15
Yamagata City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

NST Matsuri - Ramen Wars 2019

September 28 - September 29
Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 3

National New Fireworks Games

September 7
Suwa City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in Japanese](#)

Nakanojo Biennale 2019

August 24 - September 23
Nakanojo Town, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Isesaki Fireworks

September 15
Isesaki City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in Japanese](#)

Keyaki Beer Festival

September 12 - September 16
Saitama City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Komagane City Half Marathon

September 29
Komagane City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 4

Yosakoi Oedo Soran Festival

September 1
Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Afro American Caribbean Festa 2019

September 7 - September 8
Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

TELL Tokyo Tower Climb

September 9
Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Sagamihara Yosakoi RANBU!

September 15
Sagamihara City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

**Samba Carnival and Brazilian
Food Festival**

September 7 - September 8
Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

**Tsurugaoka Hachimangu
Reitasai**

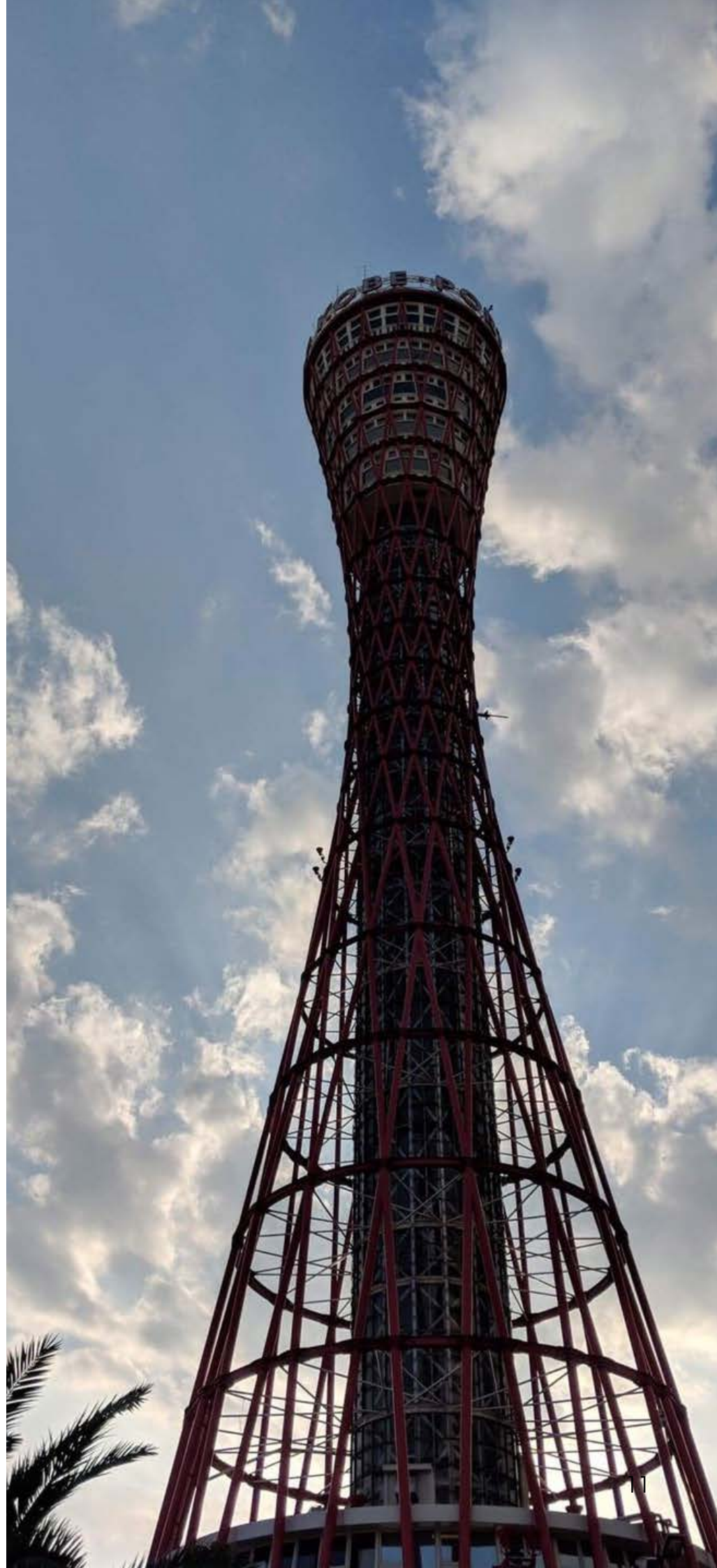
September 15 - September 16
Kamakura City, Kanagawa
Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Anzan Matsuri

September 4 - September 6
Yamanakako City, Yamanashi
Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)





Block 5

Wired Music Festival

September 7 - September 8
Tokoname City, Aichi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Okuma-Kabuto Festival

September 20
Nakajima City, Ishikawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Owara Kaze-no-Bon

September 1 - September 3
Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Fox Fire Festival

September 28
Hida City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sugo Lion Festival

September 5
Hida City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 6

Kiyomizu Temple Seiryu-e Dragon Festival (Autumn)

September 14 - September 15
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kyoto International Manga Anime Fair 2019

September 21 - September 22
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Himeji Castle Moon Viewing

September 13
Himeji City, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Ishiyama Temple Moon Viewing

September 13 - September 14
Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Rokko Meets Art Walk 2019

September 13 - November 24
Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 7

Uneme Festival

September 13

Nara City, Nara Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kudoyama Art Week

September 29 - October 14

Kudoyama City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Wine Festa Mie

September 27

Matsusaka City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Suzuka Fireworks

September 14

Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture

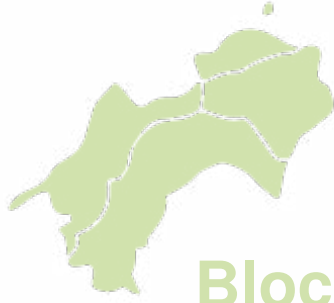
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kishiwada Danjiri Festival

September 14 - September 15

Kishiwada City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 8

Hyoge Matsuri

September 8

Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kochi La La La Music Festival

September 15

Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nakayama Chestnut Festival

September 23

Nakayama Town, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ishikari Road

August 3 - September 14

Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hanatori Dance

September 7

Seiyo City, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 9

Kumano Fude Matsuri

September 23

Kumano City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Matsue Castle Illumination

September 21 - October 31

Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Okayama Korakuen Garden

Moon Viewing

September 13

Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kaido Matsuri

September 7 - September 8

Shoo Town, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hiroshima Oktoberfest

September 13 - September 23

Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 10

Nonnoko Isahaya Festival

September 13 - September 15

Isahaya City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kashima Traditional Performing Arts Festival

September 8

Kashima City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Karaage Festival

September 15 - September 16

Nakatsu City, Oita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hojoya Festival

September 12 - September 18

Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 11

Fujisaki Hachimangu Grand Festival

Mid September

Kumamoto City, Kumamoto

Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

72nd Ibusuki Onsen Festival

September 28 - September 29

Ibusuki City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Itoman Great Tug-of-War

September 13

Itoman City, Okinawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sendai Great Tug-of-War

September 22

Satsumasendai City, Kagoshima

Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Photos:

Samuel James

Emily Belding

Rhema Baquero

Dermot Ryan





ARTS AND CULTURE

CULTURE EDITOR

connect.culture@ajet.net

Taylor Skultety

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

connect.entertainment@ajet.net

Rachel Fagundes

"Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten."

– Neil Gaiman (paraphrasing G. K. Chesterton)

FASHION AND BEAUTY EDITOR

connect.fashion@ajet.net

Devoni Guise

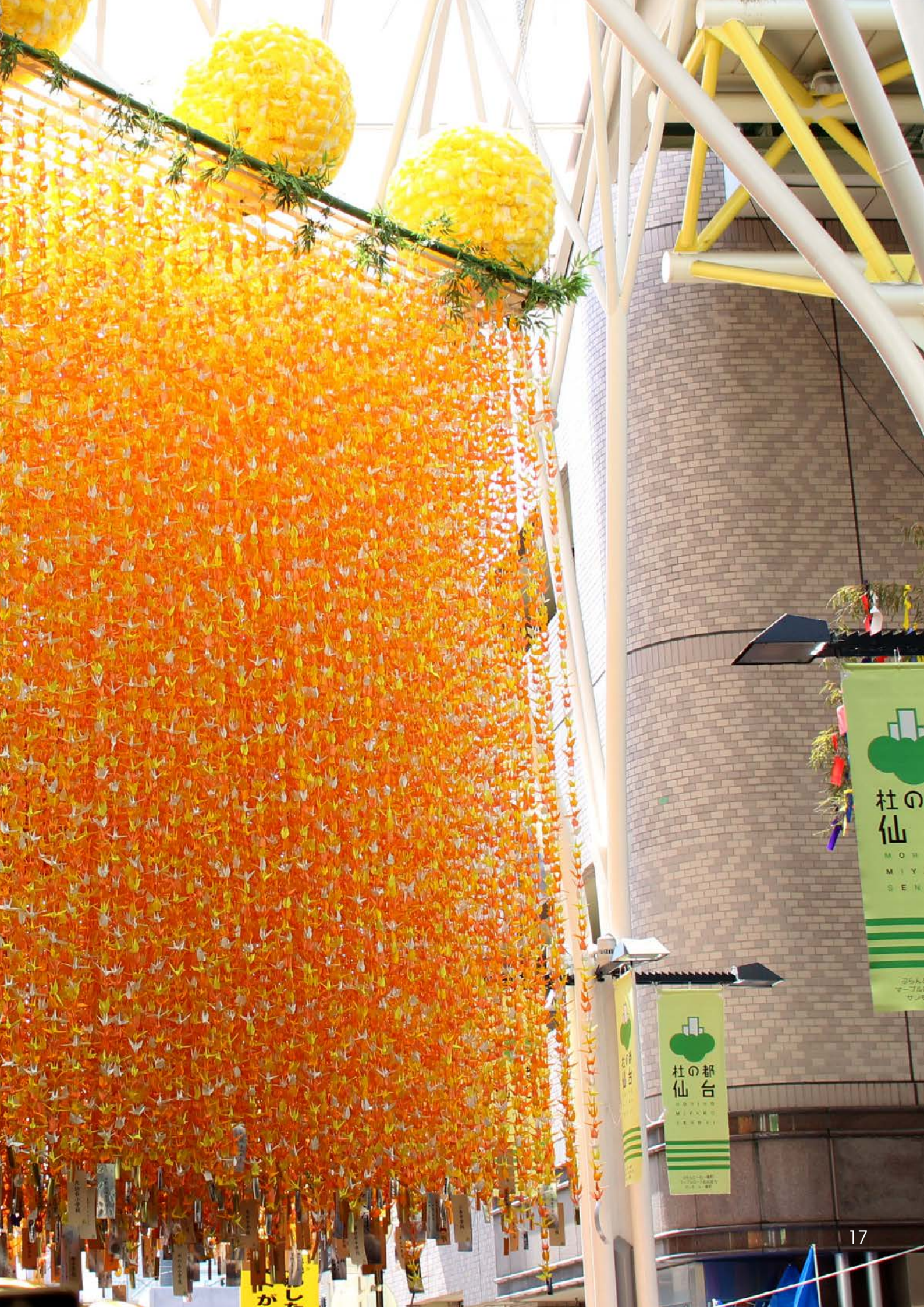
"Do Nothing Without Intention." – Solange

ARTS EDITOR

connect.arts@ajet.net

Valerie Osborne

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



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仙

M O R
M I Y
S E

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仙 台

The Plus Side of Things: Being a Big Girl in Small-Sized Japan

Natasia James (Saitama)



Japan is known as one of the fashion capitals of the world. Here, women are always dressed to impress, no matter whether they're on their way to work, spending time with their kids, or making a casual run to the grocery store. It's quite common (and super impressive!) to even see women running through train stations while wearing 5-inch high heels. Japanese fashion is highly diverse, from the 90s inspired streetwear, to *kawaii*-themed frills and lace, and the chicly refined high-waisted bottom/tucked shirt combo. Although fashion styles vary, most Japanese women have the same thing in common: they are very thin.

As in many other cultures, being thin is a trend in Japan and it is still a very strong norm. In addition to the influence of the media, which depicts thin women as desirable, the average weight of Japanese women is 116 lbs (53 kg) (1). In comparison, the average American woman weighs 170 lbs (77 kg), and the USA isn't even in the top 10 for countries with overweight populations (2). It's easy to understand then why Japan's idea of a "normal body size" is one that is excessively thin.

Recently, plus-size Japanese celebrities like Naomi Watanabe have been trying to shift the beauty standard away from its trend towards thinness through greater representation of plus-size women in media. But although there are waves being made, fat people still continue to be viewed (and even directly addressed) as comedic, unattractive, and innately unhealthy by the greater population.

