

AJET

CONNECT

magazine
May Issue
2014





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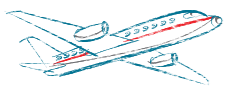


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR OF CONNECT MAGAZINE!

From the Editor

Here we are—ten issues, lots of new features, and a bunch more readers later. I won't spend too much time giving a speech, but thank you all. Thanks for reading, thanks for contributing, thanks for your feedback, thanks for all your support. This magazine in particular is built entirely around you—the community. Whether you're a current JET, non-JET, English teacher, ex-pat, alumni, or anyone at all with an interest in what real people are doing in real Japan, this magazine is yours.

Because this magazine is your magazine as much as it is mine or the team's, we want to hear back from you. You can find a full list of feedback questions on page 8 in the usual Ask/Connect space which we're dubbing Tell/Connect. You can also just click the button right below to go straight to the feedback form, or check it out on AJET.net. We want your absolute honest opinions, so let us have it! We want to make Connect better, more open, and more interesting to the entire community. Please, take a few minutes, and let us know what you really think of us.



Once you've done that, consider joining the team for next year. Positions are open for every section, manager of PR, manager of contests, and assistant designers. Connect is a fantastic way to gain real, professional experience in the field of publications. You do not need to be a JET participant to be part of the team, but you do need to currently be in Japan and plan to be in Japan until April/May of next year. If you have any questions about how Connect runs, what sort of responsibilities the positions entail, how much time you need to commit, or anything at all, you can contact me at connect.editor@ajet.net. You can also find full descriptions of the positions and the requirements involved on AJET.net. Here's a quick breakdown:

→ Section editor – Responsible for sourcing content, working with contributors, writing editorials, and editing pieces to be the best they can. Connect currently has 8 sections: Culture, Entertainment, Food, Travel, Fashion, Events, Volunteering, and Sports.

CONNECT May Issue 2014

→ Public Relations Manager – Promotes Connect on outside sources like blogs and Japan-related sites or publications. Encourages the sharing of content and cross-publishing.

→ Contest and Community Manager – Receives, organizes, and prepares cover photo contest and haiku page submissions. Also responsible for promoting those features and finding talented new contributors.

→ Assistant Designers – Work with head designer to prepare Connect's pages and visual elements. May be asked to fix up photos, change typos, tweak layout, or prepare original graphics for features.

If you're interested in joining our team for the 2014-2015 year, send me an email by June 1st at midnight with the following info:

1. Your name
2. Your prefecture
3. Position or section interested in (if section editor, up to three sections, ranked in order of preference)
4. Years you've been in Japan
5. Current profession
6. Approximate free hours per week
7. Non-detailed list of current time commitments
8. Relevant experience
9. Attached writing sample (document or link, if you don't have anything on hand, write something new and interesting)
10. Favorite or interesting quote from any source

I will follow up with all interested applicants and get to know you a little better! Hope to hear from you soon!

See you next year,

Steven Thompson 3rd-year Fukushima ALT, Head Editor of Connect magazine



SEE YOU IN
AUGUST!



✈ Departures			
TIME	DESTINATION	STATUS	GATE
18:20	NARITA	Boarding	A20
18:30	NEW YORK	Boarding	A6
19:00	SYDNEY	Go to Gate	A18
20:20	HONG KONG	On time	B11
20:35	TAIPEI	On time	B11

This may be the last issue of Connect before the summer, but you can find more stories and back issues of Connect online. Just click the links below!



FROM THE AJET CHAIR, KAY MAKISHI...



Dear fellow JETs,

"A community is a group of people who have come together, and they work and they live to try and improve the standard of living and quality of life—and I don't mean money." This quote by William Baldwin pretty much sums up how I feel about National AJET, our national JET community.

This is my last letter to you as Chair; I can't believe it! My vision for National AJET was to make it all about the community, you. I only hope by being part of the JET community (AJET), you have felt included, welcomed, and a part of something positive in Japan.

At the start of the AJET year last June 1st, I had five main goals for our council:

- 1) To help JETs by increasing personal and professional development opportunities
- 2) Foster grassroots exchange opportunities between Japanese and JETs through AJET events
- 3) Raise awareness about AJET
- 4) Improve JET participant involvement with AJET
- 5) Increase AJET's social media presence

Our council has been able to follow through by spearheading four AJET Professional Development Conference calls and numerous discounts such as TEFL certification, holding AJET block events in all 47 prefectures, having the highest AJET survey response rate for the Opinion Exchange with the Japanese ministries and CLAIR, bringing in project volunteers via an open sign-up, tripling the number of people reading AJET eConnect News and Connect, and

consistently using Facebook and Twitter to inform JETs of relevant news.

Of course, there's always room for improvement. I'm excited to see future JETs step up and become the next generation JET community leaders. Maybe it'll be you! This coming June 1st, you elected Sandy Cheng, a Kobe ALT to serve as your next Chair. I have all the confidence in her that she will be able to build and make our community even greater.

The thing is, if you want to make something better, you can. If you want to change something, you can. If you want to challenge yourself more, you can. You just have to DO IT.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Chair this year. This has been my last and best year on JET hands down. I only wish all of you the best in your future endeavors and hope our paths will cross again someday.

Until then, keep laughing, learning and exploring.

All my best,

Kay Makishi
Chair, AJET National Council
3rd-year Fukuoka CIR



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This edition, and all past editions of AJET Connect, can be found online at <http://ajet.net/ajet-connect>. Read Connect online and follow us at <http://issuu.com/ajetconnect>.



say goodbye to the CONNECT team!



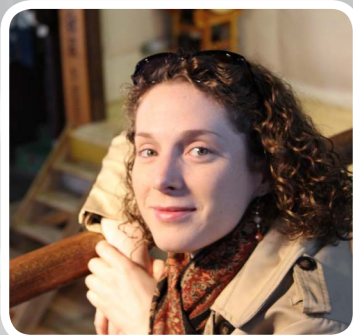
Steven Thompson Head Editor

Well, here we are—our final issue of Connect. We're happy to finally get it to you! My Golden Week involved driving down the coast to Mie prefecture to visit Ise Jingu (holiest shrine in Shinto, home of Amaterasu) and Shima Spain-mura (inexplicable Spanish theme park in the middle of nowhere) and driving back up to Yamagata to participate in their historical recreation samurai battle. Now, I'm back at my desk, planning for Connect's next year, since people were silly enough to let me do it again. I'm looking forward to it. See you in August!



Melinda Lange Layout and Design

Hi all! Settled in to the new school year yet? It's interesting, isn't it, to see how the tiny little first-years are adapting to middle school life. They're like confused, but very excited puppies. This time is all about change. The curtains are rising at school even as they're lowering here at Connect magazine. This year has been such a blast! I hope you all have enjoyed reading the magazine just as much as we enjoyed making it! Don't worry; it'll be back—and better than ever before.



Matthew Jones Culture Editor

It's official, my life is over. Just go on without me guys, I'm finished! Okay, maybe I'm being a *little* melodramatic, but can you blame me? This is my last issue of Connect, and the last few months I have left here. For those of you who have another year: enjoy it, because it will fly by! I know mine did, and I know that I'll miss Japan.



Tom Morin-Robinson Entertainment Editor

Our final issue really snuck up on me, but I guess all good things really do come to an end. It's been a great year on the Connect team and I hope the Entertainment section has turned you on to some good tunes, flicks, and other generally satisfying forms of *divertissement*. Hope to catch you all somewhere further down the trail.

If you've enjoyed reading about entertainment in Connect this year and have a few ideas of your own, consider taking over the reins! Send me an email at: connect.entertainment@ajet.net



Lineng Tee Fashion & Beauty Editor

Beyond the impossibly kawaii keepsakes I've accumulated, I'll always treasure my JET years for the genuine friendships that transcended linguistic and cultural barriers, hilarious/moving encounters with young and old at izakaya, matsuri, schools or supermarkets, as well as all those opportunities to drink in and feast on the beauty and richness of these islands. There will forever be a Japan-shaped hole in my heart. Thank you for supporting Connect—it was delightful discussing Japanese fashion and beauty with you—and I hope you keep well and keep reading wherever you may be come September. connect.fashion@ajet.net



Ariane Bobiash Food Editor

Hi everyone! It is with a touch of melancholy that I write this today, as this is the last Connect issue I will help put together as well as the last issue of the JET year. I will be returning to Canada this August to pursue my Master's at the University of Toronto. As much as I'll miss Japan, I'm already drooling thinking about all the vegan eats I'll be able to get my hands on in the big city! Several months until the next Connect issue means all you foodies have plenty of time to brainstorm your next contribution to the magazine! We're always open at connect.food@ajet.net



Xan Wetherall Food Editor

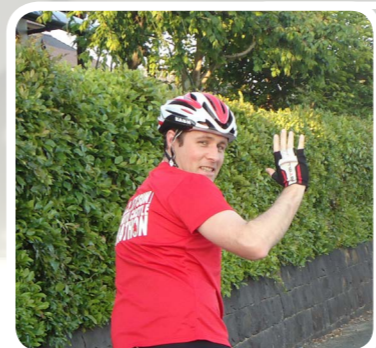
Here we are—May 2014! It's been one heck of a ride. I joined Connect magazine two years ago now, along with partner Ariane, in order to revive the woefully un-staffed Food section. It has been my great honor to work alongside her and the rest of the team to bring cuisine back into the spotlight! This year, we'll both be stepping down to pursue different dreams and directions, and from June 2014, I'll be taking over as the AJET National Council's Vice Chair! There's a whole world out there, and I can't wait to sink my teeth in! Any last requests? Hit me up at xan.wetherall@ajet.net!



Hugo Dragonetti Sports Editor

Hey, we're into May! I'm looking forward to checking out some great local festivals this month and then watching the World Cup next month. The only negative is the impending rainy season.

As it's my last issue as Sports Editor, I'd like to say thanks to you, the readers, and all the contributors to the section from the past year. I've received articles relating to all kinds of sports that JETs are passionately involved with here, and I feel that my goal of promoting participation in sports and involvement within local communities has been achieved. Thank you so much! connect.sports@ajet.net



Caroline Bellinger Travel Editor

Adios, Au revoir, sayonara, goodbye... it is hard to believe that we're already at our last issue of Connect. Along with my duties as AJET president and conference organiser for Yamagata prefecture, I can't say my time as Travel Editor has been without a certain amount of deadline-induced mini-meltdowns. What is has also been, however, is a humbling journey—from working with an incredibly dedicated and passionate team, to having the pleasure of sharing the stories of so many enthusiastic travel writers from all over the country. Continually I have been overwhelmed by everyone's selfless commitment to making this publication the success it is. Wherever you are, wherever you go from here, I hope the world continues to be a place of endless discovery. Arigatz!



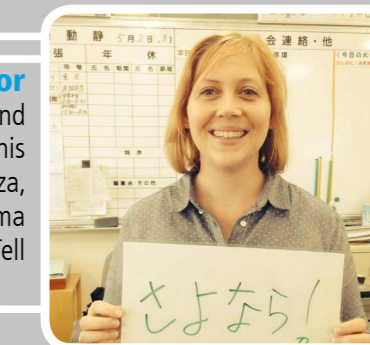
Michelle Castro Volunteering Editor

Long live Spring! I just spent the last couple of weeks seeing cherry blossoms in several prefectures. Unnan City is known for the longest cherry blossom tunnel and for having green cherry blossoms. Since school started I have made more of an effort to spend time with my students after school during their club sports. They get excited to have the support and I get to practice my Japanese. Next month I am headed down to Okayama for a two day Shimanaminokaido Bridge bike ride after a Golden Week trip to Okinawa. I am going to attempt to not fall too much in love with the beaches. I hope you enjoy this last issue of the year and continue to read it in August. I want to give a shout out to the Connect team for making this a memorable experience and a big *otsukaresamadesu* to Steven and Mel for making each issue beautiful.



Kelly Merks Events Editor

May is a marvelous month to be in Japan! The weather is pleasant, gardens are in full bloom, and tsuyu has yet to show. My husband and I are busy ticking off the must-dos before our departure this summer, including a jaunt to Fuji-Q Highland amusement park, catching a kabuki show in Ginza, and a sumo match in Ryogoku. We will end the month at a semi-annual craft beer fest in Saitama City, one of my favorite events in Japan! Have any suggestions for next year's Events section? Tell us at connect.events@ajet.net.



Ask/Connect is a bit different in this last issue before the summer break. As our team changes and we make preparations for a new year of Connect from July, we want to look back at what we've done and see what worked, what didn't, and what we should do next. That's where you come in! Take a look at the questions below, and click the button at the bottom of the page to tell us what you think online! We'll read each and every response, and take every piece of feedback into serious consideration. We appreciate your support and readership, and want to know what you want to see Connect do in the future. Connect is, after all, a magazine by the community and for the community.

Are you a current JET Program participant or alumnus?

Do you live in Japan?

How often do you read Connect magazine?

How do you read Connect magazine?

Did you participate in any of the Connect Reader Polls?

Did you use any of the interactive PDF features (clickable table of contents, links, ads, and Connect logo to go home)?

Did you email Connect for any reason OTHER THAN submitting content (Ask/Connect)?

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate Connect's CONTENT?

In what ways could we improve our content?

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate Connect's DESIGN?

In what ways could we improve our design?

Which new Connect features do you like?

Which new Connect features do you NOT like?

Which features or content would you like to see in Connect in the future?

Would you like to see an online version of Connect in addition to the magazine (with things like searchable content, multimedia features, and a commenting system)?

Would you use an online submission form on AJET.net for submitting photos, haiku, comics, and questions to Connect?

Which articles or features in Connect this past year (August 2013 - May 2014) stood out to you?

What are your favorite sections of Connect?

Overall, what do you feel Connect could improve, remove, or change to be better?

Any additional feedback or comments for the team?

Visit the Connect online feedback form!

READERS' POLL

Every month, we'll ask you guys what you think about various topics and questions submitted by members of the AJET community. You can find the results for last month's question, and this month's question here!

Cast your vote and add your voice at ajet.net. You can also submit your own idea for a poll topic at connect.editor@ajet.net!

This Month's Question(s)

VOTE HERE!

As the summer rolls around and mobile phone contracts come up for renewal, it's time to look into Japan's mobile carrier companies. For most, what carrier to go with is a two-year decision, and it can be confusing to know which to choose. To do our part to help, we'd like to at least show which is most popular and why!

Which mobile phone provider do you use?