In the United States, the acceptance and empowerment of diverse body sizes is more widespread, and there are many plus-size women who shape the narrative on beauty standards. Because of this, I was confident in myself as a bigger girl before I came to Japan. I dressed how I wanted, I showed off my belly, my cleavage, my thighs, and embraced all parts of my body, even if they weren't necessarily embraced by others.

When I first learned I was coming to Japan on the JET Programme I worried that I wouldn't be

able to fit into the clothes here and that I would not be seen as attractive. I wondered if I would have to compromise who I was in order to not be fat-shamed by Japanese people. I came to Japan with the expectation that I would have to alter my identity to appease a society that may not accept me.

Three years later, I'm still on JET, I'm still fat, and I am the most confident I've ever been. I'm still really surprised by the reactions and comments I get from my students, coworkers, and even strangers: "*cho kawaii neee*" ("you are so cute"); "will you be my girlfriend?" (I work with high school students, so some of their comments are out of line.) My beauty is still valued, my dating life hasn't suffered, and most exciting of all, I can buy clothes that fit me perfectly in local stores and online, even traditional kimono! I have been able to be myself in Japan (although I do think my style has become a little more modest), and I'm so glad I can contribute to the normalization of different body sizes just by being me.

I'm still loud and vivacious, I still switch up my hairstyles often, and I still show off parts of my body that Japanese people aren't used to seeing fat girls show. Even though I appreciate the positive comments from others, the affirmation actually hasn't been the main force behind my self-image. For me, knowing and owning my uniqueness and individuality in such a homogenous place has motivated me to love myself even more.

So, to all of my plus-sized, fat, bodacious, and thick girls in Japan: allow your light to shine and be your authentic self! There will be times where you will be laughed at and ridiculed, there will be times where you can't fit anything in a clothing store, there will be times where it feels like you're undesirable, and there will be times where you don't feel like you belong here at all. Unfortunately, these feelings can happen no matter where in the world you go.

However, don't allow the ignorance to bring you down. In the end, it's usually those who are the most insecure who put down others. Show those thighs, arms, and stomachs. No matter

how much you may try to cover up, people will always find a way to pass judgement, so you may as well look damned good when they do! Don't forget to love yourself, because as mama RuPaul says, "If you don't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else?"

Plus girls UNITE!

Here are some recommended shopping sites for my curvy ladies:

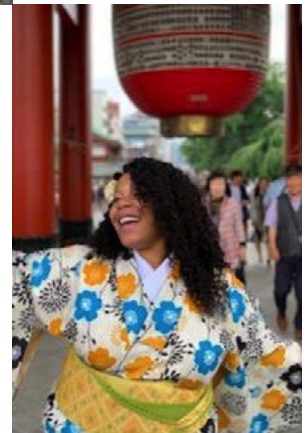


Online

- Fashion Nova
- PUNYUS
- Eur3
- La Farfa
- Re-J
- ASOS

Physical Stores

- Nissen
- Forever 21
- H&M
- Paseos/Aeon
- The Gap
- Shimamura



Sources:

1. <https://bit.ly/2kpN7DG>
2. <https://bit.ly/2XirpPa>

Photos:

Natasia James

Natasia "Tasi" James is a Saitama JET who originally comes from Louisville, Kentucky, USA. Due to coming from a military home, she has travelled and lived in many places, including Japan during her high school years. She hopes to finish her graduate studies in Rehabilitation Counseling in Mental Health within the next year as she finishes her time in JET. Her plan for after JET is to become a traveling counselor that services military families all over the world. Follow her on IG and Twitter @ _tasinicole_ and Facebook @ Natasia James



5
WAYS TO
IMPROVE
SUN-
WEATHERED
SKIN

Devoni Guise (Saitama)

Photo: Maddi Bazzocco on Unsplash.com

As we approach fall, some of us have noticed the effect the sun has taken on our skin, especially if we didn't use SPF, limit our time in the sun, and properly moisturize. Here is a list of simple steps you can take to get your skin glowing.

1

EXFOLIATE

Unless your skin is sunburned or is otherwise compromised, exfoliating is a great way to accelerate skin turnover and create a supple base so that your products work better. For the face, it is recommended not to use physical exfoliants but chemical ones. Look for products with mild acids like AHAs, glycolic acid, or lactic acid. For the body, exfoliation towels and homemade scrubs are the way to go.

3

HYDRATE FROM WITHIN

Water is always a necessity. To keep your skin in its best condition, you should consistently drink enough water according to your body mass. There is currently a trend in adding supplement powders to water such as pearl, rose, hyaluronic acid, and certain herbs. Search your local drug store for different types of powders and what concerns they address. Living in Japan, many of us have access to different types of tea, especially green tea. Green tea has many benefits not only for your health but also your skin.

2

MOISTURIZE, NOURISH, AND PROTECT

Even if you dropped the ball during summer, it's time to step up your skincare game. As we get into the colder months and drier air its important to keep your skin moisturized and supple. Look for lotions with ceramides, and skin conditioning ingredients like shea butter, urea, and the like. You can also have fun making your own unique mix of body oil from ingredients you can get from IHerb or Amazon. I scar very easily, and have found a mix of vitamin E oil and safflower oil will prevent a bite, scratch or cut from scarring badly.



4 SLEEP

Your body does all of its healing and repair work while you are asleep. The average adult needs around 7-9 hours of uninterrupted sleep a day. Keep a regular sleep schedule and prioritize good sleeping habits and your skin will thank you for it.



5 USE SERUMS, MASKS, AND FACE PACKS

Vitamin C products are especially powerful for repairing sun damage. Don't be afraid to use your products on your body. If you are consistently exfoliating and moisturizing, your skin will be positively affected by your serums. Use your products on your neck and hands. So often, people will focus on preventing sun damage or aging on their face but neglect some of the most obvious tells on our bodies—the hands and neck! I am also a big fan of bringing my products down to my décolletage (upper chest area) too. This is a good cheat for using up products your face may not have liked.

Our skin replaces itself every 28 days, so let's keep up good habits and treat our skin lovingly. By the time fall is in full swing and the nights get longer, we'll still have our own *personal glow* to keep us company— in the form of our skin.

Photos: Devoni Guise

Devoni Guise is on her second year as an ALT living in Saitama, Japan. In her free time she loves reading, practicing French and Japanese, and trying new things. You can find her @protecthemelanin



Photo: Maddi Bazzocco on Unsplash.com



BEING VEGAN IN JAPAN

*Three vegan activists
tell their stories.*

Tayler Erika Skultety (Nara)

In recent years, ethical veganism has become a popular lifestyle choice globally. How does being vegan in Japan differ from being vegan in Western countries? This month we spoke with three people active in their local vegan communities—an Instagrammer, an academic, and a baking entrepreneur—to learn about how living in Japan changed their lifestyles and shaped their initiatives.

AN INTERVIEW WITH Kat McCormick (Kyoto)

Q: Please tell us a bit about yourself and your involvement in your vegan community.

My name is Kat, I'm 35 years old, and I'm from the UK. I went vegan in my third year at university, after about 6 weeks of vegetarianism. I'm currently living in Kyoto with my husband and our little baby, and I run an Instagram account showcasing my vegan finds in the city.

Q: What (if anything) changed about your veganism after arriving in Japan?

Being vegan in Japan brings about so many more challenges than being vegan in the U.K. It's kind of like going back to when I first went vegan, in a way as in Japan there is no vegan market (yet!) so in-depth label-reading is essential. Whenever I'm back in England, I can just pick up an item of food and check for that vegan label, it's so easy, so it's very different here. As a concept, it's much more popular back home, and you can basically get vegan options in most restaurants now, which is just amazing.

In Japan on the other hand, veganism is still relatively unheard of. We do exist here of course, but it's much rarer to meet another vegan outside of related events. As a result, this has impacted my own veganism; I just don't take things for granted! For example, things that appear vegan friendly can often have hidden ingredients, so I have learned to ask those extra questions in restaurants and shops. It has also shown me that changes can happen if more interest is shown in this area, as I have seen so much progression in my six years in Japan.

Q: When you arrived in Japan, did you actively seek out other vegans? How?

I definitely did! I checked social media and found a group called [VegJET](#), which was my saviour to be honest. The group consisted of other JET participants who were also vegan (and some vegetarians) and it was a relief to know that in spite of what I'd heard, veganism was indeed a possibility in Japan. I remained an active member of the group throughout my time on the JET programme, and I even applied for and became its vice president for a time. This was important to me as I wanted to be there for other JETs in the same way the previous council were there for me.

Q: How important do you think online community is to veganism in Japan?

Hugely—not only for finding new restaurants, but also for meeting people, supermarket accidental vegan finds, and a sense of solidarity and shared disappointment when a seemingly vegan product contains hidden ingredients — aaaarrggghhh! On the JET programme especially, you can get placed anywhere in Japan, so online community and knowing where to find snacks you can actually eat is essential — and even better if you manage to make a friend along the way. It is exciting to see lots of Japanese vegans on social media too, and it really gives me hope for the future.

Q: You are always showcasing such amazing vegan restaurants on your Instagram page. How do you find such often little-known places? Is word-of-mouth a factor?

Thanks so much! I use Happy Cow, get recommendations from friends, and recently just see restaurants as I am walking around the city. There seem to be lots more popping up now, and lots of restaurants are showing signs outside advertising their vegan food, which is really great. As well as following accounts directly, I also follow hashtags, because sometimes someone will find a restaurant just from touring around, and it might be somewhere I've never thought to go.

Q: How do you hope to continue your involvement in your vegan community in the future?

Hopefully, I can continue the Instagram account and help reach more residents and tourists. Ideally, I'd love to see Japan have clear vegan labeling on food, that would be amazing. A group in Japan has been trying to make this a reality, and I think it's important to support ventures such as this, you can find them on [Facebook](#). It seems some vegan labels do exist but they're not well known or standardised, so it's difficult for companies to know what to use, perhaps. There's a petition for clear labeling, and if you feel called to do so, please sign it at [Change.org](#).

Q: What's your favorite restaurant in Kyoto?

Oh, this is such a hard question. I go through phases, but I'll always heartily recommend the chocolate cake at Morpho, the zesty ramen at Engine, the dinner set at Pettitrosso, the vegan burrito at Que Pasa, the matcha pancakes at Ain Soph, and the gelato at Premarche.



Kat came to Japan on the JET Programme in 2013, and has lived here ever since. Initially placed in Nara, she stayed there for three years, then moved on to Kyoto where she enjoys exploring the city and finding new vegan spots. Follow Kat's vegan life in Kyoto on [Instagram](#).



AN INTERVIEW WITH *Rosi Galvan (Osaka)*

Rosi was a Nara JET from 2014-2017. She was placed in Yoshino where she worked at a junior high school for 3 years. During her time on JET, she was part of the Nara AJET council, the National AJET council, and VegJET. She currently lives in Osaka, where she continues to teach and has started her own baked goods business called Trick or Treat Vegan Sweets. Follow Rosi on Instagram to see where she'll be selling her delicious treats next.

Q: Please tell us a bit about yourself and your involvement in your vegan community.

Hi! I'm Rosi Galvan. I was a Nara JET for three years and then decided to stay in Japan and moved to Osaka. I actually decided to go back to veganism when I was living in Nara. I've been vegan for three years now!

Once I moved to Osaka, I began to bake cakes and started my little business called Trick or Treat Vegan Sweets. My vegan philosophy is to just eat good food. Food doesn't necessarily have to be healthy or fit into a certain niche; it just has to be delicious. The cakes that I make are really what I grew up eating and what I miss. I guess you can say there is a certain kind of comfort food feeling to it — veganized of course. That's what I wanted to bring to the vegan community. I felt it was lacking here and so I try to have different kinds of pop-ups to bring people together. I also try to help out my local vegan community by participating in various fundraisers and different vegan festivals. My main goal is to create opportunities for people to meet and eat delicious food. Whether you're vegan or not shouldn't matter. It also gives me the chance to talk to people about veganism because believe it or not, it's not very popular here in Japan.



Q: How did you balance veganism and your social life when you first arrived in Japan?

That was an interesting time in my life. Prior to coming to Japan, I was vegan, but then made the conscious decision to go back to being vegetarian for fear of being an inconvenience, mostly to others. I didn't really know what it was going to be like here. In America it was easy to be vegan, there was always a vegan menu or it was easy to change things to a vegan option. I was pescatarian for about a year and then one day I said that I couldn't do it anymore. Even though the feeling of inconvenience is still there sometimes, I realized it's worth it. Sometimes you go out and you have to accept that all you can eat is edamame, french fries, and occasionally tofu. Socially it also made me go out and explore a little more! It was difficult at first, but once you know what you can and can't have it gets easy. It's sad, I know, but it is worth it.

Q: When you arrived in Japan did you actively seek out other vegans? How?

Actually, I didn't initially seek other vegans. But, it just so happened that one of my good friends was vegan. She would show me where she would go, like restaurants and supermarkets, and what she would eat. She was also the one who introduced me to the different support groups on Facebook. It started with [VegJET](#). Then ultimately grew to the different vegan/vegetarian communities in Kansai. I saw that there were different meetups and I tried to go to a few. These pages are how I learn about the different events happening around my area. I learned about the vegan festival that I ended up participating in a year later! I also met many of my now best friends at some of these meet-ups. I really suggest people join these groups even if it's just for the support and information.

Q: You moved from Yoshino, Nara to Osaka city. How does being vegan in a city compare with being vegan in the countryside?

It was a lot harder to be vegan in the countryside than it is in the city. I'm happy that I got to start my vegan journey in the inaka because it taught me how to be creative. It was like only having vegetables and tofu and seeing what amazing thing you can make out of it! My favorite thing to make was an eggless quiche using tofu and vegetables! Osaka is becoming more veggie conscious but it's still a long way off from being vegan friendly.

Q: What motivated you to start your own business? What has the journey been like?

It has been an uphill battle. It started with wanting to eat cake in Yoshino and having to make my own because there was no vegan cake available. I used to make my own cakes back in America so I figured it wouldn't be that hard to do. Then I started to make cakes for my friends' birthdays. They would eat it and say they couldn't believe it was vegan!

Once I moved to Osaka, it was just a lot easier to share with more friends. I could make a cake and not worry about it melting on the way to its destination. That's also when a few good friends encouraged me to sell my cakes at the Ethical Vegan Festival. It was my first time sharing and selling my cakes with people other than my friends and my first time making more than just one. It was so wonderful seeing so many people enjoying my baking. I think most people were shocked that it was vegan because it wasn't what they are used to. That was the start of my business and it has been a learning experience. I am a baker, not a business person. Doing this in a language that I haven't mastered is also another difficulty, but the community has been so generous and helpful that it really makes the struggle worth it.

Q: How do you hope to continue your involvement in your vegan community in the future?

Simply put, I hope to be more involved in the community. I see other prefectures like Kyoto having regular vegan meetups and I hope to be able to do something like that here in Osaka, even if it's just organised around my sweet pop-ups or collaborating with different restaurants. I think it needs to happen. Starting my own little shop has been on my mind for quite some time. Who knows? Maybe sometime in the future. I just want people to have a place where they can have a delicious piece of goodness to brighten up their day whenever they want.

Q: What is the most popular item that you sell?

The number one seller has to be carrot cake. I'm not surprised though. My favorite cake is carrot cake and it was also the first vegan cake recipe that I created. I think it's a very nostalgic flavor that you don't get very often here in Japan so it's very popular among my foreign customers. Also, because it has carrots in it so many think it's a little bit healthier than my other cakes. Who am I to say no?

AN INTERVIEW WITH Suzanna Powers (Kyoto)



Suzanna Powers is a wandering vegan restaurant cook, community organizer, and aspiring (food) anthropologist. She has taken her pursuit of all things food from the United States to Japan, and soon to Germany where she will continue her work on food ideologies and food-centric communities. She can usually be found spilling bread crumbs on a book or in a karaoke booth.

Q: Please tell us a bit about yourself and your involvement in your vegan community.

I'm originally from Boston, Massachusetts, USA and am a recent graduate of Doshisha University. During my time there, I also worked as a cook in a vegan restaurant and became fascinated with how we represent ourselves through the foods we eat and cook. My involvement in the vegan community is both personal and academic. I helped create a vegan meet-up community during my time at Doshisha University called Kyoto Vegans and Vegetarians. I was lucky enough that I was also able to use this community as a field site to conduct ethnographic field work on both the Kansai vegan community and the Japanese vegan community at large.

Q: Are there any differences between veganism in the Western countries compared to Japan that you think people should be aware of?

I think the key difference between veganism in Japan versus the American communities that I grew up with is the flexibility and openness. In America, you'd be hard-pressed to find a vegan meet-up group where people aside from vegans (i.e., pescatarians and vegetarians) felt fully comfortable. In the Japanese vegan communities I've engaged with, there's a lot of people who follow a "vegan except for..." philosophy. Plenty of people were vegan except for the occasional fish broth in their soup, or when they participated in work functions that did not provide vegan food. This tolerance of varied eating habits within the vegan community is something that I think Western veganism can learn a lot from. I think that giving people the agency to decide what they want to call themselves is a step in destigmatizing the image of (scary) vegans.

Q: When you first came to Japan, did you actively seek out other vegans? How?

Having first lived in a dormitory where people couldn't grasp my veganism, I definitely sought out other vegans. I was living in Tokyo and through a quick Google search came across the Tokyo Vegan Meetup Group. I knew from the moment I stepped into that atmosphere that I wanted to help create a similar group in Kyoto.

Q: Have you seen any changes in the vegan community since you've been in Japan?

Definitely! Although it's only been three years, the amount of festivals, meetups, food options, and media attention continues to grow.

Q: What advice would you give to people wanting to start an intercultural vegan meet-up in their area? What were some challenges you faced?

I'd tell them to go for it! The toughest challenges were simply making the meet-up feel as welcoming as possible. People had a tendency to want to break off into groups based on their nationalities and it was a challenge to get people to engage beyond that. After all, it's a meet up, and we wanted people to have fun! We managed to get around this by taking the introductions into our own hands. I would spend the first half hour of every meeting introducing myself to everyone and getting some basic facts about them down. Then I'd spend the rest of the event introducing people who seemed to have commonalities. Given the near 50/50 split of our demographics between Japanese and non-Japanese, this would often mean engagement between people of different nationalities.

Q: How do you hope to continue your involvement in your vegan community in the future?

Although I'll soon be moving to Germany for a master's program, I hope to extoll the virtues of the Japanese vegan community wherever I go. In Germany, I hope to bring the acceptance I learned from the Japanese vegan community to vegan communities there. On the academic side, I'll be pursuing a masters degree in Anthropology which will hopefully act as the perfect avenue for further investigating and comparing global vegan communities. I hope that when I return to Japan, it will be with a greater understanding of global vegan ideologies and food-centered communities to further build upon.

Q: What has been your favorite vegan event in Kansai?

This is such a difficult one to answer given the sheer amount of grassroots vegan events in Kansai. The most obvious choice would have to be the Ethical Vegan Fest held twice a year in Osaka. The organizers are clearly in it for the right reasons and have made it a very accessible and welcoming space.



Dancing, Drums, and Fiery Finish

A day at the 49th Apoi Fire Festival

DeVonna Lauritzen (Hokkaido)

The Apoi Fire Festival is the largest and longest-running festival in Samani, held on the first weekend of August each year at the *Fureai Hiroba* (town center). It's a great time for family and friends to get together to see some exciting stage performances and eat lots of great festival food.

The festival commemorates the history of Mount Apoi, the symbol of the town. In the old days, the indigenous Ainu people from the area would climb to the top of the mountain to light large fires in times of famine to ask the gods to provide plentiful deer.

"Festival, festival! Mama, let's go to the festival!" My Baby Bear had been eagerly waiting all week to go to the festival, counting down the days on the calendar. Of course, all he was interested in was

getting a new toy, riding the mini-shinkansen, and playing in the bounce house. The festival didn't start until Saturday afternoon, but that didn't stop him from asking all morning, "Is it time to go to the festival?"

I planned to go as soon as it started so I could see the Kids' Yosakoi Soran Dance and cheer for my kindergarten students as they went on stage. Soran-bushi is a traditional song and dance found all around Japan, but it's believed to have been first sung by the fishermen of Hokkaido. The dance portrays the flowing ocean waves, fishermen pulling up nets, pulling on ropes, and lifting cargo. The Yosakoi Soran Dance combines the Hokkaido Soran-bushi song with the energetic Yosakoi dance. This dance is taught to the two older classes at the town

kindergarten, and each year the students perform it on stage at the festival.

The festival features many local performance groups including Hula Dance, Jazz Dance, Street Dance, Apoi Taiko Drummers, Hyottoko dance performance, and more. I had never heard of Hyottoko before coming to Samani, but there is a very active group here that performs regularly around town and at various festivals and events. Hyottoko is a comical Japanese character often portrayed by wearing a mask with a puckered and skewed mouth. All the dancers wear masks, some comical and some not. The group typically starts out with a traditional dance that parades all the members around the stage, then it gets fun as they dance along to some well-known parody songs.

Two new ALTs arrived in town just a few days prior, and the town had planned to pull them up on stage to be introduced to the community, as they do with every new JET that comes through. As the town Coordinator for International

Relations (CIR), I was asked to help interpret for them, which meant I was going up on stage too.

We met at the designated time to talk with the stage manager and MC to go over what they expected and what questions they wanted to ask the ALTs. This gave them a chance to think about their answers and have something prepared. They also wanted us to participate in the fire lighting ceremony and the ceremonial *kanpai* given by the mayor.

The last act was wrapping up, meaning it was showtime. We walked through the small backstage area and then waited for the MC to make the announcement to call everyone onstage. It's strange how small and far away everything looked from up there, although I eventually spotted my husband and son in amongst the crowd. The MC introduced everyone, and I even saw a few people waving at me when it was my turn to be introduced.

The introduction and interview portion went well, so next, we moved onto the fire lighting ceremony. The mayor of Samani was introduced and joined us out on the stage. "Welcome to the 49th Apoi Fire Festival!" he declared. I moved to stand behind the ALTs so I could listen to his speech and do my best to interpret it for them. As the mayor's speech wound down, the new ALTs moved forward to grab the two torches together with the mayor. They gripped the handles and tipped them towards the lanterns to catch fire.

They lit up, everyone paused for a quick photo, and then the torches were quickly whisked away by staff to light the large fire sconces on top of the stage. Once the sconces were lit, a stagehand came out with cups of beer for all of us and we all gave an obligatory *kanpai*

together with the mayor. "Raise your glasses high and drink up! KANPAI!!"

After the toast, we exited the stage and were given a place to sit to relax for a few minutes while the next music act setup. One of the superiors from the Board of Education bought everyone a serving of yakisoba to celebrate. Once everyone was done eating, we all went back out into the crowds to find a good spot to chat and wait for the fireworks show. We reunited with Papa Bear and Baby Bear and found an open spot among the benches to camp out and wait for the fireworks.

Baby Bear was excited to show me his new treasures: two water balloon yo-yos, a pair of silly yellow sunglasses, and a tiny yellow octopus. The town JETs all sat together and chatted until the much-awaited fireworks began.

Loud pops, sizzles, and bangs caught everyone's attention as the night sky lit up. This was Baby Bear's second time to see fireworks, and he was captivated! "Wow! Colors! Big fireworks!" he exclaimed, jumping up and down. The fireworks lasted a good 20 minutes and ended with three very loud cannon booms to signal the end of the festival.

After making sure we had all our stuff, including Baby Bear's prizes, we disposed of our trash, said our goodbyes, and headed back to the car. Baby Bear skipped happily between us as we walked. "Mama, let's go to the festival tomorrow too!"

"Sure thing, buddy."

DeVonna Lauritzen, aka Mama Bear, is a third-year CIR in Samani, Hokkaido, a small town home to Mt. Apoi UNESCO Global Geopark. Her family, originally from Dallas, TX, enjoys the countryside lifestyle and being surrounded by the beautiful Hidaka Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. Check out their family blog to learn more about their experiences and what her work as a CIR entails: <https://kumanokazoku.wordpress.com/>

Photos: DeVonna Lauritzen





Nathan Abel (Gunma)

A FUJI ROCK

For the past 20 years, over 100,000 people have flocked to the picturesque ski resort town of Naeba, Niigata to attend Japan's largest music festival: Fuji Rock. As the name suggests, Fuji Rock was originally held at the foot of Mt. Fuji in 1997, but the brutal summer temperatures and a typhoon, which lead to the cancellation of the second festival, caused the organizers to move Fuji Rock to its current location. As Japan's premier music festival, Fuji Rock brings together both artists and fans from all over the world for a weekend of music and art; a sort of Asian Coachella or Glastonbury that is not to be missed for serious music fans living in Japan.

While living in America, I had the fortune of living between two major tour stops — Baltimore and Washington D.C. Hopping from dingy dive bars to sleek concert halls, going to shows was my biggest hobby and, between tickets and tour merch, was where most of my paychecks went. Congregating with fellow fans to experience live music could be a profound, even healing experience. It allowed me to connect to the music on a deeper level, and to feel like I was part of a larger community. But nothing good lasts forever, and I realized that my hobby would mostly be coming to an end after arriving at my relatively inaka JET placement. Still, going to shows is part of who I am. I knew I had to go to Fuji Rock.

Nearly a year after returning to Japan, three friends and I went to the festival with a load of gear, including bags, rain gear, and a tent. The road for Naeba was not as smooth as at the festival grounds. It might be familiar to anyone who has been to the two music festivals in the belt already. The festival is packed with tents and structures with sizes ranging from small to large enough to hold a sleeping bag, to large structures with stages in front. All around the festival, people are cooking food, drinking, and talking to themselves up and down the festival grounds. It's speakers.