- au by KDDI
- NTT Docomo
- SoftBank
- EMOBILE
- Willcom
- Other

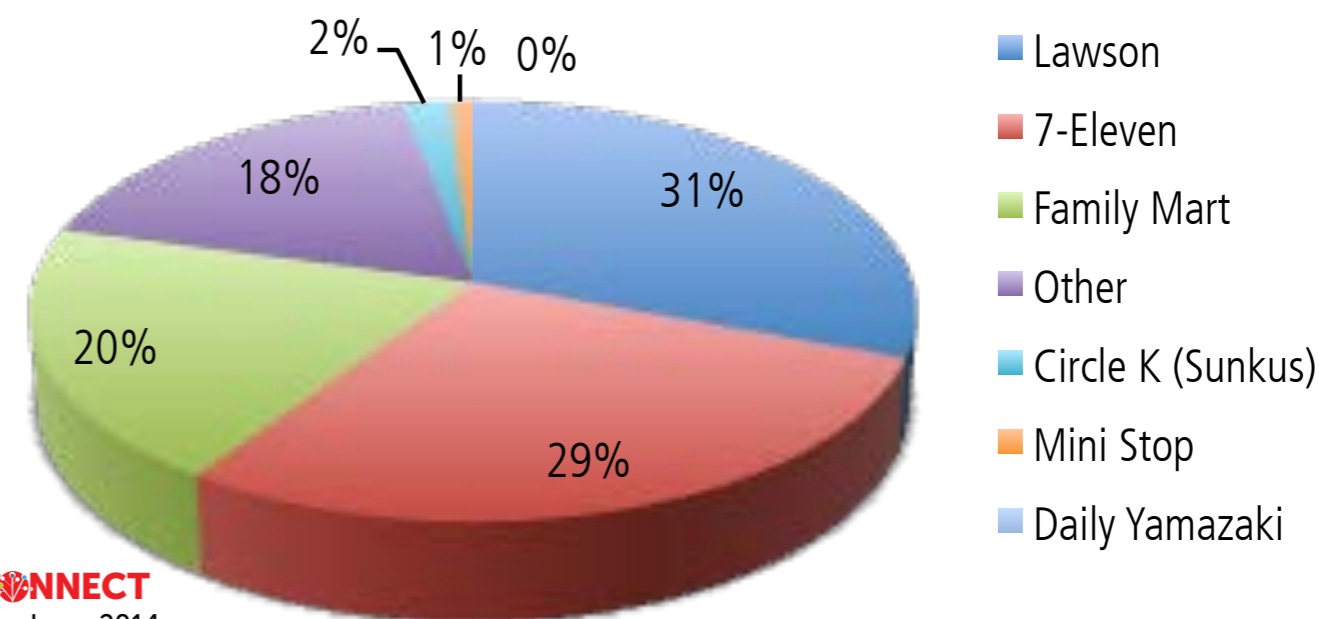
Why do you use them?

What did you think of this issue? Make sure to send your opinions to us at connect.editor@ajet.net in response to this month's articles and editorials!

Last Month's Results



It seems that you all are certainly passionate about your conbini! We saw our highest number of poll voters yet! The battle between 7-Eleven and Lawson was fierce until the very last, but Lawson won the day (one of you even specified that Natural Lawson—Lawson's earth-tone, organic cousin—was your favorite). We also saw a lot of love for your locals: 3F, Seico Mart, and Save On, but the most mentioned store in the 'Other' category was Kyushu-based Everyone by far!





Tamara Rytter, Okinawa
Director of Corporate Events

Instead of me, let's hear from the JETs of Block 11!

Okinawa

Haisai from Okinawa! The Okinawa JET community is pleased to announce the creation of OkiAJET. We are an organization focused on making life for JETs in Okinawa the best it can possibly be. We hope to provide opportunities for community service and professional development. After several months of planning we finally have something that is ready to spread its wings and get off the ground. I'm looking forward to leading this new organization and developing the new ideas we have for the Okinawa JET community.

→ Taylor Gentry - OkiAJET Chair

We're organizing a Tohoku Film Festival in Okinawa as part of a large scale visibility project to get people in Okinawa actively talking and thinking about the current issues that Tohoku is facing, what we can do to help, and how Tohoku's issues affect everyone in Japan. The festival will include talk-backs with the filmmakers, a symposium and workshops with representatives from local Tohoku-based governments, representatives from NGOs, and refugees and volunteers speaking about their personal experiences.

→ Autumn Widdoes - Okinawa ALT

Kagoshima

Kagoshima, known for the majestic active volcano Sakurajima, is one of the most picturesque prefectures in all of Japan. It is also home to an active local Kagoshima AJET chapter and more than 150 JETs. A few recent KAJET-supported events here were the annual Dragonboats Races in Osumi and the Mad Hatters Hanami Party. Upcoming community events this May will include a screening of the Japanese film *Hafu* and the Fukiage-hama Sand Festival on the enchanting beaches of Minamisatsuma.

→ Logan Morley – Kagoshima ALT

Miyazaki

Greetings from sunny Miyazaki! Our local chapter of AJET, MAJET, has had a busy year filled with fun events. Recently we enjoyed a spring hike to the peak of Mount Karakunidake in Ebino. Other seasonal events in our beautiful and diverse natural landscape here include a summer beach BBQ and camp-out at Aoshima beach, and a winter outdoor ice-skating and onsen event. This year we also held our very own 3rd Annual Miyazaki Amazing Race around the city.

→ Samantha Walters – Miyazaki ALT



David Berg, Hyogo
AJET Webmaster

Hi all! My name is David Berg and I am one of the webmasters for the National AJET Council. Despite only being a 1st-year ALT, I managed to sneak onto this year's council back in January when they were looking for some help. I live in

Hyogo Prefecture of Block 6, which I've slowly come to believe is the gem of Japan. Although I live deep in the heart of the inaka, I am just a few hours travel from Kobe, Osaka, and Kyoto. Any cravings I have for the wild side of life are easily satisfied!

My most recent excursion, however, took place outside of Japan. During spring break, I went to the Philippines with JET Christian Fellowship to assist with disaster recovery. For two days, we adopted an elementary school in one of the rural villages of Tacloban, the city hardest hit by Typhoon Haiyan. We taught lessons, sang songs, and played games. As I normally teach high school kids, I was caught off guard by how physically draining it is to teach at the elementary level. It didn't matter in the end though, because seeing all of the kids smiling back at me gave me all the energy I needed. The highlight of the week for me was holding the cutest 3-month-old baby I had ever seen while she fell asleep in my arms. Her mother survived the typhoon while she was near the end of her pregnancy, giving birth to her baby girl shortly after the storm had passed. Her story of survival was truly inspiring!

To finish off the trip, two of us flew out to Donsol Bay and swam with whale sharks for an afternoon! It's one thing to see pictures and videos, but when you swim right next to them, you get an idea of just how big they are. March is the beginning of peak season for these majestic creatures, and we were not disappointed. Over a period of 3 hours, we spotted 6 whale sharks! It was a fitting finale to a wonderful experience, and I hope to go back and visit soon. As they say—it's more fun in the Philippines!



Serena Lai, Tottori
AJET Webmaster

G'day from hot and balmy Kuta, Bali! I hope everyone's enjoying their Golden Week. Where to begin?

Well, first off, I'm quite embarrassed to say I feel like I really haven't done much since joining the council. My contributions have been small compared to David's jam-packed awesomeness and proactivity!

Nonetheless, this hermit has been doing her best working behind the scenes to get AJET's website a facelift. We all know that the current site has its issues in terms of usability. Information is buried deep and things that should be easy to find are sadly not. I'm sure that not just a few of us have found using the search button to be more efficient than using the existing navigation links to access and view the page(s) we want. And we all know how frustrating that can be. Well, with the help of our fantastic Project Manager, Penny, we have been collecting feedback on what needs improvement and have been revamping everything from the sitemap to the landing page to the way content is displayed for different sections.

Currently, we are waiting for another round of feedback from everyone before deciding where to go from here. Our goals for the new site is to make it more intuitive and easy to use as well as mobile-friendly. On a side note, this will be a personal web design challenge as I've never built a responsive site before. So I hope David and I won't do too bad of a job at it. Yoroshiku David! And wish us luck everyone! :D

In other news, I'm happy to report that our local Tottori AJET chapter continues to be active in its charity and volunteer work. Just a few weeks back, we had our annual visit to the local orphanage in Yonago. While I couldn't make it to this year's event, I had the privilege of taking part in the games and fun last year and I'm sure this year's visit, with its songs, dances and friendship-bracelet making activities brought a lot of joy and laughter to the children there. Keep it up Tottori!!



REVIEW AND INTERVIEW

LEON MARTIN AND THE FANTASY GIRL

Sterling Diesel, Nagasaki



Leon Martin and the Fantasy Girl delves into cultural exchange on a level that most people never get a chance to experience. When a group of American high school students arrive at a small German town for a summer work-study program, they find themselves caring for a potentially illegal alien in a life-threatening situation.

We got the chance to talk to Andre Swartley, current *Saga JET* and author of *Leon and the Fantasy Girl*, about his own experiences abroad and how the novel came to be.

What prompted you to write a book about teenagers studying abroad?

It probably also stems from the old advice given by every writing teacher ever: write what you know. I've lived in four countries now and visited over a dozen, and some of my most formative experiences happened overseas. Plus, a teenager away from home for the first time—and living overseas to boot—is a great setup for an emotional conflict, which this story mostly is. Living abroad as a young person immediately makes you vulnerable and unsure about everything.

Leon has a crippling disability. Why did you decide to give this to him?

There was an urban legend back in the late 80s and early 90s that some kid had given himself arthritis by playing Atari several hours a day for a couple years—I actually reference the urban legend in the book. Whether it was true or not, the idea stuck with me.

The book takes place in St. Goar, Germany. Out of all the places in the world, why did you choose this town?

St. Goar is a real place in Germany, but the town described in the book doesn't really exist. It's a combination of a few different villages I have visited along the Rhine River. I chose that region because when I visited there it was so beautiful, so postcard-perfect that it seemed almost fake. Like a huge theme park or something. And I wanted a setting like that for this book because so much of the story is about confusing fantasy and reality.

Did you base any characters in this book on people you know?

The most direct correlation between a character in the book and a real person is Leon's host father, Klaus. He is a version of my own host father when I lived in Germany, but simplified and distilled into a pleasant cartoon gnome. The only other person I "know" from the book is Autumn, who is basically my muse. I can't tell you where she came from, but she's been living in

my head for as long as I can remember, telling me stories whenever I'm willing to listen. But she doesn't wait on me either. She keeps her own schedule up there and doesn't care much if I write down what she tells me or not. I'm a little bit scared of her, actually. This book is the first time she has written herself into a story.

Congratulations on winning the Dante Rossetti Award for Best Young Adult Fiction! Although this book is geared towards a younger audience, is there a particular group of people that you think would enjoy your book the most?

Thanks! Every writer probably says this, but I like to think the characters' struggles are universal enough that just about anybody over the age of 13 could pick of the book and find something in it to connect with. The Dante Rossetti Awards actually labeled my book as "Urban Lit," because it fits pretty snugly into a niche of Urban Lit called Lad Lit, popularized by writers like Nick Hornby, Mike Gayle, and Danny Wallace.

How did you write this? Do you type everything on a computer, or do you prefer to write by hand?

I want to be able to write by hand. It's very romantic. I have a small collection of fountain pens and a beautiful leather-bound journal that looks like a prop from the *Lord of the Rings* that I've tried to write in. But it just doesn't work. That leather journal is full of old chapters and story drafts, most of which I didn't even bother to type up because they were such garbage. Typing feels like a natural extension of thinking, while writing by hand feels like doing two things at once, and neither particularly well.

How long did it take for you to finish this story?

There are a lot of ways to measure that. This story actually started out as a piece of short fiction I wrote while I was student teaching in 2002. The story wouldn't leave me alone, so I started a draft of a full book version in the summer of 2009 and published it in the summer of 2012. According to MS Word, I've logged nearly 5000 minutes (80+ hours) into the file containing the book.

What other authors would you say your style is most similar to?

I'll pick three authors who have what I feel are outstanding characteristics that I try to emulate, but I would never be

From the award winning author of *Americanus Rex*

LEON MARTIN AND THE FANTASY GIRL

レオン・マーティンとファンタジーガール

A NOVEL



ANDRÉ SWARTLEY

so arrogant as to say my work is similar to theirs. Here goes: Kurt Vonnegut for brevity and weirdness; Stephen King for image clarity and ease of voice; and J.K. Rowling for character, organization, and sheer imagination. It is no coincidence that two of those three write commercial, mainstream fiction. I don't need to sell a lot of books, but I would much rather write an enjoyable page-turner than an "important" story that might appear someday in an anthology.

Sterling Diesel is an ALT based in Nagasaki prefecture who spends her frequent road trips and cafe binges taking in a wide spectrum of literature. In between lectures and chapters of works by Alan Watts and William Gibson, she's usually planning her next excursion, or studying whatever new obsession she's found through Wikipedia.



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The build-up to the second half requires readers to have some faith that these characters will eventually find themselves in slightly more realistic situations, which they do. Spending a summer abroad in Germany is adventurous, but saving a fellow foreigner who should have been taken into custody from the beginning is a bit of a stretch.

The main characters bring more than carry-ons to their host parents' houses in terms of emotional baggage. Most of these problems rank above average on a scale of teenage angst, and the issues that they face during their summer are resolved in rapid succession without any obvious connection to the broader storyline. *Leon Martin and the Fantasy Girl* eventually comes together as a comprehensive story, but readers have to be willing to accept some recurring flaws early on.

Although this book is about high school students on a summer vacation, the theme of living in a foreign country for work experience strikes a chord with people who have taught overseas on programs like JET. With the characters' ages aside, they are much like the new ALTs that fill the schools of Japan every summer—befriending one another, testing linguistic waters, and adapting to cultural differences. Yet, *Leon Martin and the Fantasy Girl* isn't strictly about adapting to a new home. It's about a couple of teenagers saving a Korean woman's life. If that's a plot that piques your interest, consider picking this title up.



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CULTURE

EDITORIAL The Bucket List

If you, like me, are a leaver this year, then you know you only have two months left to experience the country that gave you a home. I've put together a little bucket list of things I'm glad I experienced and things I still hope to enjoy before time runs out—*shinkansen* here I come!