It's difficult to say how much Fuji Rock festival is for toddlers to par-



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college students to aging hipsters, Japanese to American, to Russian and Chinese, Fuji Rock seems to draw a crowd from all corners of the world. The biggest difference in demographics compared to other festivals I have been to is that attendees seemed to primarily be dedicated music fans. Compare this to the way many people back in the States treat a festival like Coachella or Lollapalooza. At those festivals it's seen as a sort of vacation, a place to primarily have fun and cut loose, and if they happen to hear some good music while they're there, that's great too. While there is no right or wrong way to enjoy a music festival, I did feel more in my element at Fuji Rock, being mainly surrounded by fellow music nerds.

After a rough first night camping on the side of a hill (if you go to Fuji Rock make sure you get there early so as to find a flat surface for your tent!) we headed into the festival grounds proper. Fuji Rock is made up of two main stages, a large tent area, and a smattering of smaller stages and tents spread around the festival site. With the campsite located on the side of a mountain, the festival itself was held in a valley. Unlike the massive, wide-open fields in which many other festivals take place, Fuji Rock was completely surrounded by beautiful trees, streams, and rivers. Being held up in the mountains of Niigata meant that the temperatures, especially at night, were significantly cooler compared to other parts of Japan.

We first headed to the smallest of the three main stages, the red tent stage, to take in Japanese rockers Totsuzen Shonen (突然少年) followed by UK post-punk act Shame. Totsuzen Shonen gave an exhilarating performance of 90s flavored alternative rock, the kind that will be familiar to fans of veteran J-rock acts such as the pillows or Number Girl. Stages were jumped off of, mosh pits were started, and there was not a shirt to be found on any of the band members by the end. Shame also brought a great deal of energy to their set, thanks in large part to the undeniable swagger of frontman Charlie Steen, who was quick to energize the crowd and seemed to be dressed in some sort of 70s inspired striped jumpsuit (or maybe they were pajamas?).



Perhaps the biggest highlights of the whole day came from R&B singer turned award-winning actress, Janelle Monáe. Armed with jaw-dropping costume changes and a full backing band with dancers, Monáe was without a doubt the most charismatic and most natural performer of the entire festival. It was difficult to tell the makeup of the crowd, or how many people there understood English, but it was comforting to hear Monáe be met with loud, enthusiastic cheers towards the end of her set when she stopped to call for social justice and political reforms back in the United States. From there, we moved deeper into the woods to see a set from Australian psychedelic rockers King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard, and then headed back to the red stage to check out singer-songwriter Mitski. Half-Japanese, Mitski addressed the crowd in polite Japanese, much to their delight. Later in the evening, I was able to find a spot within a few feet of the stage for a set from Radiohead frontman, Thom Yorke. Hearing live renditions of tracks from Yorke's stunning new solo album, "Anima," as well as getting to see the incredible abstract video-art light show he brought with him was an experience I won't soon forget.



Shortly after the clock turned midnight on Saturday morning, the red stage turned in to "planet groove," a showcase for some of the more "late-night" acts Fuji Rock had to offer. First up was underground EDM darling Yaeji, whose hypnotic, pulsing electronic beats acted as the perfect party starter. Next was

Kaytranada, who offered a more hip-hop and funk angled approach to his dance tracks. Kaytranada was one of the artists I was looking forward to seeing the most, and he lived up to my expectations, and then some. Finally, at around three in the morning, Japanese rapper Kid Fresino came on stage for the final performance. Fresino had an infectious energy to his stage presence, and seemed thrilled and humbled to be closing out the first day's late-night performances. His jazzy backing band, as well as the numerous guests he seemed to constantly have on stage with him, created the perfect chilled out party atmosphere that was perfect for winding down to after the one-two punch of Yaeji and Kaytranada.

While Friday was by anyone's account the perfect day of music, Saturday quickly turned to anything but. As I crawled out of my tent and made my way towards the porta-potties and food stands of the camping common area, I saw plastered all around dire warnings that would come to all but ruin Saturday: a typhoon was quickly approaching. And approach it most certainly did. Starting at around two in the afternoon, Naeba was hit by non-stop torrential rain that did not let up until about 11 in the evening. Though our crew came relatively well prepared with rain gear, nothing but the most high-end waterproof jackets and backpacks could have stopped the torrents of water that we experienced that day.

Despite the weather, I can't say Saturday was a complete bust. Shortly before the storm began we caught legendary Japanese punk rockers Ging Nang Boyz, who were spectacular. By the end of the performance, frontman Mineta Kazunobu was foaming at the mouth while flinging himself around the stage. It was at once disgusting and strangely inspirational. In the middle of their final song, he gave an impassioned speech about his regret that a bolt of lightning had not come down from the sky to strike him during his performance. Finally having the chance to see 90s icons CAKE was also a real treat, even if they don't have a lot to offer outside of their handful of major hits. Perhaps my favorite performance of the day was from American Football. Nestled in a corner of the woods at the white stage, American Football took the stage around 9pm. By now the rain had been coming down steadily for close to six or seven hours and showed no signs of

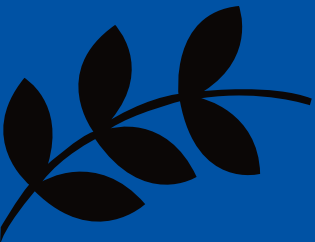


letting up. As soaked as everyone was, American Football's spindly, technical emo rock (less My Chemical Romance, more proggy 90s era Weezer) seemed perfectly fitting for the mood.

Besides the performances above, though, Saturday was a largely miserable affair spent beating myself up for not having brought honest to god rain boots and ducking into cramped porta-potties to text friends with dying phones to figure out an agreeable meet-up point at the end of the day. I couldn't help but feel lame amidst the hoards of unphased Fuji Rock veterans who likely would have been surprised if a typhoon hadn't come. Still, it was certainly

a valuable lesson learned. It reminded me of the Japanese term, *gaman*, which means to endure the unbearable with dignity and grace. When you're stuck in the middle of a typhoon with nowhere else to go, there's little choice but to accept your fate and stay calm. Shortly after the rain stopped in the evening we had a successful rendezvous and made an exhilarating fifty-minute drive back to my house in Gunma, ecstatic over the dumb luck of me living in a large inaka house a short drive from the festival grounds. Had we been forced to stay the night, I'm sure we would have been miserable and grouchy beyond words come Sunday.

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KOHH performed in front of a massive video screen that glitched and distorted his performance in real-time. It was an absolute visual treat. Dipping out of KOHH a bit early, I ventured even deeper into the woods, across a dense swamp covered by a wooden walkway and lit by moody lanterns, to find my way to the Field of Heaven, the corner of the festival most predominantly occupied by what one might consider to be hippies. toe's particular strain of technical, pretty, and (mostly) instrumental rock felt right at home amidst the tall pines surrounding the area, the grey skies, and the smell of incense. Last but not least I returned to the main area for what was arguably the biggest act of

the festival; The Cure. Somehow I managed to wind up roughly ten feet from the front of the stage. Simply put, the show was great. The Cure are legends for a reason and witnessing their performance was an honor and a privilege. They even played "Friday I'm In Love!"

Despite Saturday's trying conditions, Fuji Rock was an absolute blast, and I can't wait to go again next year, especially knowing what I know now about how to come prepared. If you're a serious music fan and you've been yearning to see live music in Japan, you can't ask for a much better experience. Just make sure you don't cheap out on what you need to stay dry!



Nathan is a second-year JET. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland in the United States, he teaches at two senior high schools in northern Gunma. Other than his passion for music, he enjoys reading, rock climbing, watching strange movies, and playing the guitar. He encourages you to get in touch with him if you're interested in going to Fuji Rock next year and want to meet up.

Photos: Nathan Abel

SEPTEMBER RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

MOVIES

1 Sept.

- Hello, Love, Goodbye (2019)

6 Sept.

- Us (2019)
- Hostiles (2017)
- Free Solo (2018)
- Shadow (2018)
- Ash Is Purest White (2018)
- Hindi Medium (2017)
- The Last Movie Star (2017)

9 Sept.

- Triple Threat (2019)

13 Sept.

- A Dog's Journey (2019)
- A Private War (2018)
- Satantango (1994)

19 Sept.

- Malibu Road (2019)

20 Sept.

- Annabelle Comes Home (2019)
- Ad Astra (2019)
- Eighth Grade (2018)
- Rampant (2018)
- Swimming with Men (2018)
- The Conductor (2018)

21 Sept.

- Playmobil: The Movie (2019)

27 Sept.

- Hellboy (2019)
- Peppermint (2018)
- Hotel Mumbai (2018)
- Escape Plan: The Extractors (2019)
- The Hummingbird Project (2018)
- Thoroughbreds (2017)
- Weekend (2011)
- In Like Flynn (2018)
- Au bout des doigts (In Your Hands) (2018)

28 Sept.

- Ethel & Ernest (2016)

SEPTEMBER NONSPECIFIC

- WRC 8 (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch) –
September
- Doctor Who: The Edge of Time (Rift, Quest,
Vive, PS VR) – September
- Crying Suns (PC) – September
- Everreach: Project Eden (PC, Xbox One) –
September

GAMES

3 Sept.

- Catherine: Full Body (PS4)
- Conan Chop Chop (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Last Oasis – Steam early access (PC)
- Torchlight 2 (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Spyro Reignited Trilogy (PC, Switch)
- Uplay Plus service launch (PC)
- Children of Morta (PC)

4 Sept.

- Warsaw (PC)

5 Sept.

- Lock's Quest (iOS, Android)
- Sin Slayers (PC)
- River City Girls (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Ghost Recon Breakpoint beta
- Green Hell – official launch (PC)
- NBA 2K20 (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

6 Sept.

- Monster Hunter World: Iceborne expansion (PS4, Xbox One)

9 Sept.

- Kings of Lorn: The Fall of Ebris (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Unrained – Steam early access (PC)

10 Sept.

- PES 2020 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Gears 5 (PC, Xbox One)
- GreedFall (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Walking Dead: The Telltale Definitive Series (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

12 Sept.

- Call of Duty: Modern Warfare beta (PS4, PC, Xbox One)

13 Sept.

- Daemon X Machina (Switch)
- Borderlands 3 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Nascar Heat 4 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

17 Sept.

- AI: The Somnium Files (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Devil's Hunt (PC)
- Lego Jurassic World (Switch)
- Truck Driver (PS4, Xbox One, PC) - 11 Nov.(PC)

19 Sept.

- Sega Mega Drive/Genesis Mini console launch
- Police Stories (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

20 Sept.

- The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening (Switch)
- Tracks (Xbox One)
- Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch Remastered (PC, PS4)
- Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch (Switch)
- Nintendo Switch Lite console launch
- The Sojourn (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

24 Sept.

- Dead by Daylight (Switch)
- The Surge 2 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

25 Sept.

- The Executioner (PC)

26 Sept.

- Northgard (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Flotsam – Steam early access (PC)
- Darksiders 2 Deathinitive Edition (Switch)
- Contra: Rogue Corps (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

27 Sept.

- Dragon Quest 11 S: Echoes of an Elusive Age- Definitive Edition (Switch)
- FIFA 20 (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Code Vein (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Tropico 6 (PS4, Xbox One)
- Teslagrad (Switch, Vita)
- Jalopy (Xbox One)

Sources:

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

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

Photo: Fredrick Tendong on Unsplash

VENUS GURLZ

Valerie Osborne (Fukuoka)



When Hawaii-native and current Fukuoka JET Missie Yamamura first began designing pins as a junior in college, she saw her work as just another hobby to explore alongside her love of thrifting and upcycling clothes. “[I] just wanted another fun hobby under my belt!” However, this hobby has grown into a passion project for Yamamura, blooming into her own enamel pin design company, Venus Gurlz.

A self-described “foliage fanatic,” Yamamura takes inspiration from the fauna of Hawaii and Japan. She uses this inspiration, as well as her experiences as an Asian American woman, to create a brand devoted to “harmonizing a love of foliage with shattering Asian & Pacific Islander stereotypes through an eclectic collection of pins.”

According to Yamamura, her goal is to use Venus Gurlz to break down stereotypes of what Asian Americans can and can’t do, especially when it comes to art. Based on her own experiences, she feels that artistic pursuits are often still considered taboo for

those growing up as Asian American. Through her pins, she wants “to represent how Asian Americans can be in a creative field [and] do more things than the stereotype of being doctors and lawyers.”

In fact, Venus Gurlz has helped her find pride in her own identity as an Asian American by allowing her to “[express her] experiences through the botanical-inspired pins.”

Now entering her second year on JET, Yamamura’s work through Venus Gurlz has also aided in her transition to living in Japan.

“I thought I wouldn’t get [culture shock because] my family is Japanese...but alas, I did!”