Fuji

Mt. Fuji is one of the true symbols of Japan, and climbing it has to be on your list. The mountain is only open for climbers during the months of July and August, which means one of your final memories of Japan could be watching the sun set, and later rise from the top of Fuji-San.

Geisha

Kyoto isn't the only place where you can catch these elusive performers. Many old cities in Japan come equipped with their own geisha district. Here in Nagasaki, we have a small geisha district where geisha, or to give them their *Nagasaki-ben* name, "*geiko*", arts are still practiced. Before leaving, I plan to attend a tea ceremony and soak in this cultural ritual. I suggest you do too.

Tohoku Region

Sadly, the Tohoku region is still in need of assistance today. After the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, more than 15,000 people died and thousands more were left wounded, bereaved, or without shelter. There are always groups of volunteers going up, and I for one, will be joining a group of volunteers doing clean-up and volunteer work at an orphanage. If you have a chance to give back to Japan—after the country was so good to you—you owe it to yourself to lend a hand.

Karaoke

A surprising amount of ALTs here have not had a true evening of karaoke. I don't mean the 2-hour *nomihodai* session that you can bang out and then head home to cuddle up with a nice book. I mean the 8-hour long marathons where you keep singing Ricky

Martin's *Living La Vida Loca* because you *know* you can hit that high note... maybe you need to move your hips more.... Not an experience to be missed!

Shinkansen

Yes, flying is usually cheaper over long distances. Yes, flying is also usually faster. But no, flying does not offer the best views of Japan. Granted, the scenery won't be there for very long as you zoom past it at incredible speeds, but the bullet train is something you need to experience, as well as something you know everybody will ask you about.

Urban exploration

Some areas of Japan's infrastructure are in need of repair, and some areas are in need of complete rebuilding. Then there are the structures that are perfectly serviceable, but completely abandoned. Walking around a creepy abandoned pachinko parlor, or an abandoned amusement park can leave you with some amazingly unique memories, photos and souvenirs.

Climb it, because it's there!

Simple, open your window, pick a nearby mountain and say: "That one, I'm having it!"

Japan is so mountainous; there will be plenty of different opportunities nearby, from little foothills to real climbs. Just stay off the beaten track. Traveling in a straight line up a mountain is, by far, the most difficult route, but the animals you'll see, the hidden beauty you'll discover, and the satisfaction of "conquering" that mountain you can see from your apartment window will more than make up for it.

THIS MONTH IN CULTURE...

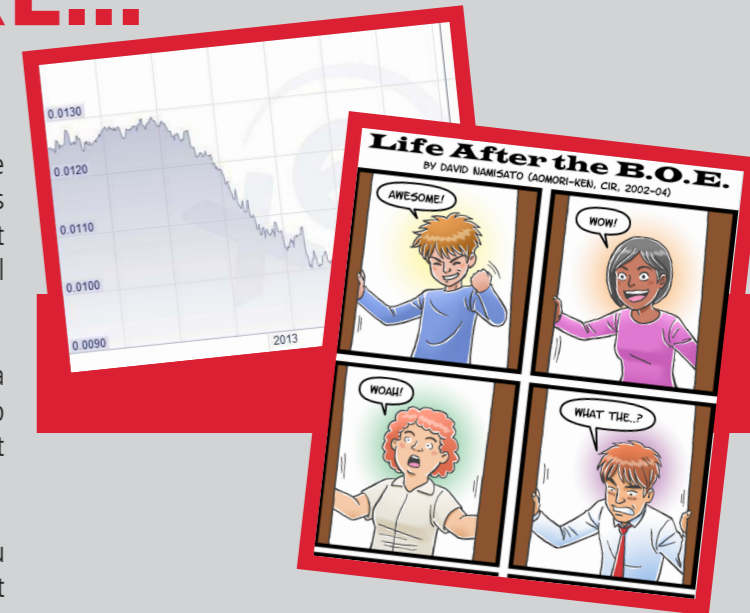
Whoa! We have here a nice juicy pair—of articles, of course.

If you have seen any of the recent developments in Japanese news, and want to bone up on your information, Connect has you covered. Gabriela Romeu has taken five of the biggest news stories from the year and constructed a concise, helpful retrospective.

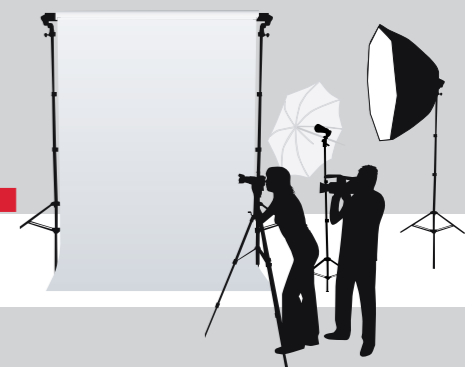
Caroline Fink too, has been on the ball. She's collected a whole host of stories from JETs all over Japan. Why? To help us know what makes a good predecessor, what makes a great predecessor... and what makes a bad one.

My Spotlight this month is for all those who are staying, if you need a way to keep your kids' attention during the long, hot summer, check it out!

And finally, my editorial. It's the last one of the year, so I've made a bucket list. If you, like me, are looking at your last two months with apprehension, take a look, and see if you can find some new memories to make.



SPOTLIGHT



TeacherTube and Short of the Week

Stayers! Don't worry, we've not forgotten you here at Connect. This issue might have a lot of content aimed at leavers and newcomers, but we know that there's a whole load of you staying this year. You guys have at least another year here in the land of rice'n'sun, so you need to find the best, most engaging topics to put before your students. Well, our good friend, the internet has you covered.

TeacherTube is a content sharing site that shamelessly mimics YouTube in its design, layout and player. However, it stocks teacher-created videos, and music videos for public use, if your kids don't know what sound a fox makes, this is the site for you. You can even add to the site, by having your kids give a rendition of your favorite *Baby Metal* song, they might seem embarrassed at first, but the kids will love the whole project.

If you're looking for more polished content for your English club, look no further than Short of the Week. Featuring a wide variety of content, from silent animations and samurai-style movies to sci-fi and action shorts, there is something here to suit you, especially some scary films for Halloween....

Try printing out the script for the films and having students fill in the gaps, or answer questions about the films, and even movie





CURRENT AFFAIRS FLASHBACK

Gabriela Romeu, Okinawa

Abenomics

In April of 1997, the Japanese government raised the sales tax from 3% to 5%; which, combined with a decrease in consumption and general economic decline, resulted in persistent deflation that Prime Minister Abe is trying to rectify today. Abe, who took office in December 2012, pledged to revive Japan's economy by steadily raising the sales tax to 10% by October 2015. The first stage of this policy included the increase of sales tax from 5% to 8% in April of this year. Although fearful of Japan's experience with recession after a sales tax increase, economists expect the economy to grow slightly next fiscal year. Moreover, unemployment in Japan fell to 3.6% in February; it's lowest since 1998. This decrease in the unemployment rate raised the hopes that wage growth will also increase in correlation with the tax.

On the days leading to the tax increase, shoppers raced to beat the impending sales tax by buying essentials such as toilet paper and rice, which became more expensive after the increase. Consumption of luxury items and electrical goods have drastically decreased due to the consumer sales tax, as one leading sales department reported its store saw a 25% drop in sales. Officials say the decline in consumption is temporary and that it is projected to return to normal by July. However, a poll by Kyodo News states that 66% of its respondents plan to cut spending and "nearly 80% expressed worry about the economic outlook" ¹.

Senkaku Islands Dispute

International tensions over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands between Japan and China continue to escalate. Both nations have been at their most active, militaristically, since World War II. China, who traces their claim over the islands to 1403, recently imposed an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that extends far into the East China Sea. With the creation of ADIZ, Chinese officials also stated that all foreign aircraft seek authorization to pass through the zone. However, the new law does not distinguish between aircraft flying through the zone with no intention of entering China's airspace and aircraft that do. Japan criticized the expansion claiming that China has unilaterally changed the state of affairs concerning the East China Sea. John Kerry, U.S.

Secretary of State, expressed concern over China's decision, saying it could lead to confusion in the skies:

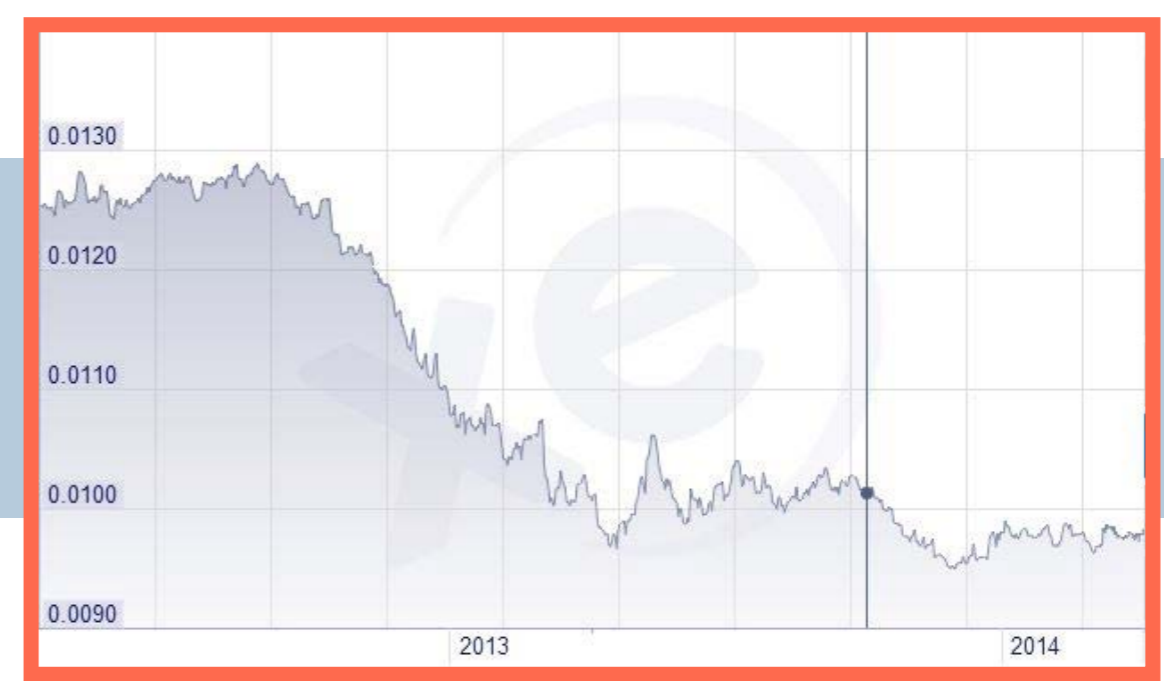
The United States does not apply its ADIZ procedures to foreign aircraft not intending to enter U.S. national airspace.... Freedom of overflight and other internationally lawful uses of sea and airspace are essential to prosperity, stability, and security in the Pacific. We don't support efforts by any State to apply its ADIZ procedures to foreign aircraft not intending to enter its national airspace ².

The U.S. announced that it does not recognize the zone and will not answer authorization calls from China over the area. Japanese airliners, ANA and JAL, also announced their refusal to submit flight plans when traveling through the zone.

Whale Hunting

On March 31st of this year, the United Nations International Court of Justice in The Hague declared the Japanese Whale Research Program under Special Permit in the Antarctic (JARPA II) illegal. The decision was made to "revoke any extant authorization, permit or license...and refrain from granting further permits" to carry out annual whale hunts in the Antarctic. Despite global criticism, Japan's fleet carried out annual whale hunts taking advantage of a loophole within international law that permits the killing of whales for scientific research. The presiding judge, Peter Tomka of Slovakia, said that the Japanese program had involved the killing of thousands of *minke* whales and a number of fin whales, but that its "scientific output to date appears limited" ³.

The issue initially earned global criticism when Animal Planet introduced *Whale Wars*, which followed Sea Shepherd USA, a branch of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, and its attempts to deter the Japanese fleets, through violence if necessary from hunting whales. The Institute of Cetacean Research initially stated its disappointment, but that it would respect the ruling. However, on April 11th, the institute stated that they intend to hunt whales in the Antarctic for the 2015-2016 season under a newly designed research program.



Japanese Yen versus the US Dollar over 2 years

Fukushima

New developments have arisen in Fukushima, at the site of the disaster-struck No. 1 nuclear power plant. In April of this year, Tokyo Electric Power Co (Tepco), announced that the waters tested from the leak last August were far more contaminated than initially reported. After an error in calculating the radiation level, Tepco announced that the water contained over 280 million becquerels per liter of beta-ray emitting radioactive substances instead of the 80 million becquerels as previous reported ⁴. The resistance to restarting nuclear power plants has waned since Prime Minister Abe took office in 2012. However, Abe is pushing to expand the use and sale of coal domestically and internationally. According to industry figures, Japan's top ten power companies consumed over six million metric tons of coal in January of this year, setting a record. A new energy plan approved by the Cabinet designates coal as a long-term power source over that of renewable energy such as wind, solar or geothermal. This policy also gives importance to nuclear energy. Amid Japan's reliance on coal and the forced idling of power plants, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) urged Japan to also set targets for clean and renewable energy in order to reduce the environmental impact.

History Textbook Controversies

In the wake of Prime Minister Abe's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in December, nationalists in Japan are pursuing an agenda to bring politics into schools via history textbooks. A government-appointed committee recently suggested that mayors take charge of their local school districts, a move that opponents say would increase political interference in textbook screening and push the country further away from pacifism. The suggestion of intervention by mayors came when a newly elected conservative mayor on Ishikagi, an outer island of Okinawa, appointed a new head of the education district, who then selected a history textbook published by a right-wing company. Consequently, a junior high school rejected the textbook and refused to include it within its curriculum ⁵. A main issue within the textbook controversy involves the portrayal of the massacre that took place in Nanjing after its surrender during second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Chinese historians claim that over

300,000 people were killed during the massacre; mainstream Western historians place the figure at between 40,000-80,000; whereas right-wing Japanese scholars deny any such massacre occurred. Other debated issues within history textbooks include the use of comfort women and the Battle of Okinawa. Although educators worry about these textbooks, they continue to show a small penetration rate within the Japanese education system.

Gabriela Romeu is first-year ALT in Ginoza-son, Okinawa. She is a self-described "loca" who is working on her Miami tan in Japan. Follow her travel adventures on her blog: Donttouchmyshisa.blogspot.com and on Instagram: [gabzilla_rawr](https://www.instagram.com/gabzilla_rawr).

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DON'T BE THE PREDECESSOR

Caroline Fink

When I arrived in Japan, I was lucky enough to be welcomed to my new apartment by well-placed furniture, clean sheets on a made bed, a bowl full of snacks, and a bottle of wine in the fridge. The apartment was already furnished and was conveniently located close to everything and anything I could need. Arriving at this place that already felt like home, I was unprepared for what I found lurking in the closets.

My predecessor had been here for five years before I moved into her apartment. A place easily starts to become cluttered with the sheer amount of things someone can collect after one year, never mind five! I understand that she couldn't take everything with her, but I was hoping not to have to clean out everything from unopened presents to broken toys. All of us JETs will be leaving after a few short years, and most of our living spaces will be passed along to new JETs. Try to remember that the next time you toss something into your "junk drawer", it may be your successor who eventually uncovers it! I'm sure that broken toy was meant to be fixed at some point, not left behind as some sort of metaphor....

Arriving here, I ended up with so much more than I bargained for. Sometimes it was great. I found countless school supplies under my stove along with great JLPT books. I also found a lot of things which weren't quite as useful. There was expired medicine under my sink and shoes two sizes too small in a closet. As a successor, try to leave only those pleasant surprises. Protip: Advil and Nyquil are great things, as long as they haven't expired over a year ago.

Although it was a bit of a hassle to clean out my apartment just to unpack, I was incredibly excited to move to Japan and into my new place. When I was shown to my apartment and greeted with the inviting atmosphere my predecessor had left, I felt instantly at home. My predecessor left me a bowl of her favorite snacks that I munched on whenever I started to feel overwhelmed. I was able to fall asleep after a long few days without worrying about making my bed. I was able to jump in the shower right away to wash off the lingering feeling of Tokyo Orientation. Leaving certain items will make your processor feel at home and ease some of the stress of moving to a completely new place. Think back to your arrival here, could you have done with a bottle of wine, or a nice beer, to cool off after a long hot day?

Soon-to-be predecessors, please consider this: leave only things you think will be useful. Clean out your apartment and then have a friend come over. That friend can then tell you those cardboard boxes probably aren't going to be as appreciated by your successor as you think, and although there is a possibility that they could need a manual to use the air conditioner, some handwritten instructions would be much better than the challenge of trying to read the dense kanji, or, more likely, pushing random buttons until something starts happening.

What did you predecessor leave for you?

"I think the best thing my predecessor did for me was get driven home to the apartment a lot. Half the people here know where I live if I ever need a ride."

"My predecessor giving me some personal advice about the teaching styles of my JTEs over some laps in the school pool definitely helped me make a strong start when I arrived."

"Best thing my predecessor gave me was all the free stuff he left for me at my schools and in my apartment."

"My pred left me several word documents detailing the school schedule and environment, especially the quirks of the system. It was most helpful."

"COCKROACH KINGDOM"

"She left her dirty bedsheets and underwear in a bag and rotting food in the fridge."

"A rusted bicycle locked in front of the house (no key), trash, boxes of used clothing, expired food and no notice about the bats in the walls."

"My predecessor left me a piano, a full-size piano. It didn't work and it still doesn't, but I still got a (broken) upright piano!"

"My predecessor left me 3 cans of cheap *chu-hai*, the best gift after being ion a stuffy airplane in a suit in 29 degree weather!"

"Life after the BOE" by David Namisato
<http://www.lifeaftertheboe.com>

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN, CIR, 2002-04)



What did your predecessor leave behind in the closet?



ENTERTAINMENT

EDITORIAL Keiji Haino – 灰野 敬二

Dressed entirely in black, with grey hair down to his chest, straight bangs, and rounded shades that never seem to leave his face, Keiji Haino looks every bit the singular and long-running pioneer of the Japanese musical avant-garde he is.

Few musicians have been consistently recording music for over forty years, and even fewer can say that they've truly challenged their sound every step of the way. With no less than 83 releases under his belt, Haino has pushed boundaries in experimental genres like free improvisation, noise, drone, minimalism and psychedelia, recorded countless warped covers of blues and 60s pop songs and now, at the ripe age of 62, has taken up DJing in Tokyo nightclubs. With a track record like that, he might just be the hardest working man in experimental rock.

For all his efforts though, Haino remains completely unknown to most and perhaps—due to NHK banning him from the airwaves for 40 years—even more so in his native Japan than abroad.¹ But lack of widespread recognition is hardly a concern for Haino; he is far too occupied with the act of creation. Haino prefers to call himself an inventor rather than a composer or a musician: his stated aspiration being to “obliterate” the language we typically use to describe music and to “create something completely different”.²

In this, he succeeds more than most. Listening to a Keiji Haino record is an experience that takes up every morsel of attention it is given. Unpredictability is the only constant as heavy, noisy, blues guitars burst into frenetic, full on assaults of the senses, only to immediately dissipate and give way to beautiful, almost serene moments of respite. These quiet ripples in a sea of noise are exemplary of the Japanese concept of “ma”, or negative spaces, offering time for the listener to almost participate in the music by using their own imagination to fill the gaps between sounds.

Most of his daunting discography is composed of recordings and selections from his marathon live sessions, which are often several hours in length. Ever energetic, he still gives these performances on a very regular basis in Tokyo, often at Roppongi's Super Deluxe, the meeting ground for Tokyo's bleeding-edge art crowd.

Like most truly avant-garde artists, Haino's work can be difficult to get into, but those interested in hearing a truly unique take on sound should check out his 1993 release *Double Live* with his



The cover for Keiji Haino's companion album to the 2012 documentary about him "A Document Film of Keiji Haino"

band Fushitsusha. Generally acknowledged to be one of his best performances, the record is a long listen, but offers a healthy mix of riotous and carefree garage rock coupled with very beautiful if subdued tracks. If it piques your interest, Keiji Haino will be playing a special set at a small venue called Soup, in Ochiai, Tokyo on May 31st.

Have you read, watched, played or created anything interesting lately? Be sure to let me know at connect.entertainment@ajet.net.

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THIS MONTH IN ENTERTAINMENT...

This month, Okayama JET Sabrina Zirkazadeh brings us a performance review of the Takarazuka Revue. One of the few all-female troupes in the world, it brings a uniquely Japanese twist to the theatre. We talked about its history and cultural impact last month, now you can learn more about the show itself.

Next up, Brianna Hom of Akita prefecture gives us a personal window into the cross-generational appeal of Japan's arcades.

If those new fangled video games are a bit too much for you, check out Audrey Akcasu's feature on *kendama*, a game that's so damn old it's still made out of wood and requires motor skills that extend beyond the wrist to master.

Aomori JET Chris Carlsen changes things up with a creative piece entitled "My Braino in Ueno" which, if you've ever spent a late night in Tokyo will surely strike a chord.

Finally, I've written up a feature on Keiji Haino, one of the longest running members of Japan's musical avant-garde. Happy reading!



SPOTLIGHT

ULTRA Korea, Adam Carter, Kagoshima

Electronic music fans may want to take a trip across the straits to check out the second annual instalment of the ULTRA Music Festival being held in Seoul, South Korea on June 13th and 14th. The ULTRA Festival, which started back in Miami in 1999, has been named "Best Music Event" by the International Dance Music Awards (IDMA) for six consecutive years as it has blossomed into one of the world's biggest electronic music festivals. Last year's Miami edition, held over the course of two consecutive weekends, drew more than 330 000 people. In addition to the US and Korea, they hold parties in Brazil, South Africa, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Croatia and Colombia.

Last year's first-ever ULTRA Asia Party in Seoul attracted 60,000 revellers to the huge outdoor Olympic Stadium Complex. This year's two-day event promises to be even bigger, featuring over 40 DJs spinning on three mammoth stages.

Headliners this year include progressive legend Armin van Buuren (Holland), super-star DJ Avicii (Sweden), house legend Carl Cox (UK), and British trance DJ Above & Beyond

(who played at the exciting Tokyo ULTRA run-up show at Ageha Nightclub back in December). Dubstep junkies can look forward to sets by Kaskade and others, while EDM fans will enjoy sets by Afrojack, David Guetta and Hardwell, amongst others. To get a taste of the mayhem, take a look at any of the official "after-movies" on YouTube.

Peach and Jetstar offer cheap flights to Seoul. For tickets or more info, check out www.umfkorea.com or their Facebook page.



THE TAKARAZUKA REVUE: PART 2

Sabrina Zirakzadeh, Okayama

The city of Takarazuka in Hyogo prefecture is undeniably lovely, with its flowering trellises, Mediterranean-inspired architecture, and numerous scenic pedestrian walkways. This bedroom community nestled between Osaka and Kobe is a popular spot for photographers, cosplayers, and tourists alike due to its accessibility, scenery, and intimate atmosphere. It is also the birthplace of the father of anime and manga, Osamu Tezuka, best known for his series *Astro Boy*. However, were it not for its centenarian main attraction—the Takarazuka Revue theater company, the city itself would never have become anything more than another cute little town.

Whenever I hear someone talk about uniquely Japanese phenomena, I always have to bring up the Takarazuka Revue. On the surface, the revue is simply a group of performers, based around one main theater, who perform plays and musicals primarily based on North American and European stories. The revue also puts on shows based on traditional Japanese tales and modern pop culture hits, and the performers often go on to become some of Japan's top theater stars and idols, occasionally crossing over into film work as well. The performers are selected from rigorous auditions, with only forty or so getting into the company each year, and train for two years while waiting for their big break on the main stage. It just so happens that, in a twist unique amongst theater companies around the world, the Takarazuka Revue consists of only female actresses.

The concept of female-only theater companies exist throughout history around the world, and Western operatic and panto traditions include "pants roles," where women would play handsome young men and boys whose voices were too high for the parts to be played by men. However, the Takarazuka Revue is the only well-known, truly successful all-female theater troupe in the world.

Successful might even be putting it mildly—attending a show at the Takarazuka Grand Theater is a lot like going to a boy band concert, at least between acts and during the finales. At every show, the dedicated fans welcome the actresses on to the stage and also cheer for them as they make their exit. Even casual fans will spend hours waiting in line the morning of the show in the hopes of scoring an available ticket. The fan clubs even hold events to meet their favorite actresses, and every day the theater stores are constantly packed with women and girls buying photo books, DVDs, CDs, posters, and more.

The shows themselves are great fun as well. From translated musical and opera performances, to Japanese legends, to adaptations of *Ocean's Eleven* and the Phoenix Wright video game series, there's something for everyone to enjoy. Even if you don't speak Japanese, it's worth it just to hear the amazing musical talents of the famed Takarazuka stars and take in the lavish, spectacular sets, effects, and choreography.

The revue shows are two-part affairs, with the first half being the play or musical itself and the second half consisting of a lavish, cabaret-inspired revue usually celebrating a specific theme or milestone for the revue. The plays are executed with an eye for detail and period accuracy—within the confines of the play itself, of course. The revue throws everything the company has at its disposal at the audience; from Las Vegas-style showgirls joining in chorus lines to giant feathered costumes denoting the actress' star power. Often, the revue even finds itself spilling right into the audience.

Really, it simply has to be seen to be believed.



Takarazuka Grand Theater This April



The Takarazuka Grand Theater

A statue in front of the theater of Oscar and Andre from *The Rose of Versailles*, one of the revue's most popular shows

The company consists of five acting troupes, each with their own specialty, though the overlap between troupes and shows can make it difficult to distinguish for newcomers. Here's a quick breakdown:

- ◆ **The Flower Troupe** is considered the top troupe in the company, with many of the revue's biggest stars among its members, and therefore the productions are more lavish and operatic.
- ◆ **The Moon Troupe** is best known for its strong singers and performs mostly Western musicals and plays set in more modern times.
- ◆ **The Snow Troupe** houses most of the strong dancers and classically-trained singers, and used to specialize in traditional Japanese stories and theatrical traditions, though in recent years they have tended more towards operatic productions. This troupe debuted one of Takarazuka's signature shows, an adaptation of the German musical *Elisabeth*, which has become so popular over time that even Japanese pop stars have covered its most popular song, "The Last Dance," to great acclaim.
- ◆ **Star Troupe** specializes in, as the name implies, the star performers of the revue, particularly *otokoyako*, or male-role performers.
- ◆ Finally, **Cosmos Troupe** is the newest addition to the revue and presents more experimental and modern works, in addition to being the only troupe to have a well-known non-Japanese musical composer, Frank Wildhorn, create a show especially for them.

A Takarazuka Revue show really is a truly uniquely Japanese experience, but getting tickets can be difficult, not to mention expensive! The revue is currently celebrating its 100th anniversary with some of its most famous shows, including the currently running *The Rose of Versailles: Oscar and Andre* as well as the first performance in six years of *Elisabeth*, and tickets are selling out within minutes of going on sale. If you have the money and want to ensure that you have seats on the day of your choice, your best bet is to find a member of one of the stars' fan clubs, as

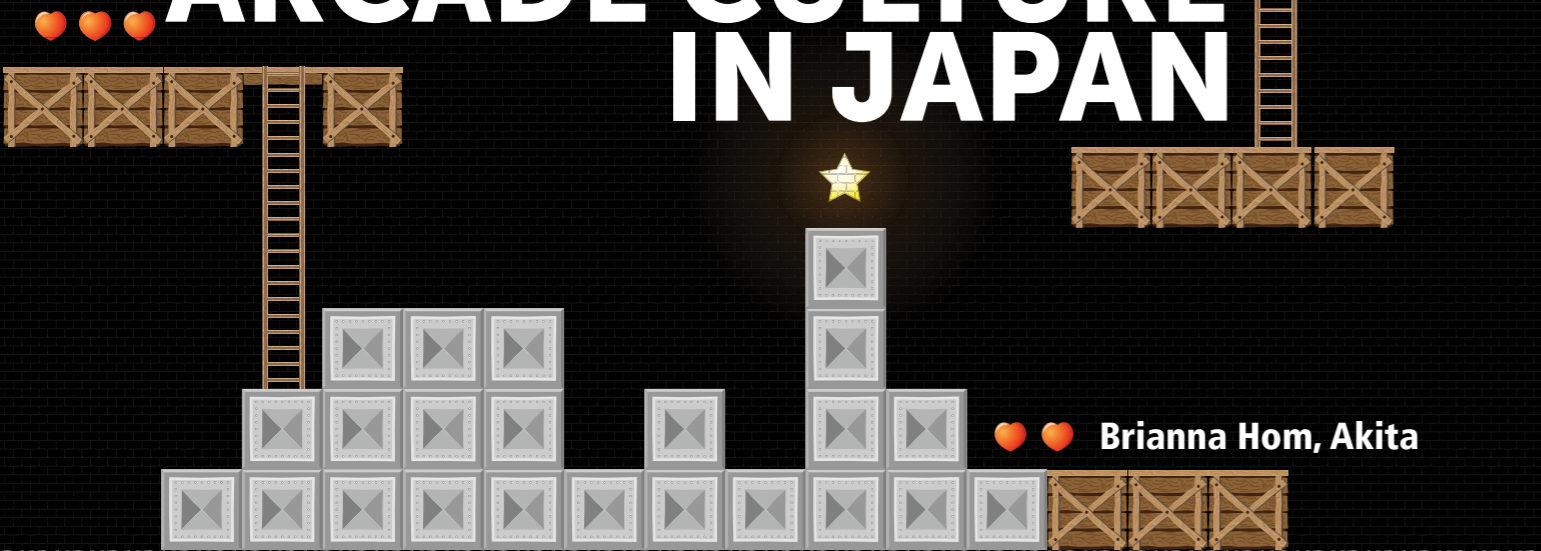
they get advance purchases and can order tickets for friends to ensure packed houses for their favorite performers. You can also take your chances buying online through the **official website** (Japanese only), by phone, or at the Loppi machines at Lawson, but be aware that both options are extremely time-sensitive and buyers are extremely lucky to get anything even then.