RRLZ "STICKS" IT TO ASIAN STEREOTYPES



FUKUOKA JET CELEBRATES ASIAN IDENTITY THROUGH PIN MAKING

Photos: Missie Yamamura

Being a Japanese American in Japan, Yamamura must deal with the unique experiences and struggles of being ethnically, but not culturally, Japanese. Most of her culture shock stems from her still growing Japanese language ability and her anxieties over being unable to speak her ancestral tongue fluently.

"People always [assume] that I'm fluent in Japanese, but rather, I'm the by-product of the Japanese diaspora," she said.

Since coming to Japan, Yamamura has incorporated her sometimes rocky relationship with her ancestral tongue into her art by using Japanese in many of her newer pin designs. "Continuing this passion project in Japan has helped me navigate through my culture shock," Yamamura explained.

She intends to continue to grow Venus Gurlz during her time in Japan, with plans to put out a tote bag by the end of the year. While her pins are currently available for purchase in boutiques in her home state of Hawaii and through Instagram, she also hopes to eventually launch an Etsy site. Any *CONNECT* readers who are interested in purchasing Yamamura's pins or learning more about her journey in Japan can check out her professional Instagram account [@venusgurlz](https://www.instagram.com/venusgurlz).

Finding a Seat in the Orchestra that is Japan

*Redefining a
relationship
with music
in a new
country*

Vicky Zhang (Tokyo)

Mi-mi-mi



As the classic child-of-an-Asian-family maxim goes, my relationship with music began when I was very young. I grew up in a small household that always had music playing somewhere in the background, and started piano and ballet together at age six.

Somehow that childhood equation led to joining the JET Program in 2018 with six years of tertiary classical cello on my application.

Evidently, 12 years on a single instrument was not enough, and I've since obtained a ukulele, melodica, and, most recently, a trumpet. The first three work quite well together...

A wise lady by the name of Marie Kondo once said, "keep what sparks joy"—so of course, the instruments had to come to Japan!

I dove into YouTube in the spirit of pre-JET hype, trying to get a feel for what the music vibe might be like in this vibrant country.

In doing so, I found out about Japan's lively brass band and jazz scene and left Australia excited to sink my teeth into as many new musical adventures in Japan as possible.

Not-so-lost in translation

About a week into Japan, I paid a visit to a little ukulele shop tucked away in a corner of Ikebukuro hoping to find someone to jam with.

As a cello major in university, I'd gotten to know a community of artists that was always within arm's reach. I knew that making the decision to work and live in Japan meant that I'd be removing myself temporarily from the colleagues I'd come to know in Australia and understood that I'd have to start over on my own.

As I sat down to talk with the owner whilst trying out one of the store ukuleles, a tanned Japanese lady with a sweet and cheerful demeanor entered the store looking for an instrument.

She also happened to be a singer.

I jumped at the opportunity, asking tentatively in broken Japanese, "Ano... ano uta ' *Ue o muite arukou* 'shiteru?" (*Do you know that song "Ue o muite arukou"?*)

(" *Ue o muite arukou* " ("I look up as I walk") was released in 1961 as a single recorded by Kyu Sakamoto. The singer describes looking up at the sky as a means to not let his tears fall. It's an old, classic Japanese melody filled with nostalgia for something that was meaningful but is now far away. Listening to this has been comforting lately, as I'm still missing home whilst transitioning into a new life. Fun fact: it was featured in Studio Ghibli's (*Up on Poppy Hill!*)

"Ah hai, shiteru!" she replied.

We ended up singing this song together with yours truly on the ukulele. Even the store owner joined in with his own finger-picking improv. It was a cheesy but cool moment of being able to connect with one another when neither of us knew how to speak the other's languages. I'd just experienced the saying "music is a universal language" first-hand. I know that this experience will serve as a reminder that so long as I keep looking to meet other people with a similar love of music, my own community will naturally grow over time.

Jamming in Yoyogi Park

Next, I hit up the Meetup app and found a group whose event info was in English, which could only mean one thing — more foreigners!

All credit goes to the organiser “Kwan” for this event — this one, in particular, was the first of its kind. Have a [listen](#) to a bunch of stray expats and musicians free-styling about the rent situation in Tokyo.

Listen out for a beatboxer, an Aussie delivering some rap, a ukulele player, guitarist on shakers, an excited JET, more guitarists, songwriters, and generally just a very happy mix of both expat and local musicians sitting on a tarp as the moon rose over the trees in Yoyogi Park.

The wonderful thing about Yoyogi Park is that it’s a welcome space for anyone to practice anything. You could go so far as to say that the variety of skills on display there is a big reason as to why many people enjoy visiting the park in the first place. It’s also a fantastic solution to the “no music” rule in many Japanese apartments, and I definitely plan on making plenty more visits whilst I’m here (especially with the trumpet...).

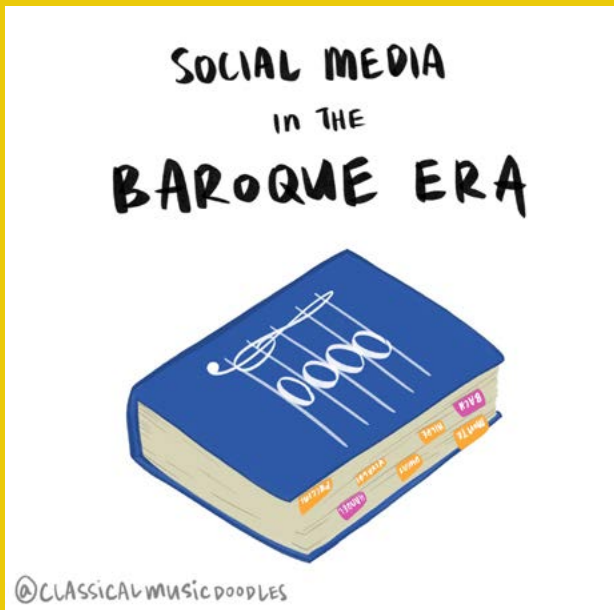
You can find the Yoyogi Jam group under [“Tokyo Outdoor Music Sessions”](#) on the Meetup App.

Classical Music Doodles

Somewhere throughout the six years of studying cello, my relationship with music had become stale and I was feeling mentally burnt out. I wanted to take a break from music and was considering other options, and that's actually how I came across the JET Programme. During this period of career-flux, drawing became a creative outlet that helped me work through the confusion I'd been feeling about my life.

Funnily enough, taking a step back from music to just do whatever I liked only made it that much clearer to me how much I actually loved music itself.

Thus, [@classicalmusicdoodles](#) was born. There you can expect to see content like illustrated practice journal entries, Harry Potter music analogies, and toe-dips into TikToks. It's been my way of putting a playful spin on the experiences I've had with classical music, and I hope to continue making genuine and humorous content that hopefully lots of people will enjoy.



You'll find more punny illustrations as well as fan-made music doodles on my personal account [@vickywzhang](https://www.instagram.com/vickywzhang). The lame humour is definitely not for the faint of heart, but I still look forward to seeing how my time in Japan will affect the evolution of my content.



Last words and a reminder to my future self

To any stray artists who've relocated to Japan, remember you are not alone! The sheer diversity of music Japan has to offer means that it's more than likely that a community of like-minded people awaits you.

Take advantage of Japan's open spaces, not only to practice your art but to also meet other people. Be open to all options, not just the ones you've become accustomed to up until now. Go out and own your individuality, because you never know what could be in store for you. You got this yo'. がんばれ!



Please don't hesitate to drop a line on either of my accounts if you'd like to talk music or just connect, I'd love to make your acquaintance!

Vicky is a musician from Melbourne now based in Tokyo. When she isn't teaching English, she's jamming on her ukulele, melodica, cello, and trumpet. She also enjoys making doodles on her Instagram accounts: [@vickywzhang](#) and [@classicalmusicdoodles](#).

Photos: Vicky Zhang

LIFESTYLE



WELLNESS EDITOR

connect.health@ajet.net

Caroline Allen

"Sometimes there's nothing better on earth than someone asking you a question." - Lisa Taddeo

SPORTS EDITOR

connect.sports@ajet.net

Rashaad Jorden

"Don't count the days. Make the days count"
- Muhammad Ali

Photo: Charlotte Coetzee





My Wellness

Hazel Reilly (Tottori)

Moving across the world with diagnosed depression and anxiety is not easy, let me tell you. It's difficult no matter what, but when your own mind constantly bullies you, it's almost a recipe for failure. If you let it. Your illnesses do not define you. My anxiety and depression do not define me, but they do affect me a lot.

So let`s talk about how to cope.

Whilst attending counselling prior to moving to Japan, my psychotherapist introduced me to the idea of “mindfulness.” At first, if I’m honest, I thought it was hokey. “Oh yeah love, meditation is so gonna help me.” However, I was in my final year of university as a stressed mature student, and at that point, I was willing to give anything a shot. As much as I hate to admit I was wrong about mindfulness; I was wrong. It’s wonderful. If like me, you get overwhelmed by everything going on in your life, even things you had absolutely no control over, then I can’t recommend this enough. When the world and all of its issues are too loud, mindfulness is a sanctuary you can turn to.

So first, what is “wellness?”

According to the World Health Organization, wellness is “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The National Wellness Institute defines wellness as “a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential.”

In other words, to be well is not just to be physically ok. Your mental state is equally as important. Neglecting your mental well being can have as big of an effect on your life as a broken leg or arm. The [National Institute of Health](#) has an “Emotional Wellness Checklist” which recommends brightening your outlook, reducing stress and getting quality sleep. In my opinion, these recommendations are far easier said than done. Another recommendation they make, however, is to “be mindful.” This is something you can do, fairly easily.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us. – [Mindful Magazine](#)

What does this mean? Well, I’m in no way an expert, but in my layman’s view, mindfulness is pulling your mental focus away from the millions of things you’re stressing about and focusing on your physical self. This is you, this is your body, this is what your body is feeling, you control this body, you are here, in this body and you are breathing and alive. I find this really helpful when I feel myself on the verge of breaking down or having a panic attack.

How I do this is? I get comfortable, usually sitting, close my eyes and start focusing on my breathing. In. Hold. Out. In. Hold. Out. In. Hold. Out. Then I focus on my heartbeat, is it racing? I count the beats, listen to them. Then I focus on my toes. All the while, every time my brain starts to drift (and it does and will) I bring myself back to what I was focusing on. Don’t get frustrated, your thoughts will wander. It’s normal, just keep bringing yourself back to focus. Focus on your toes, are they touching anything, are you wearing socks? Can you feel the fabric touching your toes? How about your ankles? Can you feel your trousers against the skin there? Are your legs crossed? Can you feel them touching each other? Your legs. Can you feel where they touch your chair or the floor or your bed? Is it soft? Your back, your stomach, your arms, your fingers, can you feel them? Are they hot? Cold? Are they tense? If so relax them. Relax your body, try and release as much tension as you can.

When you start to feel calm and like the outside world is far away again and not pressing up against your mind you can open your eyes and hopefully, like me, you will feel the benefits for a while. It can be difficult if you are in public to really distance yourself from the world. So, if you can go somewhere private to try, I recommend it. If not, there are plenty of YouTube channels dedicated to white noise and delta wave sounds, which I personally find really good for blocking out unwanted sound. I use it for sleeping in fact, so my new location near a train station and on a noisy main road doesn’t disturb my sleep.

Lately, I have had a lot of extra stress that is consistently keeping my head buzzing when I try to sleep. So, rather than trying a full mindful meditation set, I place my fingers against the wrist of my other arm and focus on my pulse, counting the beats, trying to see if I can feel my heart pumping in my chest.

[Here](#) is a link to a five minute guided mindful meditation to get you started. Remember, please, to look after yourself. You are important. Your health and well-being are important.



STAYING FIT AND HEALTHY WHILE ON JET

Caroline Allen (Tottori)

I surprised myself by how much I loved Japanese food. Before coming here, I reckoned there would be one or two dishes that would be regular go-to's, along with a couple of no-go's, and plenty of food I would just about tolerate. Weirdly, I love almost all of it; from spicy *mentaiko* to the sour sting of *umeboshi*, and all the shades of *umami* you can find. Not to mention the steady stream of liquor; *umeshu*, cola highballs, and gin and tonics.

Part of coping in Japan is learning to keep your mental and physical health in check. Eating right and finding the time to exercise, without depriving yourself of what makes you feel good. All of this is to say: how can you maintain your weight and maintain a good body image when there is so much temptation around you?

I think the key is balance. Too many people try to cut out an entire food group or turn to extreme diets while in Japan. They get upset because the ideal body type here is thin, thin, thin (I've been in this headspace, no judgement) and it's impossible to achieve. They crave the food they left behind in *gaikoku* [foreign country] and they feel like all the food here in Japan is out to get them and make them fat.