For an affordable, more certain, and unique experience, its best to wait in line for the same-day ticket sales. You may have to line up before 7:00 AM, but with two shows a day—and seated and standing tickets available for half the price of advance tickets—it's fairly likely there will be tickets available. Plus, some same-day tickets allow for a chance to shake the performers' hands during the second act revue! It's really worth the effort if you want to experience the Takarazuka Revue to the fullest.

The entire city of Takarazuka breathes with the life of the theater company. Because the aesthetic and atmosphere are reminiscent of the theater's Western influence, and because the town is centered around the Grand Theater itself, a visit to the revue begins the second that you step off of the train. For something as easy to explain as an all-female Japanese musical theater company, the experience cannot be captured in words. You simply have to see it for yourself.

Sabrina Zirakzadeh is a second-year ALT living a short hop from Takarazuka in Okayama prefecture. She has seen five Takarazuka shows since coming to Japan, but is not dedicated or close enough to join a fan club yet. When she isn't going to concerts and musicals, she writes her own! Read more about her musings on Japanese music and theater at <http://www.jupiter-star.com> or follow her on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/jupiter-star!>

ON BEAT: STEPPING INTO ARCADE CULTURE IN JAPAN



♥♥ Brianna Hom, Akita



A typical arcade in Japan

MaiMai, a music game played by tapping buttons on the outside of the circle and dragging ones finger across the screen



Jan Rambaud, an Akita City ALT who I sometimes play Jubeat with

The deafening music. The dim lighting and flashing colors. Rows of machines demanding your attention. Sometimes this assault on the senses can turn away visitors who first step into an arcade—they are overwhelming places filled with noise and chaos. But if you can weather the initial wave of light and sound, you may find things you wouldn't expect—things like new friends, a greater understanding of Japanese culture, and perhaps even inner peace.

I remember my first foray into a Japanese arcade—or game center, as they are often called—only a day after Tokyo Orientation. The most fascinating thing about it was not the foreign games I had never seen, or my inability to read anything, but rather the sight of a *salaryman* in his work clothes and a pair of gloves unashamedly flinging his hands across the circular surface of a rhythm music game. In the States, I had never encountered such a thing. Arcades were the domain of kids, teens, and twenty-somethings, not a 40 year-old man still in a crisp white shirt and black slacks. Truly, I thought, this was a different country.

For all my surprise, though, I soon found myself following the *salaryman's* example. I may not be in my 40s, but nothing beats driving into the city after work on a Friday night to immerse myself in a world of color and music (I make sure to change into comfortable street clothes, though). In Japan, the arcade is a place that isn't as constricted to the younger generation as it is in the eyes of the rest of the world.

But what is so addicting about the arcade? Plenty of Japanese locals go because it's a fun and convenient place to hang out with friends after school, after work, or on the weekends. The documentary *100 Yen: The Japanese Arcade Experience* mentions that, due to the inconvenience of cars and widely scattered housing, students (and, by extension, workers) find arcades to be a great meeting spot for everyone to gather.¹ In

the city, there is often an arcade within walking distance of a train station, so friends who live far apart can easily congregate and participate in a group activity. Such placement also makes it a good way to kill time while waiting for the train.

Others enjoy the community of gamers and the excitement of live competition—nothing gets your adrenaline going more than knowing your opponent is actually sitting at the seat on the other side of your screen, mere feet away from you. Signs for regional and prefectural tournaments pop up with regular frequency as well. In fact, one of my elementary school students placed in the top five in a Taiko no Tatsujin (Taiko Master) competition a few months back, showing how early kids can begin cultivating their competitive gaming skills. I don't have the time and money to dedicate to reaching this upper echelon of gamers, but I still get a thrill whenever I sneak a look at my neighbor's screen, see that he's at the same level as me, and proceed to silently compare the two of us for the duration of our play. There is an unspoken camaraderie between gamers—you may be opponents, but you have both invested large amounts of energy and time endlessly grinding to master the same thing, usually battling not another person but rather yourself and your current skill cap.

Many create friendships over these games, or at least form a community not unlike that of regulars at a local bar. At my local arcade, I'm probably known as that female foreigner who shows up every week or two and plays until late at night. On Friday and Saturday nights I'll see the same guy perform flawlessly on the main Dance Evolution area. I noticed he dyed his hair a couple months back, changing it from blonde to brown/black, which makes me think he was preparing for college or job interviews. There's another girl I see who practices on the side Dance Evolution areas, and I wonder how long it'll be before she gets the courage to start trying the main stage.

It may not be Cheers, but it's comforting to see familiar faces as we all individually work towards our own gaming goals. I don't have enough faith in my Japanese skills to strike up a conversation with the other gamers, and I think my foreignness might be a deterrent, but I have seen plenty of people start talking to each other after a few rounds of playing side by side. You, too, could find a new colleague and enjoy the gaming experience together. I once asked myself, "Why do you keep going back to the arcade? What is it that's so appealing?" And while these are all reasons that I go—to hang out with other ALTs and eikwaiwa teachers, to compete and test myself against more experienced players, to unwind at the end of the week—I found that my favorite moments spent in the arcade were the times when I was able to, for lack of a better term, get "in the zone."

It might be unusual to think of an arcade as a great place for meditation, but to seriously play a game requires a mental state where you are simultaneously deeply concentrating and yet thinking of nothing. Playing becomes an act of instinct and feeling. Not every game is like this, but many often are. My favorite type of games are the music/rhythm machines, my top choice being Jubeat, followed by MaiMai, Dance Evolution, and Taiko no Tatsujin. If you concentrate too hard on the music and what you're seeing, you start tripping yourself up and then berating yourself for messing up, which only leads to further errors. Gaming is all training and discipline—it takes dedication, practice, and memorization to attain the perfect score and it requires you to clear your mind of all thought. I can often find myself in the same mental state when practicing *kyudo* or *naginata*, which some may consider more respectable forms of recreation. I might argue that there's no rhythm and music to sink into when practicing those martial arts, and sometimes you just want to sway your body to something. Plus, rhythm games are a good way to discover new music and see what's popular.

But the Japanese arcade holds games of all types—UFO catchers (crane games) and other kinds of prize-winning machines, fighting games, racing, shooters, horse racing/betting, pachinko, bullet hells, medal (coin) games, sports, Gundam fighting, mahjong, and many more. Unfortunately, you won't find many imported titles, but that's a testament to the strength of Japan's arcade game culture. You'll find a video game of some type in any city you go to—it might be within the huge Sega or Taito building downtown in the city, or it might be tucked away in the corner of your local Aeon. Despite the proliferation of home consoles and PC gaming, arcades in Japan still enjoy a fairly healthy life. There is something intensely alluring about playing a game that has a strong physical presence. The joystick, large buttons, an actual steering wheel and gas pedal, speakers that envelop you in sound—these sort of things, coupled with the ability to have your friends or an audience of strangers to perform in front of, make the arcade experience something unique.

If you are interested, you can find the documentary 100 Yen: The Japanese Arcade Experience on YouTube (though there are no subtitles for the Japanese interviewees), or check out their website at www.100yenfilm.com. If you want to know about the history of video games in general or just want to read more about the subject, email me at bthom003@gmail.com, and I can give you some resources to get you started!

¹ Legary, Michael (Producer) & Crawford, Brad (Director). (2012). *100 Yen: The Japanese Arcade Experience* [Motion Picture]. Canada: Strata Studios.

Brianna Hom is a first-year ALT currently tucked away in the countryside of Akita Prefecture, chilling and traveling with the locals when she's not at Round One attempting to beat the next level 10 Jubeat song. She has two Tumblrs, one for personal musings at silentspaces.tumblr.com, and one about travel at foreignforays.tumblr.com.



I CAN PLAY KENDAMA

Audrey Akcasu, Nagasaki

What traditional Japanese toy is making its way into renewed popularity? *Kendama*. Surprisingly, this newfound fame is bubbling up not here in the toy's homeland, but in the US. The trend is taking the West Coast, Hawaii and the internet by storm, even getting its own article on National Public Radio's homepage. I don't know what sparked this new popularity, but I'm all for it. I was once a kendama addict myself and although I'm not great, busting it out comes in handy as an ice breaker—it's a skill particularly useful in the 6th grade "I can ____" lesson!

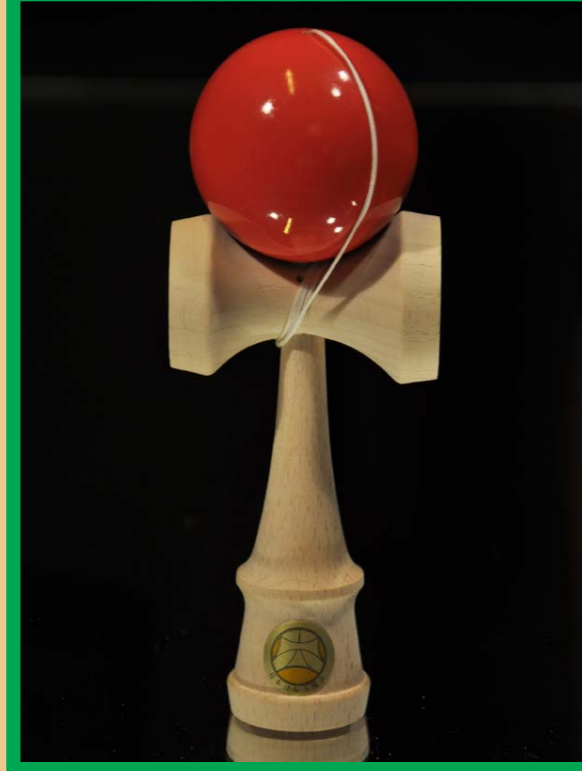
If you want to get on the kendama train, let's get started with some history. Kendama is more-or-less what Westerners know as a "ball and cup." It's thought to be a modified version of the sixteenth century French *bilboquet*. The French toy reached cultures all over the world and is thought to have come to Japan via Nagasaki port in the Edo era. When it first arrived in Japan it was used in drinking games, until the Ministry of Education decided it was actually a good educational tool for kids.

It is said that in Kure, Hiroshima in 1918, Hamaji Egusa created a new form of the toy—the current versions predecessor. When nearby Hatsukaichi City was chosen as the location for the first mass-production factory, it was dubbed the birthplace of the Kendama. The modern form of the toy was finalized in 1975, when Issei Fujiwara created the Japan Kendama Association, standardizing the specifications of the toy and rules for playing. Today, they organize certificate level tests and tournaments.

Let's look into the toy itself. It is called a "ball and cup" although it's a bit more complicated than that. On the body of the toy, the *ken* (ケン), there are three cups of varying sizes, a big cup, *oozara* (大皿), opposite a small cup, *kozara* (小皿), separated by a crosspiece, *sarado* (さらど). The third cup, the center/base cup, *chuuzara* (中皿) is at the end of the body. The center cup is opposite a spike, *kensaki* (剣先) and a ball, *tama* (玉), with a hole drilled halfway through, is attached to the body with a string. The idea is to get the ball to land on one of the cups or on the spike, but the fun comes in *how* you do this.

The simplest skill is landing the ball on the big cup. Easy, right? For most people, it's not as easy as it sounds. It can take hundreds of tries to master this simple action. The next step is to go from one cup to the next or onto the spike and so on. The better you get, the more complicated the tricks become. You can land the ball on the spike, you can throw the whole *kendama* in the air, catch it, swing the ball around again and land it on the spike, etc. There are tens of thousands tricks to learn and more being created every day.

A red oozara kendama



Retrieved from the Wikimedia Commons, licensed under Creative Commons by Isakkk.

Audrey's kendama tips:

- ◆ Bend your knees!
- ◆ When catching the ball, drop your hand down a bit as well-acts to absorb shock.
- ◆ Keep your eye on the target.

Audrey Akcasu is a 4th year ALT in Omura, Nagasaki, the best place on the planet. When not blowing the minds of students with her kendama skills, she's rock climbing or attempting to cook Japanese food—three things she's unfortunately not as good at as she wishes she was. She's also part of Nagasaki's very own English language magazine, Nagazasshi. You should probably check it out at nagazasshi.com.

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SHORT STORY: MY BRAINO IN UENO

Chris Carlsen, Aomori

21 hours away from the year 2014, and I'm sitting on a rusty iron chair outside an Ueno café. It's closed, of course, at 3 AM, but it feels like it's been closed forever. Precisely how long I've been drifting through Tokyo alleyways. The day ended, the night ended, and somehow a third, permanent interval interjected itself. A period defined by a sepulchral sense of peace so thick it renders the world inanimate.

Suddenly, as if summoned by *Guanyin* to lift me from this catatonic indifference, a young couple appears. I see them briefly as they flash past the alley. They don't know I exist; I don't want them to know. So I remain hidden like a beetle in a concrete crevice. They're mad about each other, I can hear it in the laughter, it bounces off their faces, pinballs down the crevice and vibrates my little beetle ears. I'm a part of their lives and they don't even know it! I want to scurry behind them. I want to see what else they do in life besides laugh and radiate love. However, I remain seated, and they drift away, slowly enveloped by silence and the emptiness returns.

People think public life, especially in a city like Tokyo is a story of hustle and push, energy and direction, but the emptiness is always there, waiting, every bit as defining.

I notice the crystal blue glow of a nearby streetlight reflecting off the asphalt. Unremarkably gloomy, yet remarkably active. It idly sighs and glides about, making mawkish attempts to emulate sentience. "Hey you insipid spook, don't you think you're acting a bit dour?" I think to myself. "It's New Year's Eve in one of the world's liveliest cities; can't you be a bit more, I don't know, peppy?"

In response to my query, the little glow begins to differentiate itself. It disperses in a great yawn, leaving a mess of symbols in

its wake. I can't decipher any of it but I recognize their shape, Mesoamerican, some sort of ayahuasca-dream font, no longer blue, but a hazy dull rainbow, they begin to swirl around in slow vapid circles at first. Then, all at once, they flow down the road like oil on a black river. Things get interesting when they reach a road sign painted on the street. They absorb it completely then adopt its aesthetic appeal, Japanese characters now run amok. I can't read any, the only characters that are well developed wiggle coily in my peripheral, just out of range. It's futile, so I make a wild guess as to what's happening.

I'm seeing the conscious stream of the light bulb manufacturer. Something was weighing heavy on her mind as she put this bulb together; she was possessed and poured it into her work. Now, the conditions are perfect and I am able to peep into her past stream of consciousness. Vivified by a new sense of purpose, I take another crack at solving this lexical enigma. Nope, no chance. I hope this isn't a cry for help because it's fallen on blind eyes.

いつまでも
心に浮かぶ
光り物。

Indefinitely
You are always on my mind
Luminous metal

Chris Carlsen is a third year ALT living in a place called Shingo on the southern edge of Aomori prefecture. He can look in all directions at once, but only while sitting still.



FASHION & BEAUTY

EDITORIAL The Kawaii Spirit

Leafing through this month's print issue of 装苑 (one of my favourite fashion periodicals, available online at fashionjp.net/soen) seemed more of a delight than usual, likely because I was sitting in a sunlight-filled room with birds chirping outside the window and all manner of cute and colourful leaping out at me from the pages. I showed the magazine to some students and they repeatedly exclaimed "kawaii"!

Living in Japan, there's no escape from kawaii. Each prefecture has a cuddly, super genki mascot welcoming visitors, almost everyone has furry plushies dangling off their cellphones and backpacks, entire stores are decorated in lace, stickers and sparkles, and anime character-like youngsters flit in and out of crepe parlours and fashion boutiques.

As you witness all that, you might think to yourself: where does that leave me? What if I don't really look cute, or know how to dress or behave cute?

To begin with, kawaii is a state of mind that actually extends beyond physical appearance and can be applied to behaviour, room decor, transportation design and even gadgets. If you like using MT tape, own a cute bento box, keep the rain away with a charming umbrella or drive a kei car with rounded edges, you are already consuming or incorporating kawaii in your daily life. Many male friends both foreign and local have admitted that Totoro is irresistibly cute.

A quick and inexpensive way to enjoy kawaii is to dress as you usually would, whether you are Hipster Harry or Meek Margaret.

All you need to do is to add one or two cute accessories, whether headgear, jewellery, a key chain, cell phone strap or iPhone case. Small accessories can be replaced quite easily and regularly, allowing room for experimentation.

If the promise of spring and the anticipation of summer has awakened a (latent) desire to go into kawaii mode, here're my suggestions:

- It's so pretty outside, so dress accordingly. Go for bright/fresh shades of green, orange and pink, or at least their pastel cousins.
- The growing season has begun. This means apparel and accessories with floral, veg and fruit, bug and animal motifs.
- Don't shy away from wacky combinations. Parrot dungarees or a silk tie with daruma show a sense of humour.
- If you'd rather play it safe, plaid and breton stripes are perennial and unisex.
- Always look for subtle, quirky details—a cutout there, a small bit of fancy embroidery, an asymmetrical hem.

Graciously accept (and enjoy) the compliments that will probably come your way, and cast aside niggling thoughts that you aren't really cute. Kawaii is young, fresh and fun, and we can be that at any age. Whee!

THIS MONTH IN FASHION AND BEAUTY...

All too quickly, we've come to our final Connect issue for the year
insert sad face

This month's Spotlight subject Jamina Ovbude just oozes charisma—how high-fashion is that photo?

Alex Varney, Erika Ehren, Galileo Navarro, John Weber and Yuko Nakajima pull out the stops and come together for our feature on how living in Japan has made an impact on their personal style. Whether you have only a passing interest in trends or are a bona fide fashion maven, it's surely a subject each of us can relate to.

It being May, of course I discuss springtime trends and the kawaii factor in the editorial (hey, someone's got to do it!)

As you know, we've grown from strength to strength with your support (Thank You!), so be sure to stick around for more fresh, fabulous fashion- and beauty-related content in the 2014-15 JET cycle (with a brand new Fashion Editor and more great suggestions from the community)!



SPOTLIGHT

Jamina Ovbude, Fashion Enthusiast

This month's Style Q&A is with Jamina, a fourth-year JET in Fukuoka. She has experience with fashion shows and photo shoots, having worked for a small fashion PR firm before coming to Japan. Jamina enjoys going through street style posts, and is inspired by women who view fashion as an opportunity for self-expression.

You always look great! Could you share your style icons, influences or inspirations?

Style goddesses? Grace Jones, Lupita Nyong'o, Emanuelle Alt and Jenna Lyons.

I'm drawn towards simplicity. The bloggers I follow all dress somewhat the same: muted solids with notes of whimsy and a whisper of sex appeal.

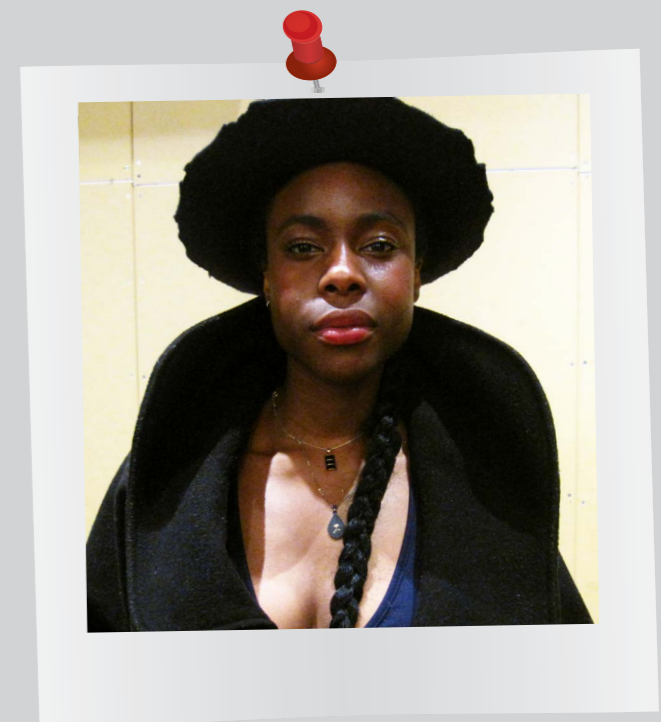
In Japan I find ladies in their 60s and 70s to have the best personal style...think blue hair, perfect manicures and timeless Chanel suits.

How's shopping been for you in Japan?

I'm not too thrilled by the average selections in Japanese stores—pink ruffles make me gag—so I tend to shop at recycle and consignment spots. It's a bit of a hunting sport, but I've managed to score some incredible finds, including a perfectly-fitting Thierry Mügler silver sequined cocktail dress (still dying over that one).

Any Spring/Summer fashion advice for fellow JETs?

Japanese workplace attire tends to be a lackluster combination of black/grey/white. Don't be afraid of color or patterns—bright yellows and vivid blues can easily be work-appropriate! Keep lengths and proportions modest and you'll be all good.



FASHION ROUNDUP: HOW JAPAN HAS INFLUENCED & INSPIRED MY STYLE

Yuko Nakajima, Saitama

Yuko is a 1st-year ALT who spends her time gallivanting around Tokyo in flippy dresses. She loves taking happy snaps, stuffing her face and trolling for anything and everything cute or fun.

The fashion scene in Japan has definitely encouraged me to up the “cuteness” and downplay the “edginess” in my wardrobe. I’ve kept my love of bold, bright statement prints, just with a higher dose of cute. I’m glad spring is finally here, because the warm weather means I can whip out my tie-front tops, fun playsuits, high-waisted shorts and swirly skirts. “Fun, floral and flirty”—that’s me!

Fashion photography is a major love of mine, and I’m astounded by the creativity and incredible attention to detail around me. Sure feels like it’s perpetually Tokyo Fashion Week! Japanese fashionistas regard every waking moment as an opportunity to showcase their style, so there’s nothing off-limits, and few things improve one’s outfit and posture as heels can. The lifestyle in Australia is comparatively more laidback, so it’s a rare sight to see a woman in heels in the daytime. I’m definitely a convert.

I’ve always been addicted to hair accessories and Japanese style has taught me to embrace—can you believe it—*scrunchies*! Scrunchies, so lame back home but the height of feminine sophistication in this country.

While it may appear socially unacceptable to show cleavage, clavicle or even your *shoulders*, miniskirts and barely-there shorts are no cause for concern. [Fash Ed: See Page 28 of the September 2013 issue of Connect for more on bare shoulders]. Use this odd cultural quirk to incorporate layering into your style repertoire! Japan is the land of layering!

The best outfits combine basics, high-street, designer and vintage fashion. Back home, I frequented thrift stores and I must say vintage stores in Japan are a veritable treasure trove! Everything is kept in mint condition and fairly well-priced. Much as I like department stores like Lumine, the prohibitive prices mean I limit myself to infrequent treats from stores such as Journal Standard, Beams and Olive des Olives, with the occasional fun purchase from Liz Lisa, Cecil Mabee or V.V.P. Visalia.

Beauty products remind me of “Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory, FOR YOUR FACE”. I’ll gladly spend a whole day in a drug store or at The Plaza. Everything is so luxuriously-scented and deliciously-flavoured. Just the other day I bought strawberry marshmallow frosted lipgloss, and it took everything not to eat it straight from the tube.

Finally, Japan loves anything limited edition, so pounce when you see 季節限定 (*kisetsu gentei* –seasonal specialty). Many brands, be they food, beauty products or clothing lines, release items only available in Japan for a limited time. One recent example is the Undercover x Nike Gyakusou Collab.

What can I say—embrace the wild and the weird, and have fun shopping in Japan!



1

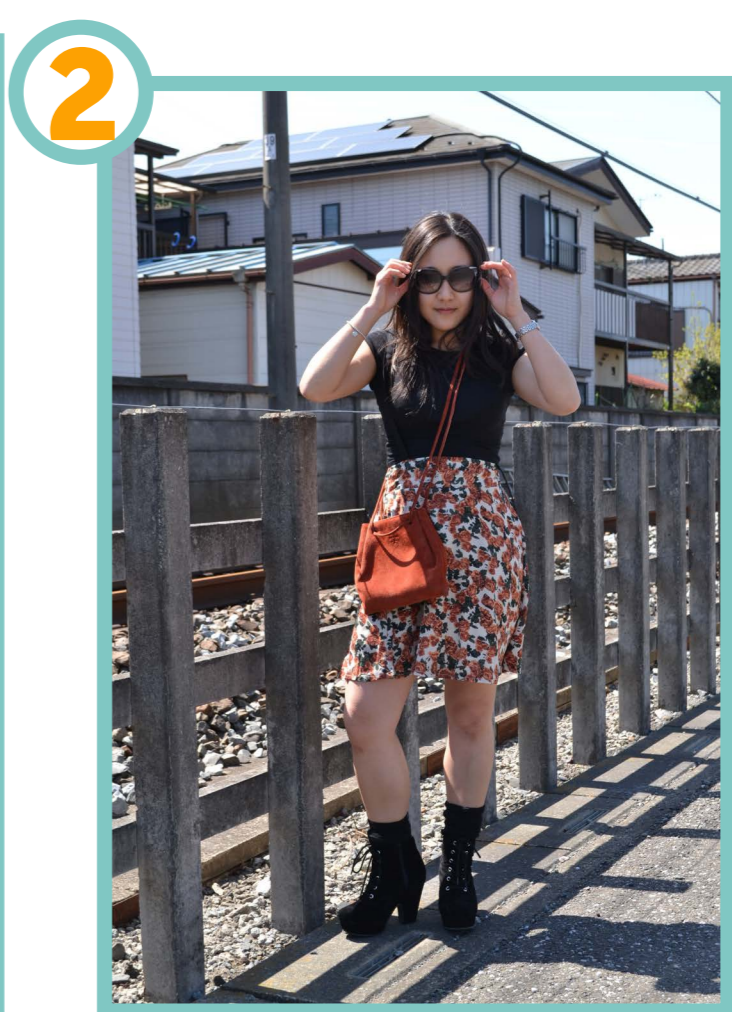
This get-up screams SUMMER!!! Chambray is a major player in my wardrobe because it’s casual and goes with almost everything. I’d wear this to Coachella or any kind of fun-in-the-sun-but not fussy/fancy event.

2

Floral motifs comprise 80% of the items in my wardrobe because the colours are perennial, feminine and oh-so-pretty. I love anything high-waisted (especially when paired with crop tops)—but I particularly love this skirt because it is not only floral but also a pinafore! The suede Prada pochette was an absolute steal that I found it at Treasure Factory complete with card of authenticity. Black suede platform boots and cat eye sunnies complete the look.

3

My next favourite print? Why leopard of course! My coordinates are a giant mix of prints, textures and patterns—leopard print headband, acid wash and stud pocket oversize tee, black velvet leggings, suede Nike Dunk wedge sneakers (I’m obsessed with olive green) and my beloved Nike x Undercover Gyakusou running jacket.



3



Galileo Navarro, Fukushima

Galileo is a former Fukushima JET now living in the ancient capital of Japan, Kyoto. He is a black belt in taekwondo and likes to 'increase the peace'.

I think there is a greater appreciation of fashion by the general public in Japan. I like how characteristics of traditional Japanese art are projected onto modern fashion. For example, the texture of *washi* (Japanese paper) is sometimes featured on sweaters and jackets.

My style has evolved along with my appreciation of colours and patterns. I find myself wearing bolder colors than I would if I were back in Australia, and pay more attention to fit and tailoring. Chilly weather can be a lot of fun with scarves, headwear, gloves and coats. I own more than 10 scarves!