My advice is to let go. Let go of unrealistic expectations and hang-ups. Try to remember why you came here. Experiment with different foods. Listen to your body and what it is telling you—maybe you can't digest

seaweed or rice the same way Japanese people can. That's OK. Find a balance between engaging with your adopted culture (eating *kyuushoku* [school lunch], going to *enkai* [drinking party, usually for work], trying new sushi restaurants) and eating in a way that is nourishing and comforting.

Personally, my weight has fluctuated since coming here but it has ended up being more or less the same. It tends to rise and fall with my mood and how I'm feeling about my life (a big culprit for me is sugary drinks and cakes). Right now it's at a place I'm reasonably happy with but I know I need more vegetables. I can't be the only one craving fruit, can I? It's just so damn expensive.

Perhaps the key between balance and letting go is other people's expectations, along with our own. We could all do with being easier on ourselves and each other. It's not easy to adapt to living in a completely foreign culture and the pressure on top of that to look model perfect is too much. Participating in the JET programme is a valuable experience, not only in Japanese culture but also self-growth.

I want to know: What works for you when it comes to keeping a good body image? How have you managed to feel healthy in yourself—not just in body but in mind?

Email me at carolineallen25@gmail.com with your tips and tricks.

MY TOP 5 TIPS FOR STAYING HEALTHY AS A JET



1

Learn to cook. I'm being a hypocrite here though because I'm no chef and I live in an apartment with a kitchen small enough to require a microscope to see. Still, it's the best way to stay healthy.

Salad chicken is already prepared and a great, healthy option.

2

Failing that, go for healthier pre-prepared options. You might be surprised to find that your local *conbini* has a selection of salads and lower-calorie options.



One of my favorite drink choices is green tea.

3

Try to love green tea. I know, it's a cliché that every weight-conscious Japanese woman just sips at green tea constantly instead of actually eating, but it's refreshing, less boring than water and not absolutely loaded with sugar.



It's easy to find healthy lunch options in your local *conbini*.

4

Find a beautiful spot (maybe early in the morning, before the sun threatens to melt you) and go for a run. Leave your phone behind.



Miso soup - a tasty and healthy option.

5

Have fun. Any weight you gain while here, you can lose. Any hangover you inflict on yourself will heal. This might be the first and last chance you have to experience this way of life. Try to stop and enjoy it, once in a while.





SCRUMS, TACKLES, AND GOALS: RUGBY MANIA

Rashaad Jo

This March, while walking through Shinjuku (and later, Kobe and Beppu), I saw numerous prominent posters promoting a major international sporting event coming to Japan soon. But they weren't for the Tokyo Olympics.

The Rugby World Cup will grace Japanese shores for the first time. Twenty teams (and their fans) will descend upon twelve venues to watch the world's best rugby players. Tickets have been selling steadily for the roughly six-week event and currently, more than 80 percent of them have been sold.

The tournament kicks off on September 20 with the host team, the Brave Blossoms, taking on the Bears of Russia in Tokyo Stadium. Though not considered a favourite to capture the Webb Ellis Cup, the Japanese team will be one to watch out for. After defeating the United States to win the Pacific Nations Cup in

August, they climbed to ninth place in the world rankings—their highest ever. They'll be looking to build on their success in the World Cup four years ago, where they won three pool games and stunned two-time champion South Africa 34-32, a result that has birthed an upcoming movie named *Brighton Miracle*.

Whether Japan will accomplish its goal of reaching the quarterfinals depends largely on getting revenge in its final pool game against seventh-ranked Scotland, who pounded the Brave Blossoms 45-10 four years ago after the Japanese upset South Africa. Before meeting the Scots, the Japanese must also deal with third-ranked Ireland, whom they play on September 28 in Shizuoka Prefecture.

However, the Brave Blossoms are feeling confident about their chances of producing its most successful World Cup run, especially as they have gotten more preparation time than a lot

of the other teams competing in this year's tournament.

"We've been together since February and all the hard work has paid off," said captain Michael Leitch after the team's triumph in the Pacific Nations Cup. "I think we're on the right track."

As for the favorites, New Zealand immediately comes to mind. The All Blacks are the two-time defending champions and last month, defeated rival Australia to win the Bledisloe Cup. Other teams to watch out for are South Africa (who actually face New Zealand in group place), 2015 runner-up Australia, and Wales, winners of the 2019 Six Nations Championship. The Welsh have been in strong form recently—last year, they won ten of the twelve games they played and shot to the top of the world rankings after defeating England 13-6 in a World Cup warm-up last month.



オーストラリア

STRIKES

ニュージーランド

JAPAN

Jordan (Kochi)

Aside from the game action, one wonderful aspect of the tournament is that the host cities run the gamut from huge locales to smaller cities not used to hosting high-level sports events. While the likes of Tokyo and Osaka come as no surprise, locales such as Kamaishi (Iwate Prefecture) and Fukuroi (Shizuoka Prefecture) will get in on the action. The final will be held at International Stadium in Yokohama on November 2.

Kaimashi has a deep rugby history; the now-defunct Nippon Steel Kamaishi captured seven consecutive All-Japan Championships from 1979 to 1985. Kaimashi was heavily damaged by the 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami, and by hosting World Cup matches, it hopes to inject money into the local economy and instill pride in the still recovering city, as well as attract foreign visitors to a relatively unknown city. One hotel manager in the city said

that the prospect of an enormous sporting event coming to her city has motivated her to keep her hotel running.

Regardless of where their favorite teams will be playing in the country, hordes of rugby fans will descend upon Japan. With an estimated 400,000 visitors set to come to Japan for the Rugby World Cup, Japan's tourism industry will surely receive another huge boost as 216.6 billion yen is expected to be injected into the Japanese economy, in addition to a 21.6 billion yen increase in tax revenue and the creation of 25,000 jobs. Furthermore, the Japanese tourism industry has the opportunity to display a country that is more welcoming to a diverse set of guests. An increasing number of onsen and sento have expressed a willingness to welcome tattooed guests. Oita Prefecture has set up a website in English that lists 95 tattoo-friendly establishments

and provides instructions for visitors on proper onsen etiquette.

While the Brave Blossoms have plenty of work to do in order to satisfy its rapidly growing fanbase, rugby is set to blossom in Japan with a new professional league on the horizon. The World Cup will surely play a huge part in that growth.

Photos: Rashaad Jordan

Rashaad Jordan has always been a big sports fan but for the longest time, didn't have the foggiest clue about rugby. While still not totally familiar with the rules of the sport, the Kochi Prefecture ALT is excited for the rugby stars coming to Japan, and hopes to get a better grasp of the sport by the time the Brave Blossoms face the Russian team in the tournament's curtain riser. Aside from rugby, he loves track and field and soccer, and hopes to complete another marathon in Kochi.

COMMUNITY

A photograph of a modern building with a glass facade and a concrete walkway, with a reflection in a pool of water in the foreground. The building has a prominent vertical structure and a series of windows. The foreground shows a concrete walkway and a pool of water reflecting the building. There are some people walking on the walkway. The background shows other buildings and a clear sky.

COMMUNITY EDITOR

connect.community@ajet.net

Jessiete Amerila

TRAVEL EDITOR

connect.travel@ajet.net

Hoong Shao Ting

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." - Lao Zi

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



All the World

Experiences with Performing Arts in Japan

Laura Duvall (JET Alumni, Gifu)

I vividly remember July 2014 — I was a few weeks away from beginning my life in Japan on the JET Program, feeling the sting of having to leave my community theatre family. I had just finished working backstage on my theatre's production of "Shrek: The Musical." All of my life, I had been involved in some sort of performing. Would I be able to continue that once I arrived in Japan? I just couldn't imagine my life without performing arts in it.

After settling into my placement in Nakatsugawa, Gifu, some local *senpai* ALTs pointed me in the direction of Nagoya's bustling community theatre scene. Several companies even perform with international casts, doing shows in both English and Japanese! So, in October of my first year on JET, I was already auditioning and attending networking events. Over my five years on JET I ended up working on seven shows with four different theatre companies, with roles both onstage and off.



World's a Stage



1 “The Club” (The Nagoya Players, 2015) — In my first experience as a lighting assistant in Japan, I helped design a sunset light motif to signal the passing of time during the play. I can vividly remember the shock on the faces of the Japanese theatre technicians as I walked into the theatre and instantly began climbing ladders and setting up lighting instruments!

2 “Nagasaki Dust” (KanGeki Theatre Company, 2015) — Dealing with the serious subject matter of Nagasaki’s atomic bombing, Nagasaki Dust was performed with scenes in Japanese and in English. Performing in such a show was sort of like paying my family’s karmic debt, as my grandfather fought on the American side during World War Two.

3 “The Boxer” (KPB Theatre, 2017) — KPB Theatre is known for its original English language productions. The Boxer followed the story of a struggling boxer with a dark past. As a lighting operator on this show, it was my job to use lighting to set the tone of this more dramatic piece.

4 “Unglued” (KPB Theatre, 2017) — In another original piece, this time centered around a group of old friends reuniting for a weekend together, I played one of the more eccentric members of the group of friends. It was a blast to dig deep to find the level of crazy necessary to play my character!

5 “Little Red Riding Hood Pantomime” (KPB Theatre, 2018) — As a special Halloween event for one of our theatre’s sponsors, a few KPB Theatre members performed a fun British style pantomime for a Nagoya-area children’s English school. I played the role of Grandmother, where I had to learn how to do my own old age makeup!

6 “Gerry in the Attic” (KPB Theatre, 2018) — KPB Theatre not only produces original plays, but also original musicals! In this show, I played a tough-as-nails waitress who helped the main characters achieve their mission of getting their friend’s ashes to their final resting place. With songs, dance choreography, and the lines to memorize, this was definitely one of the greatest challenges to my stamina.





7

“Speaking in Tongues” (Theatre Iridescence, 2019) — In a move not done by many theatre companies, Theatre Iridescence produced this play with two different casts: one Japanese, and one English. I worked as a lighting operator on both shows. Working with two different languages and two different sets of cues pushed me more than I ever had been before. But, it firmly cemented in my mind that I belong behind a lighting desk, making all of the magic happen.



While I loved going to Nagoya for rehearsals and theatre, I still wanted to do something more local as well. I began going to local rock concerts at Nakatsugawa’s local live houses. As I began to become a regular face in the music scene, I joined in on vocals at open-mic events. This eventually led to being asked to be the lead vocalist of a classic/punk rock cover band for four and a half years. We played at local festivals, multiple live houses, and even were able to open for Western bands who were in Japan on international tours.



It wasn’t always easy to balance both my musical and theatrical performing lives, but all of the hectic weekends and long rehearsals gave me so many great rewards. I honed my skills as a vocalist, actress, and lighting technician. I experienced theatre in multiple languages, with cast and crew from all over the world. But most of all? I made some of the best friendships that I know will last me a lifetime.

To those just starting your lives on JET, I encourage you to speak openly about your hobbies and passions. You never know what sort of doors can open for you until you put yourself out there. Go make your JET experiences as great as you can! Break a leg! :)



Photos: Laura Duvall

Laura is a JET alumna from 2014-2019. She worked for four years in Nakatsugawa, Gifu as an ALT and then spent one year in Gifu City as Prefectural Adviser. She now studies Entertainment Design and Technology at Eastern Michigan University.



**LIGHTS,
CAMERA,
ACTION!**

A Filipino YouTuber's
Journey

Karla Valdez (Nagano)



“Hello everyone, this is candyinthelandofsushi and welcome back to my channel!” — It has been three years since I started my YouTube channel here in Japan, and I never thought that I could influence and inspire the people aiming to be teachers like me.

Even before coming to Japan, I already had a vision and a plan to create my own channel. I first wanted to start my own channel seven years ago, when there weren't many Filipino YouTubers about. At that time, I was into makeup and beauty reviews, however, I didn't have the resources like a nice camera, a heavy-duty laptop, and a video editor that wouldn't crash when files were big.

As a newcomer to Japan, I had a difficult time settling into my area, and YouTube was one of the resources that I turned to for help. Then it hit me — I remembered the vision I had and thought to myself that I could create a channel that would cater to assistant language teachers like me. Not only would it help the people already living in Japan, but it could also inspire people back home to give teaching in Japan a shot.

To make this possible, I saved a lot in my first year here in Japan so that I could afford the gadgets and tools I needed. Before uploading my first video, I explored my area and traveled to other prefectures,

studied the language and Japan's rich culture so that I could share new information and experiences. I've always believed that “you cannot give what you do not have,” so I researched topics beyond my knowledge as an ALT.

Let's face it — the first year in Japan is the toughest. Homesickness kicks in after a few months, or weeks, perhaps even days! It happens when you finally realise that you are clueless about the nitty-gritty details of living in a foreign country. This is why I want to create content that can help others pave the way to achieving their dreams and to build a community where people can pick up tips and tricks to make their lives in Japan easier.