In all things, "try before you buy". It's simple but very practical. I'm confident about the value I get from the purchases I make in Japan. I know I'm getting lasting, quality products.

With one of my favorite scarves



1

Alex Varney, Saga

Alex is a 3rd-year CIR who can usually be found monopolizing the mic at karaoke or getting super competitive at sporting events all over Kyushu. He's also partial to shouting "Irasshaimase!" in public to see how the Japanese around him react.

I've been in Japan several times: first as a tourist, then as a study abroad student, next for an internship, and currently on the JET Programme.

There's so much to notice and be surprised at fashion-wise in this country. Two examples are kindergarteners running around in tiny uniform shorts in the middle of winter (still don't get that) and horrendous *English* on shirts and jackets (you know what I'm talking about). One of the things that really jumped out at me though, was how professional everyone looked and how sleek their work clothes were. There's just something about suits that I've always liked. It's clean, professional and put-together.

When I first started working at Saga City Hall, I thought I had my style and "professional wear" pretty much figured out. I had button-up shirts in a variety of designs, grey slacks, black slacks, khakis, a few blazers, a suit, and a nice selection of ties. These were the clothes I had slowly accumulated growing up attending important family, school, social, or religious events. I spent the first 8 months here thinking I got it covered— until it dawned on me that none of my dress clothes really fit well, at least not compared to the office staff around me.

Fortunately, being in Japan makes finding and buying sleek-looking work wear very easy! The fact that almost all young people go through extensive job hunts and interviews wearing smart suits (some say uniform) means there is tremendous demand for all manner of professional wear. As a result, there are a ton of companies (the ubiquitous Aoki and Aoyama spring to mind) providing well-cut, slim-fitting and stylish products at fair prices. You can buy decent dress shoes at ABC Mart, dress socks at your neighborhood Uniqlo, and shirts and slacks in any number of designs at any number of places, not to mention at the tailor's. Most places have a wide selection of button-up shirts organized by size, and will offer to measure your neck and inseam to help you find the best fit. Of course, the endless selection of ties, cuff links and tie clips is equally mind-boggling.

I began by buying a few dress shirts to test out fit and fabric, adding new pairs of slacks and a gray blazer a few months after that. Building a professional wardrobe is a bit like putting together a toolbox. You add to it gradually and lovingly, replacing older or obsolete items with better, multi-tasking or snazzier versions. I know not all of us have to wear a tie or jacket to work, but Japan sure is a great place to begin building a professional wardrobe!

1



2



3



- 1 Better looking than the mannequin!
- 2 A tie clip is a great style addition, so go buy one NOW.
- 3 Got my suit on and I'm ready for anything.

2



Nothing like a bright jacket on a rainy spring day

Erika Ehren, Fukushima

Erika is a 3rd-year ALT in amazing Fukushima. When she isn't scavenger hunting around the castle grounds of Tsurugajo looking for hidden cross markings in the dead of night, you can find her with her nose in a book or plunking away on her piano. She's a volunteer English tour guide for Aizuwakamatsu and loves showing everyone the best of Fukushima, so be sure to get in touch if you're ever in the area!

I've always gravitated toward clean lines and understated pieces. Since coming to Japan, I still wear the same clean lines, albeit in brighter colors accessorized with statement pieces. It's hard say whether my style has evolved as a result of my time spent in Japan, or is the result of growing up and growing into myself. Whatever the case is, I feel my choice of apparel reflects my current state of mind, and I've certainly taken a hiatus from the style I sported in America. Some styles just don't translate well, and you learn to adapt your personal style to reflect trends and unspoken wardrobe rules that are part of your new home, one example being Japan's dislike of sleeveless shirts on women in the workplace!

When I began my time on JET, I was only 20 years old and was still troubled by the body insecurities of my teen years. As I've gotten a little older (and hopefully wiser and more self-aware!), I've come to like myself and my body much better, and I think Japan had a lot to do with that. Once I felt happier and more secure about the way I looked, I found myself giving styles and trends I had previously shied away from a go. Feeling comfortable and confident in your own skin is one of the best feelings in the world and possibly one of the best accessories you can have! I've found myself choosing bolder pieces, selecting more fun and colorful accessories, experimenting with color, texture and patterns, and experimenting with makeup and hairstyles.

Japan has a culture of cute that influences a lot of the fashion here, and I've started to gravitate towards softer colors and patterns, especially floral pieces for spring. I like the doll-like, girly look a lot of Japanese women go for—muted colors and natural materials, topped with the doe-eyed look. I like to mix that up with a bit of retro and country. It may seem like an odd mix, but it's been an enjoyable journey of discovery, this taking of elements from different styles to create something subtly, uniquely mine.



2 Polka Dot Sleeveless Peplum Shirt (Forever 21), White Jeans (UNIQLO), Owl Necklace (21 Love), White Platform Heels (Aldo)
A bright polka-dotted shirt is the perfect accompaniment to sunny days. It's not quite summer yet, but I'm anticipating that too-brief period between the chilly spring days and humid summer hours when the weather is just right. Although this outfit has a bit of a retro feel to it, the white jeans and pumps help inject modernity.

3 Chiffon Buttoned Floral Shirt (G.U.), Pearl Necklace (Forever 21), Cropped Black Pants [Not Pictured] (UNIQLO), Black Slip-ons [Not Pictured] (Vans)
I love this for the office in spring. The shirt is loose-fitting but professional, and the floral pattern is season-appropriate. A simple compass necklace adds a touch of whimsy. To go easily from day to night, perfect your classic black winged eyeliner, add statement jewelry, switch from Vans to heels, and you're set!

1 Denim Shirt (G.U.), Leopard Maxi Skirt (Forever 21), Fang Necklace (Forever 21), White Platform Heels (Aldo)
There's still a bit of a chill in the air, but it's nice enough to head outdoors. Switch out the heels for some white Keds, and you've got the perfect outfit for a stroll amidst the gorgeous blooms of the season.

John Weber, Hokkaido

John is a 2nd-year ALT from Philadelphia who wastes his free periods at school surfing eBay for ties with fox prints, boating blazers, white suede bucks and cotton tunics. He takes photos for JET publications and is on a quest to find the best kaitenzushi spot in Hokkaido. While sakura has been blooming and falling across Japan, this fashion correspondent is busy gearing up for the final snow flurries in the tundra of Hokkaido.

The casual dress code at my schools has given me a less of a reason to show off silk scarfs or fedoras, and I've found myself caring less about "fashion". Functional gear is the name of the game. I see young people overdressed for menial tasks all the time. Six-inch heels and a pleather jacket won't get you to the top of Mt. Fuji, people. Women wearing tights and skirts in Sapporo winters. Really?

Most Japanese elementary and junior high school teachers have perfected the art of looking cool/obnoxious in their swishy tracksuits. This is a work outfit I can get behind from a functional standpoint, but I'd never want a vague French phrase in neon yellow emblazoned across my chest. I take cues from what I call "gym teacher swag" mixed with "weekend mountain climber."

Look 1 is my go-to combo for junior high school. Daniel Johnston shirt: check. Neutral jacket: check. Bright pink Pumas for the blossom lovers: check. Optional: gold chiiiiiiiin. Pair with non-flare khakis and you're good. Well-worn jeans work too if you're going to kick it real casual. Rock some bling if you're feeling wild, but the tie-dye shirt speaks volumes. I've pretty much lived in this Mountain Hardware monkey fleece this year. Its fluff makes me feel like I'm constantly hugging teddy bears. The more outdoorsy teachers at school will think you're a real adventurer, even if you're just a wannabe in fleece. Mont Bell, North Face, and Patagonia all make nice options. It's *that* easy people!

Look 2 is the "time-to-go-to-the-grocery-store and/or roll-through-the-wooden-toy-museum" get-up. One-part purple gingham with two-parts neutral. It's like baking bread, only you look better and it doesn't end up undercooked in the middle because you used a Japanese microwave oven. The hat is from Filson and has an extra-long bill so I look like "Smalls" from the Sandlot, which pleases me to no end. A wool car coat from Schott finishes the ensemble—it's the clean lettering that gets the job done. Pair with any pants you like.

There you have it folks. No mysteries this month. Thank you, Japanese school system, for helping me retire most of my tie collection in favor of casual work wear. As the token foreign teacher, you get some leeway with your fashion choices. So infuse some personal style into everything you wear. Get crazy!



1 Mouth swirl tie-dye and gaudy springtime sneakers

2 Showing off the duckbill platypus hat

3 Awkward white dude finger pointing

FOOD

EDITORIAL Come Fry With Me, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Oil

by Xan

Bugger. Competitive spirit aroused, I was left with no choice but to face my fatty fears. The first thing I discovered was that tempura, much lauded as a “traditional Japanese food”, was actually introduced to Japan by Portugal—and not even that long ago. Launched in the sixteenth century in Nagasaki, tempura gradually made its way up to the Kanto region, and by the late nineteenth century, was one of the most popular fast foods in Tokyo, being sold from sidewalk stalls and pushcarts everywhere. Hell, I thought. If old men on the corner could boil oil and not die, I can, too.

A few days later, sitting next to a huge stack of newly-tempura'd mountain veggies, I contemplated. Tempura, and indeed deep-frying, is dead easy. I cursed myself mentally for my foolishness, my negligence based on a childhood fear of bacon grease. The batter? Cold water and a cup of pre-mixed tempura flour. The oil? Ready when you stick a chopstick into it, and bubbles come off it. Frying time? Ready when it's golden-brown, in no time at all. Everything easy as pie. Sure, it wasn't high-grade stuff—some hard-working tempura chef in Tokyo is probably cursing a newbie recruit for his stodgy, Xan-esque tempura—but I did it myself, didn't light anything on fire, and most importantly, did not die. Frying things may still be the death of me, but only if I eat too many of them.

36 I made tempura for the first time the other day.

Okay, not the most shocking statement of the century, certainly, but it's a big step for me. I love cooking, and I love fried foods, but I was never able to bring myself to deep-fry anything, and it's all because I cooked bacon as a kid.

Let me explain: whenever a weekend rolled around, I would start the day off right and fry up a few huge, glistening, fatty strips of bacon for breakfast. But the bacon's fat would melt right out, and begin to sizzle and pop in the frying pan. Every time, without fail, I'd be caught in the crossfire of the exploding bacon grease, and issue plaintive, mewling cries as the billion-degree oil touched my baby-soft hands. Boiling fats, I surmised, would kill me.

Later on, I would read several accounts of people working as line cooks thrusting their hands into deep-fry baskets of boiling oil accidentally, maiming themselves for life, and the prospect grew even dimmer. Someone else was going to have to deep-fry things for me my entire life. That, naturally, included tempura. Besides, it's a delicate art, right? Right, I agreed with myself.

Then, someone had to go and give me a pile of 山菜 (*sansai*), wild edible mountain plants. The heralds of spring, these delicate buds are simply unbeatable as tempura. I smiled in thanks, trying to think of another way to cook them, when my benefactor rolled out the ol' “You know how to make tempura, don't you, Xan-sensei? You're such a talented person!”

THIS MONTH IN FOOD...

Get excited readers, because this month's Food section is bursting with truly exceptional content! Read about former Kagawa JET Norman White's adventures in owning and operating Japan-based food businesses in Spotlight. Xan's editorial follows up with account of overcoming everyone's worst kitchen nightmare: the deep fry! Then, read Robin Seymour's personal account of discovering her love of cooking and baking while on JET in 'Sweet Comfort'.

Let Lynne Francis of Akita satisfy your chocolate cravings with an overview of her explorations in Japan's weird and wonderful Kit-Kat varieties. Are you looking for a way to make your lunch bentos healthier, or ever find yourself wondering what you could make for a lovely spring picnic? Sara Beniamino of Osaka will enlighten you on the art of the vegan bento. Now, I know what you're thinking: WOW! SUCH FOOD! MUCH CONTENT! But hold on to your doges, because we're not done yet, folks. It's time to wash it all down with a shot of chilled local sake! We've got Matthew Headland is here to educate you on the ins and outs of the ubiquitous rice wine tipple. Hope you enjoy this issue as much as we did!



SPOTLIGHT

Norman White, Resolute Restaurateur

When people in Tokushima crave thick-crust cheesy pizza, there is but one man to turn to: Norman White. Owner of BB Pizza, the prefecture's only authentic American-style pizza joint, Norman has been in the food business in Japan for roughly ten years. When he first lived here, he was a JET in Kagawa prefecture from 1994-1997. Over the years, he has opened and owned a sandwich shop, a bar, and now BB's since 2012. When asked about the biggest barriers to entry when opening a business as a foreigner in Japan, Norman describes buying or renting a space to be top of the list: because of discrimination, doing this without the lead of Japanese contacts or staff is close to impossible.

Food-wise, he offers a crucial piece of advice—one has to strike the right balance between sticking to the original tastes of certain foods while being attentive to local market preferences. He offers a noteworthy example of a foreign business not paying close enough attention to the unique Japanese market: when Cinnabon came to Japan, they did not change the Jumbo size of their product, and soon failed! To source products for his businesses, Norman says he has procured from various sources such as Costco and the Foreign Buyers' Club, but realized wholesalers were more reliable as the other places were more geared towards personal consumption and often run out of stock.

Learn more and “like” BB Pizza on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/bbpizza>



VEGAN BENTOS



Sara Beniamino, Osaka

I haven't always been vegan, but sometime during junior high school I gave up meat, and then about six years after that I made an educated decision to cut out the rest. My convictions to stay vegan in Japan were strong and it was never an option for me to give that up. But before coming here, I spent many hours filtering through forums and blogs about being vegan in Japan—an overwhelming number of which proclaimed things like, "You won't survive in Japan," "You can't eat at restaurants because everything has fish in it," and "You'll never be invited to *enkais!*" But the most concerning advice, delivered with such conviction was, "You have to eat school lunch or all the teachers will hate you." From that moment on, *kyūshoku* became my focus.

Shortly after finding out my placement, I sent an email to my supervisor telling him I was vegan and that I wanted to bring my own lunch to school. I prepared for the worst, and his response came quickly: "I see. You are vegetarian. You can eat your lunch in JHS's teacher room. No problem." And then added, "Don't worry" for extra emphasis. Those comforting words set the stage for—as it turns out—my surprisingly positive experience with school lunches in Japan!