To be frank, I could not have started my YouTube channel on my own. I am one of the most introverted people you'll ever meet. I don't have a colourful personality or witty humor and I am not like other YouTubers who could stand on their own and make a one-man show. But, I try; I try for my subscribers and viewers. I try to make the most helpful content. I try to make the quality of my videos worth watching.

Over time, I have become a visa, tax, and pension expert even though these matters were once beyond the scope of my knowledge. I am just an

ordinary expat but I try to keep studying and researching so I can give informed answers to my viewers.

Although there have been countless times that I wanted to stop making videos, I always look back in the number of people whose lives I have inspired and changed and that makes me continue this passion. If I carry on, I could

inspire more people to reach their dreams of becoming an English teacher here in Japan.

Right now I have over 4,000 subscribers in my channel, it's not a lot but it counts. Most of them come from the Philippines but my videos are also reaching far more countries than I could ever travel to. One subscriber from Zimbabwe sent me a message through my Instagram

account recently. I have never been to Zimbabwe, but to think that my videos have reached there really made me happy. I almost couldn't believe it.

I really just want to help aspiring ALTs and experienced ones alike. I never thought of the money I could earn via ads on my channel and, to be honest, I am still not earning much. My only goal is to be a go-to-person when it comes to anything and everything ALT.



The small community I have built now has a special place in my heart. I want to take this opportunity to thank my subscribers-turned-friends for supporting my channel and for sending me inspiring messages when times get rough and dark. You guys have been my silver lining and without you, I wouldn't be able to continue making useful content. I have not made a lot of friends in Japan since I am a homebody. When I don't travel (solo), I stay home, film, and edit. I also live in the countryside, which makes networking all the more challenging. But, I realized that although I might not have that many friends in Japan, I have 4,000 solid subscribers, who I now call my friends in my home away from home.

Karla, aka candyinthelandofsushi, is a twenty-something Filipino kindergarten turned Assistant Language Teacher who fancies coffee shops and crepes. Hiking and travelling keep her sane. She can be found on both [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

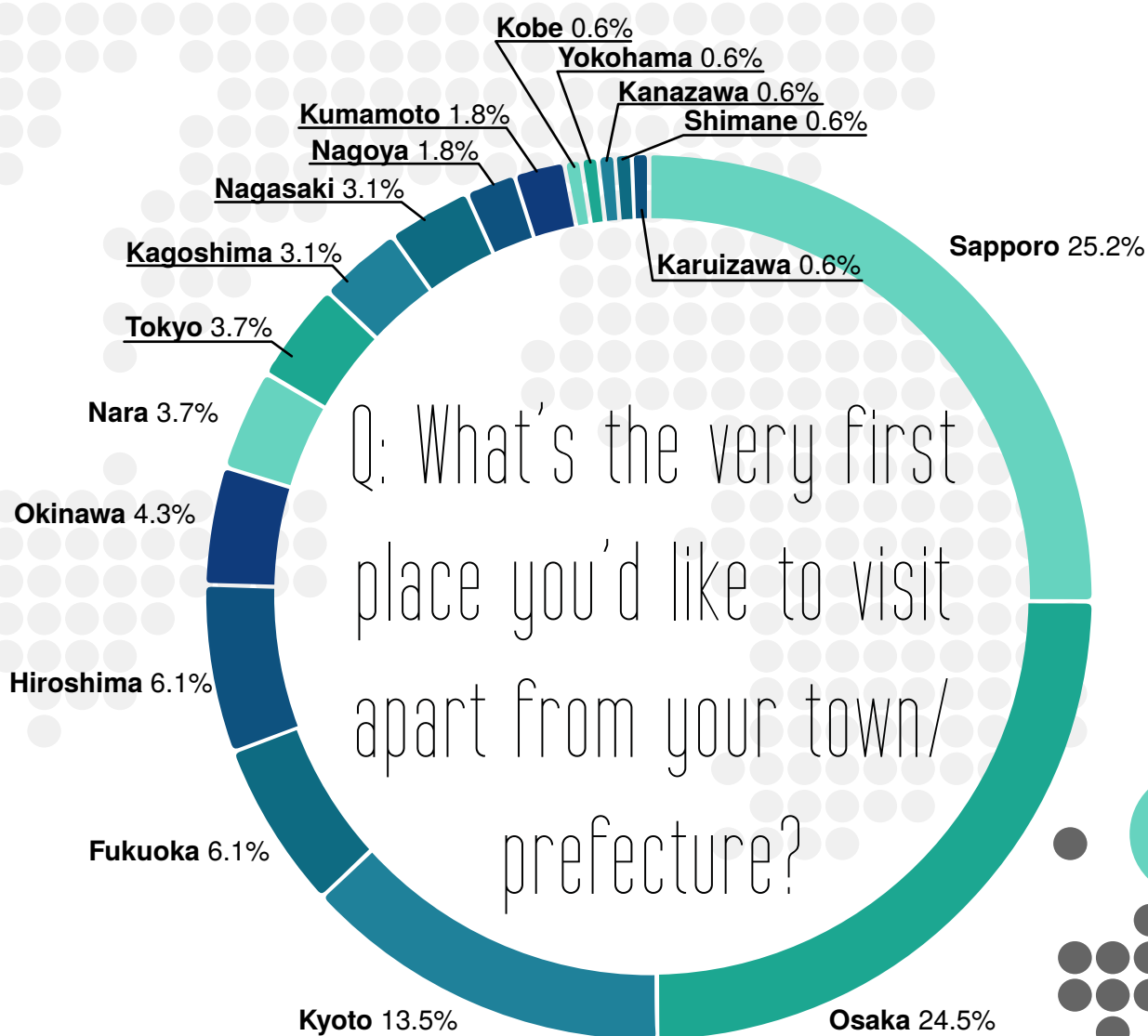
IG: [@candykab](#)
YT: [canyinthelandofsushi](#)



(Re)discover Your Travel Inspo

Hoong Shao Ting (Nagano)

Let's be honest: did anybody *not* entertain thoughts about travelling around Japan when deciding to relocate here? With this time of the year being a fresh start for incoming JETs and the beginning of another school term for returning ALTs, it is time to plan those new adventures! To share some travel inspo, I conducted a couple of surveys on Facebook (super official, I promise!) and here are the results:



"Basically tout Miyazaki history and But Kagoshima have plenty paradise." - Cassie

Q: Which destination off the beaten path would you recommend?

“The four corners of mainland Japan. Two are in Hokkaido (North and East) and two are in Kyushu (South and West) ... There is so much to see in Japan, it is easier to talk about hidden gems by prefecture.”

– Catrina Caira, Sendai.

“From Mt. Watamuki and the former Kaigake Elementary School in Hino to the Azuchi Castle ruins in Omihachiman, rural Shiga has plenty for you to explore. Take the ferry out to Chikubu Island on Lake Biwa and try to throw your wish tile through the *torii* gate!”

– Magda Fuller, Kanazawa

“I love all of Kyushu ... I'll always love Fukuoka, of course. So much history and folklore come from there. From Fukuoka, Kumamoto, and Oita are also worth a visit to offer as well. Pretty much everywhere is worth a visit.”

– Conrad, former Miyazaki JET.

“Taketomi Island is not very famous but it's definitely the cutest place I've been in Japan.”

– Ashley Levin, former Shizuoka JET.

I have visited Japan for work and leisure quite a number of times, but this is only the beginning of my JET journey. I'm looking forward to even more breathtaking moments. How about you?

*Shao Ting is a first-year ALT from the little red dot called Singapore, and the new Travel Editor for **CONNECT**. You're most likely to find her in some sort of flower field or quaint café with good confectionery—check her [travel blog](#) and [Instagram](#) for her whereabouts!*

Check out the article on 'hidden towns' in *CONNECT*'s [November 2018 issue](#) for more ideas!

There is no lack of travel books, magazines or websites offering information about Japan and I don't want to be a broken tape recorder. For the uninitiated, however, I would like to point you to the articles '*Ryokou Shimashou*' (lit. 'Let's Travel') and 'Travel Websites & Apps' in the [July](#) and [September 2018](#) issues respectively for recommendations to get started on trip planning.

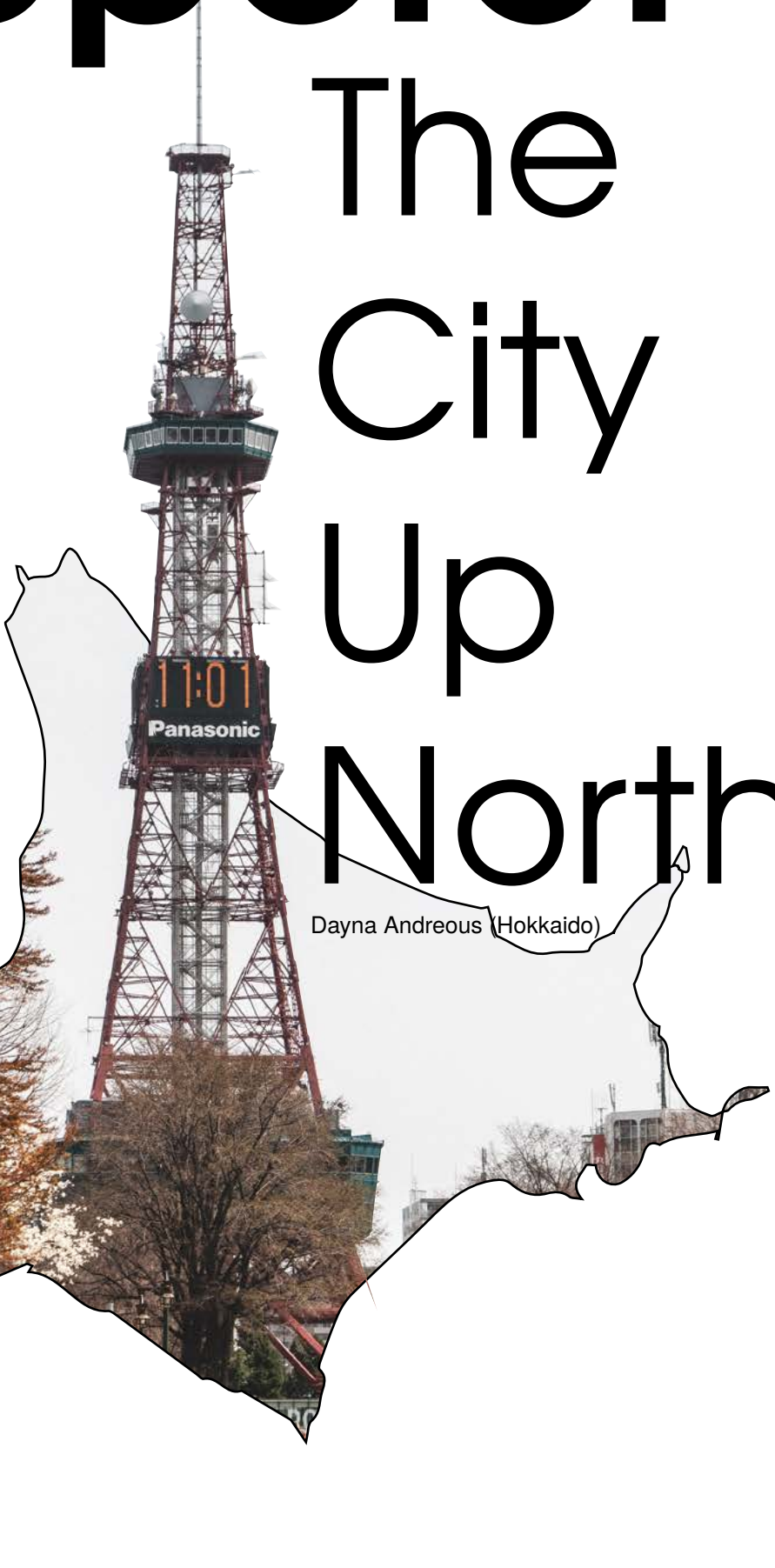
Personally, I like browsing through [retrip.com](#) (Japanese only) for inspiration, then looking at [japan-guide.com](#) for the details of each spot. I absolutely *adore* Google Maps and relish customising my own maps—marking out important places and sorting them by layers are some of the most basic yet useful features. Serious functions aside, I also customise the pins in my spare time so that a *sakura* spot is represented by a flower, for example!

Sapporo: The City Up North

As the third most populated city in Japan, Sapporo functions as Hokkaido's urban hub — it is the heart of the prefecture. From Sapporo station, buses travel to farther, more obscure parts of Hokkaido. The most beautiful forestry and *onsen* can be found on Sapporo's outskirts. Sapporo is the place to be for trying out prefectural specialities.

Hokkaido as a whole can seem like an enigma to those living on the mainland. However, Sapporo is the northernmost answer to Tokyo, with so much to do, see, and reflect upon for those who are tempted to travel up and into the vastness that is this prefecture.

Sapporo can be enjoyed through all seasons, with a variety of activities available. Read on through the seasons to see which best suits you and plan your travels around them!



Dayna Andreous (Hokkaido)

AUTUMN

Autumn Leaves



Autumn in Hokkaido begins the earliest out of all the prefectures, so if you're planning on seeing the beautiful autumn leaves changing in Sapporo, aim for the end of September through until mid-November. To see the really colourful and vibrant changing leaves, it is best to go in October.

Sapporo has a wide range of places and parks where you can view the leaves. Nakajima Park in downtown Sapporo boasts some of the most beautiful reddish and gold leaves every year. Shobu Pond is also a lovely touch to the beautiful autumn landscape, where you can see the mesh of colours reflected in the clear waters.

Another popular spot is Hokkaido University. Ride a bike or simply stroll down the famous Ginkgo Tree Avenue on campus, where trees line the sides of the street and provide a dazzling scenery overhead as their leaves turn a bright shade of yellow. Lastly, Maruyama Park boasts a combination of elms, maples and *sakura* trees. Their changing colours make for wonderful viewing and photo opportunities.

Sapporo Autumn Fest

Each year in September, Sapporo holds its Autumn Fest, which promotes food from all around Hokkaido, and showcases Sapporo cuisine especially well.

This year from the 7th until the 30th of September, food and drink stalls will line the length of Odori Park on either side, giving you the opportunity to sample Sapporo's famous *ramen*, local speciality wine, and strangely flavoured ice-cream. If you're feeling brave, you can even try the fishy sea urchin, or *uni*, that is so famous in Hokkaido!

The Autumn Fest also includes stalls with foreign cuisines, such as tacos from Mexico, as well as stalls where you can buy souvenirs on your journey.

As the venue tends to become busy, it is best to prepare yourself for some wait time. Furthermore, Sapporo will be a little chilly towards the end of September, so be sure to bring a coat!

WINTER

Sapporo Snow Festival

Arguably the most famous attraction in all of Hokkaido is Sapporo's *Yuki Matsuri*. Held on the first weekend of February each year, the festival attracts millions of tourists worldwide. Wandering through Sapporo's various parks, visitors are awed by the wonderful sculptures constructed from snow and ice.

The Snow Festival can be enjoyed at many locations, but one of the most famous and impressive places to visit is Odori Park, where sculptures can be seen from either side of the park representing all manner of pop culture, film culture, and traditional Japanese culture. In the last few years, outstanding Star Wars sculptures, complete with the film's soundtrack playing in the background, have stolen the show. Equally impressive are the true to size houses made entirely from ice, some measuring up to 25 meters in size. The Odori Park Yuki Matsuri also features a ski jumping competition, which can be enjoyed in the afternoon.

Other locations to admire the sculptures are the Susukino Site and the Tsu Dome Site. Whilst admiring the creations, you can also buy hot drinks and souvenirs, including Snow Festival T-shirts which feature a unique design for each year. February is the coldest month in Hokkaido, so be sure to bring your warmest clothes and thickest woollen scarf!



Soup Curry

During Sapporo's harsh winter, nothing can warm you up better than Hokkaido's Soup Curry.

Soup Curry differs in both taste and presentation from ordinary Japanese curry. The rice and curry are served separately, and the curry is more liquid than an ordinary curry—hence the 'soup' part of the name. Soup Curry tends to be spicier than its counterparts and includes a handful of seasonal vegetables such as carrots, aubergines, and green peppers. The dish is often finished with half of a boiled egg. In almost every Soup Curry restaurant, you can choose your preferred spice level, amount of rice and any additional vegetables or toppings.

There is a plethora of great Soup Curry places in Sapporo, but two that stand out are Picante Soup Curry and Okushiba Shoten Ekimaesoseiji Soup Curry Restaurant.



If you are interested in the typical wintry skiing experience in Hokkaido, Hokkaido AJET organizes an annual 'Snowcation' for a reasonable price. The event is always exciting and is a great opportunity to meet the Hokkaido JETs tucked away up in the northernmost prefecture. In 2020, it will be held from February 7th to 10th.

Check out the following pages or contact Arin, the Social Coordinator for HAJET, at social.coordinator@hajet.org for more information.

SNOWCATION

Hosted by

HAjet

FEBRUARY 7TH - 10TH, 2020

¥ 59,000

divided into two **non-refundable** payments of **¥29,500** due on:



October 31st



December 2nd

Recommended flight arrangement:



Arrival on Friday, February 7th through New Chitose Airport (CTS).

Price includes:

- Shared accommodation with other Snowcation participants in the heart of the Sapporo
- Ski lesson and ski pass for skiing or snowboarding **OR** a guided snowshoe hike
- Relaxing soak in a Jozankei hot spring
- Enkai with HAJET members and your fellow Snowcation participants

ITINERARY



Friday, February 7th

- There will be a welcome party and activities.
- After a day of activities, you will feel fresh and new in Otaru!



Saturday, February 8th



7:20 AM

Depart from Sapporo

Tokyu to participate in activities.

options:



Skiing

at the Otaru

(<http://www.otaru-ski.com/>)



Snowshoe

hike



6:00 PM

Enjoy an enkai with

Japan! After 8, you will

for an after party

illuminations in Otaru

(until 10pm) or relax

for the next day.

RARY

Feb. 7th

There are no scheduled activities on this day. For those arriving in Sapporo, please see to explore the city and nearby towns, like

Feb. 8th

AM

Stay at Sapporo Excel Hotel or stay in one of two

and snowboarding at the Sapporo Olympia Ski Center.

([/bit.ly/olympiaski](https://bit.ly/olympiaski))

and snowboarding at a to-be-determined location.

M

With JETs from across

you can stick around

and check out the

Odori Park

Get up



Sunday, Feb. 9th



9:15 AM

- A guide will meet you at your AirBnB and lead you to Sapporo Station where you will take a bus to Jozankei.



- We will leave the onsen at Jozankei at 2:50pm, leaving you free to explore for the rest of the day!



Monday, Feb. 10th



The last day of Snowcation.

We hope you make many fun memories to look back on after your return!

CONTACT

For general inquiries:

social.coordinator@hajet.org

For immediate concerns during the trip, please contact our Social Coordinator,

Arin, via LINE or telephone*:



*Phone number will be distributed to participants after reservation confirmation.

YOUR
Hokkaido
SNOWCATION

AWAITS

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS



The Sapporo
SNOW FESTIVAL

Delicious
**LOCAL
SPECIALTIES**



Relaxing outdoor
HOT SPRINGS

Instructor-led
**SKIING &
SNOWSHOEING**



FEBRUARY 7TH - 10TH, 2020

RSVP @ [BIT.LY/SNOWCATION2020](https://bit.ly/snowcation2020)

Organized by 

SPRING

Lilac Festival

The lilac tree is the official tree of Sapporo, and every year there is a festival in the springtime to celebrate its blooming along Odori Park. It is a very relaxed and chilled-out atmosphere, perfect if you feel like having a picnic beneath the pink and purple flowers. The upcoming Lilac Festival is from May 13th to 14th, 2020, so plan your dates accordingly!

Sakura

A list of any sort about things to do in Japan would not be complete without advice on the best sakura spots. Sapporo is no exception. The cherry blossoms in Hokkaido bloom the latest in all of Japan, meaning you won't need to skip your local *hanami* festivities in order to see the beautiful blossoms in Sapporo. The season begins early May and can be seen all the way through until the end of the month.

Scattered around Odori Park are large sakura trees with beautiful pink cherry blossoms, the petals sometimes falling on your shoulders as you walk.

Maruyama Park and Hokkaido Shrine, which are located next to each other, are very popular for *hanami* parties from early to mid-May.

A hidden gem, Moerenuma Park, has a condensed grove of cherry blossom trees that are perfect for photoshoots and picnics.

SUMMER

Yosakoi Soran Festival

One of the biggest treats of the summer in Sapporo is the Yosakoi Soran Festival. It happens annually around the beginning of June and provides one of the best and most authentic experiences of Hokkaido culture that the entire prefecture can offer.

It is a dance festival where various groups of dancers perform their own renditions of the Soran Bushi dance and song, complete with their own bright, impressive costumes and accompanying makeup. The festival also features *naruko* clappers.

The main performance can be seen in Odori Park, where the dancers parade down the length of the area on either a stage or on the street. Visitors can dance too, and also purchase local speciality food and drinks at Waodori Square.





Mount Moiwa

Mount Moiwa is a popular sightseeing spot in central Sapporo. Although it is not as tall or formidable a mountain as Mount Fuji or Hokkaido's Mount Yotei, it boasts an impressive view (particularly in the night-time) from the observation deck at its summit. The Mount Moiwa Ropeway at the base of the mountain takes you to the top via a mini cable car. There are restaurants at the top, including The Jewels, which is known for its delicious Soup Curry. There are also places to buy souvenirs, and many opportunities to take breath-taking photos of Sapporo city below. The lower temperatures of Hokkaido's summer makes this a perfect activity for those escaping the heat of the mainland.

Photos:
Dayna Andreous
Shabubu Yu on Unsplash.com

Dayna Andreous is the Editor-In-Chief of Hokkaido AJET's monthly magazine, Polestar. She hails from London, England and is currently based in the coastal town of Yoichi, wedged between the tiny fruit-picking town Niki and the famous, romantic Otaru. She loves reading, writing and coffee!

NIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Outside of seasonal activities, Sapporo has a bustling nightlife. To touch on a few places:

1 Gossip Lounge located in Susukino features poker chips to trade in for drinks and a cool, relaxed atmosphere. Many university students visit this bar and it is a good place to socialise with young people, including foreign exchange students.

2 Booty is a bar-slash-club with an upstairs and downstairs area. If you like hip-hop and a place to dance, it is a great place to go. The space upstairs has chairs and couches for you to sit down and have a drink, whilst downstairs there is a dark dance floor for you to show off your moves. Entry for women is free.

3 Finally, no night entertainment section for Sapporo can be complete without mentioning the notorious KING XMHU, a large dance club similar in style to European clubs. This venue is always bustling and features some special nights with a dress code. If you are into clubbing, this one is a must.

Sapporo is without a doubt one of the best cities in Japan. Although it can seem an entire world away for those outside of Hokkaido, it has so much to offer. I hope this has helped convince you to come and visit our prefecture and make the most of our special city!



I'll Shoyu Yuasa

A brief history and
guide to the dark and
salty essence of Japan

Siobhan Fahy (Wakayama)



Wakayama. “Where is that?” I hear you ask. Unlike Sapporo, which topped the to-go polls, this humble prefecture sits quietly on the borders of Nara and Osaka and boasts sweeping coastlines, Mt. Koya, the Kumano Kodo, and enough *mikan* to turn your body composition into 80% vitamin C by the end of winter. And in this corner of Japan, a hidden gem is nestled between the mountains and the sea.

Yuasa is a quaint town about an hour and a half south of Osaka. It has the beauty of the mountains which put the *yama* in Wakayama as well as the bountiful waters of the Kii Channel. With a population of only 12,000, this little town is slow and peaceful. Yuasa’s claim to fame, however, is its status as the birthplace of soy sauce in Japan.

Soy sauce, or *shoyu*, is a byproduct of another Yuasa delicacy: *kinzanji miso*. In the thirteenth century, a monk returning from China settled in Yuasa and shared his methods of creating miso by incorporating a range of vegetables. The liquid collected in the vat was serendipitously discovered to be delicious and was then developed into Japan’s quintessential condiment. During peak production, Yuasa was home to almost one hundred shoyu factories but now, there are fewer than ten. The two factories which absolutely warrant visits are traditional Kadocho and newcomer Yuasa Soy Sauce.

One Day Guide to Shoyu Yuasa

Arrive at Yuasa Station on the Kuroshio (if you're lucky you can catch the panda-themed train) and pick up your free [bike rental](#) across from the station.

Make your way to [Kitamachi](#) to admire the traditional Edo era buildings where Kadocho is located. It is recommended to arrange your free tour in advance. The factory is dark, old, and the ceiling is covered in spores, but it's wonderfully authentic. Don't forget to check out their two galleries across the road.

Hungry? Stop by [Ippuku](#) nearby for a tasty and cheap lunch. The proprietor is fluent in English and may even ask you for a movie recommendation.

Next stop is the Jinburo, a former bathhouse turned museum with many historical memorabilia illuminating Yuasa's history. Entrance is free.

Bike out along the coast to Suhara Beach, then take a short hike up the mountain and past Semuiji Temple for panoramic views. On a clear day you can even see Shikoku.

Last stop is Yuasa Soy Sauce to sample a plethora of shoyu and kinzani miso varieties before partaking in the pièce de résistance: shoyu soft cream.

Return your bike before staying at Yuasa Castle for the night. You can also head further south to see what other treasures Wakayama has to offer.





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

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CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

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

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

ARTICLES

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

SPOTLIGHT

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

COMMENTS

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

PHOTOS

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

HAIKU

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

COMICS

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



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