Against all odds, I've had great feedback from my coworkers about the lunches I bring, and no, they don't hate me. Many days my *bento* is a huge conversation starter. My Japanese-style lunches seem to elicit *oishi-sou* more often than my more "exotic" bentos, such as Indian curry, Mexican enchiladas, Italian pasta, Korean bibimbap, or American mac and cheese with BBQ "meat." I usually pack rice, miso soup (I use the hot water machine at school), edamame, fried veggies, beans, tofu, salad, fruit, or leftovers from last night's dinner. When I bring a particularly great bento to school, I'll offer small samples to my coworkers, which always goes over well.

Then, at the start of my second year here, things got even better for me when one of my JTEs asked if I could talk about veganism in my self-introduction PowerPoint. "Of course I can!" I said, and got right to work on those slides. My students already knew I was *bejitarian*, but this was the first time I could speak so openly to them about my diet. For two weeks straight at my junior high school I was able to talk about why I'm vegan, explain what foods I do and don't eat, and show pictures of delicious vegan

meals, among other things. My students were fascinated! They wanted to know everything about my diet, and wouldn't stop asking questions until the class chime cut them off. Incidentally, the most common questions during the Q&A were, "What did you bring for lunch today?" and "Can I see your lunch?" Suddenly I had groups of students storming the teacher's room everyday at 12:30 to check out my bento! That still continues to this day.

I'll admit, figuring out what to prepare for lunch everyday is about 80% fun and also about 20% chore. But I love feeling creative in the kitchen, I love the conversation that revolves around my lunches, and quite simply, I love making cute bentos! In fact, my experience with school lunch kind of symbolizes my whole experience as a vegan in Japan—it's been a lot easier and far more rewarding than I ever imagined!



A taste of Korea - bibimbap



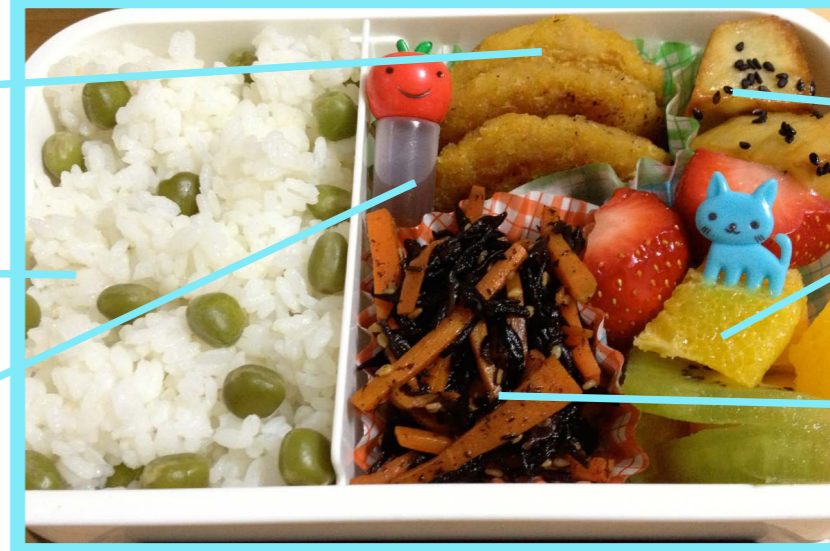
Indian curry and naan

Sara Beniamino is a 2nd year JET living in Osaka Prefecture. She loves animals, bicycle touring, traveling, and discovering new vegan-friendly restaurants across Japan. In fact, you'll probably find her at one of them! She's also the current Vice President of VegJET, a community for vegetarian JETs to network and share advice. Check them out on Facebook!

Easy Bento Bean Patty (recipe included)

Rice with green peas

BBQ sauce



Daigaku imo (glazed sweet potatoes)

Fruit: mikan, pineapple, kiwi, and strawberries

Gomoku hijiki (recipe included)



Easy Bento Bean Patty

Makes 6 small patties

This recipe is so versatile, simple, and packed full of protein! What's great is you can use virtually any beans you have on hand and add in all kinds of veggies too. The secret is the grater—traditionally they are made of sharkskin and used to grind down wasabi, but I bought a ceramic one at my local 100yen store that works great for grinding almost any vegetable!

- 1 cup boiled or canned beans, drained (soybeans, chickpeas, or black beans work well)
- ½ medium-sized carrot, ground up 4 Tbsp potato starch (in Japanese: *katakuriko* 片栗粉, かたくりこ)
- 2 Tbsp water
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp cumin
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp onion powder
- Sesame oil for frying

Directions: Mash beans with a fork. Grind up the carrot and mix with the mashed beans. Add spices, potato starch, and water, then form into patties. Heat sesame oil in a pan, and cook patties until golden brown on both sides. For your bento, cut patties in half.



ground carrot



五目ひじき (Gomoku Hijiki)

Makes 3-4 bento servings

Hijiki is a popular seaweed, often found in bento, that happens to be high in calcium and iron. The texture of this dish is really great and its flavor always compliments the other Japanese foods I pack in lunch. The hardest part is cutting the carrots into thin sticks, but once that's out of the way, you'll be amazed how easy this is to make! As an added bonus, I get many positive comments from my teachers when I bring this in my bento.

- 1 small can of hijiki seaweed, not dried (my can is 110g)
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 1 medium-sized carrot, julienned
- ½ Tbsp mirin, or to taste
- 1 Tbsp soy sauce, or to taste
- Toasted sesame seeds, for garnish

Directions: In a small saucepan, heat sesame oil over low-medium heat. Add carrots and cook until softened. Add hijiki, mirin, and soy sauce to the carrots. Heat through. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and let cool.

More Vegan Bento Recipes!

Just Bento – This popular blog from Makiko Itoh features many vegetarian and vegan recipes. (English) <http://justbento.com/category/vegan>

The Japanese Vegetarian Kitchen – Super simple, creative, and delicious recipes from Izumi Shoji. (English) <http://izumimirun.blogspot.jp>

Vege Dining – From the same author of The Japanese Vegetarian Kitchen, this recipe blog is updated more frequently, and just as amazing! (Japanese) <http://ameblo.jp/izumimirun>



SWEET COMFORT FOOD

above: Biscuits and gravy with cabbage

Robin Seymour, Tokushima

below: Lemon Blueberry Sweet Rolls



Food: one of the main reasons I travel. I am a food tourist before any other thing. So when I was in Japan the first time, I ate so many pots of curry, plates of *karaage* and sushi that I was almost sick. However this time around, after the initial joy at having access to all my Japanese favorites again wore off, I began to crave home cooking.

For everyone, comfort food means something different, but it always means something familiar. There wasn't much at the local *Kyoei* that fit that bill. I was homesick for food that tasted like America. Before I knew about online stores like *themeatguy.jp* or *iherb.com*, before Costco became a familiar name, I required dishes that fulfilled my heart's desires. So I created my own ingredients. From cheese to tortillas, I researched and made them all from scratch.

Having a decent amount of free time at school meant I had all the time I needed to read about how to culture bacteria or create that perfect pie crust. In my journey to fill my belly, I discovered a previously hidden passion. I loved to cook and bake. In college the most I cooked was a box of Uncle Ben's with some chicken added. I never needed to go beyond that. Everything I desired was already at my fingertips. Here in the land of rice and chicken, I realized that I wanted to eat so much more. It began slowly—with an item here or there. I took home the bread and milk from school to make bread pudding. I got packets of oatmeal from the

family and made raisin cookies. Then I decided to get healthy. I started eating more vegetables and needed to find ways to make my favorite foods healthier. This was the beginning of a whole new world of cooking for me. I started to have gatherings just to have a reason to cook for people. I needed to feed them. I needed to share my findings.

Upon the arrival of several vegan JETs, I embraced the idea of vegan baking. I delved into alternate methods of cooking. I even started making sourdough to get that step further from commercial production. I love to make delicious things and there is nothing I enjoy as much as hearing someone say, "yum!" when they bit into something I made.

Now I have a reason to bake every week, whole wheat breads, pies, sweet rolls. People are always in need of sweet comfort and I am happy to provide it knowing how I felt at the beginning of my time here, almost five years ago. Without coming to Japan, I never would have discovered this talent of mine. Though it has been a long and twisting road of discovery, I am glad that a lack of familiarity drove me to provide for myself. I can't take America for granted—nor the *karaage* I know I'll soon miss. After all, I'll have to figure out how to recreate Japanese food when I return to the US! I can't wait for that next adventure.



Robin with Minnie at Tokyo Disney

Robin is a 5th year ALT in Tokushima. She has two rescue cats. She loves to run, read, and swim in waterfalls when she isn't baking. If you're interested in tasting some of her sweets, you can contact her via Facebook at Robin's Homebaked Goods.

ALL ABOUT SAKE

Matthew Headland, Niigata



Natsuko no Sake, a famous manga, was created in Niigata

When my friend asked me if I wanted to study sake with her, I don't think I really understood what she meant. I thought what anyone three or four drinks into the night would think; it was her way of inviting me out more. Despite living about two hours away, I enthusiastically agreed. When I had the chance we'd meet up and I'd follow her to a bunch of local restaurants, meet a lot of her friends and usually I'd sit silently listening to them talk about sake, food and culture. The more I listened the more I drank, the more I drank the less I understood but even if I had no idea what they were talking about, the food and sake made me stay, it was that good. One thing did start to become clearer; she might have actually been serious about studying.

It turns out she was, very serious. In the mail she sent me a handbook on Japanese sake and it was then that I began my slow and often fumbling attempt at studying a national iconic drink. I joined a group called Niigata Sake Lovers (Facebook page below) and attended small seminars and drinking parties where people would bring their own sake, share and talk. Soon I found out that there was even a sake exam that you could take to familiarize yourself with sake making and culture.

The day of the exam came sooner than expected. I walked in to a huge conference hall with about 350 people. I sat down at my seat and skimmed through my trusty handbook in the hopes of absorbing that last morsel of information that could save me. In preparation for the exam, I had made full use of my this handy text and even taken two practice tests from previous years. On the second test I had scored a passing grade and so for only a month's work I thought that was quite encouraging. I sat down and readied my pencil confident that I could pass this thing—after all no use in stressing out now, right?

Wrong. The test began and as I glossed over the questions I suddenly lost my confidence. The two largely similar past tests I had taken looked absolutely nothing like this monstrosity. I flipped the exam over to see that I was taking the level I signed up for (there was three and I was in the lowest level). There was no doubt, there had been no mistake.

In the end I didn't quite make the cut, but I did learn (and continue to learn) a whole lot about sake and making tons of new friends in the process.

Want to try your hand at the sake test? We've translated two example questions for you. See how you answer, and check out the author's blurb for the correct responses.

1 The winter climate in Niigata is said to be ideal for brewing sake but which of the following are true?

- A. Days are longer
- B. Temperature lows are relatively stable
- C. Days with extremely low temperatures continue
- D. Temperatures vary significantly between daytime and nighttime

2 What is the correct order of the top three sake exporting prefectures?

- A. 1) Hyogo 2) Kyoto 3) Niigata
- B. 1) Kyoto 2) Hyogo 3) Niigata
- C. 1) Niigata 2) Hyogo 3) Kyoto
- D. 1) Niigata 2) Kyoto 3) Hyogo

How'd you do? Here's a bit of a beginners guide for the newest of new to the world of sake.

Sake is made from rice, duh, but did you know that it's made from a special kind of rice that's made specifically to brew this dry wine? If you're lucky enough to have kyushoku (school lunch in public school) at school every day, you're more than familiar with typical Japanese rice (*hanmai* 飯米) and the obscene portions it comes in. In its raw form, the grain is translucent and uniform in colour. Though you can make sake from regular rice, sake rice or brewer's rice (*shumai* 酒米) is bigger and has a white core in the middle of its translucent body. They say that the bigger this white core is, the better; who said size never mattered?

Breweries will go to great lengths to acquire or grow larger grain rice with this big white core so that they can mill it more finely and produce higher grade sake. This is because the white core is known to promote fermentation and produces purest taste without excess harsh flavours.



Ready to take the test!



The main testing hall was full of people

What kind of sake is there anyway?

Generally speaking there are four grades of sake. The grade depends largely on how much of the outer grain has been milled or "polished" giving the final product the clearest, most genuine taste of the rice. Another distinguishing factor is whether the sake has any additional "jozo alcohol" or distilled alcohol. It's common even for higher grade sake to add a small amount of distilled alcohol in order to bring out flavour and aroma. Among higher grade sake, *junmai* meaning "pure rice" can define any sake which hasn't been made with any additional distilled alcohol. Here's a non-exhaustive list of some of the most common types on the shelf.

Junmai Daiginjo (純米大吟醸) & Daiginjo (大吟醸)

These two types of sake are generally made with rice polished to about 50% or more of their original grain.

Junmai Ginjo (純米吟醸) & Ginjo (吟醸)

Polished to about 60% of their original grain.

Junmai (純米) & Honjozo (本醸造)

Polished to about 70% of the original grain.

Futsushu

Polished to 70% or less and made with a significantly higher percentage of distilled alcohol. This type of sake considered "ordinary" or "table" sake is what makes up a high percentage of total sake produced in Japan.

There are a plethora of other sake types as well including *namazake* (unpasteurized), *koshu* (aged sake) and *nigorizake* (milky white sake, lightly filtered).

In terms of taste, one can't say that a higher grade is better than a lower grade. Even within a high grade sake, taste can vary immensely and can have quite a varied character. Equally, there is a lot of futsushu that might fit your pallet more than a daiginjo or junmai sake. The taste can also change based on whether its served cold or If you're someone who gets rather adverse I suggest going out and trying as much as you can and find your niche!



Some award-winning sake

Niigata sake is best served hot!



If you're interested in how sake is made, Niigata Sake Lovers will be holding a series of bilingual events starting with the harvesting of the sake rice, all the way through to the bottling and you'll get two bottles of special brewed sake you helped make yourself!

Check out the Niigata Sake Lovers FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/niigatasakelovers?ref=ts>

Also, for more information on sake types and brewing, check out this handy guide: <http://www.sake-world.com/html/brewing-process.html>

Matthew Headland is a 3rd-year ALT in Joetsu, Niigata. Matthew will be the AJET Block 2 Representative for Niigata, Fukushima, Miyagi, and Yamagata in the coming year, so if you have a great idea to bring the prefectures together or start up a project, yell at him. He dreams of one day competing in RuPaul's Drag Race, but for now practices the naginata. The correct answers for the sample sake test are B and B.



A local brewery and its giant tanks



THE GREAT KIT-KAT ADVENTURE

Lynne Francis, Akita

Back in my junior year of college, I spent one year studying abroad in Tokyo. During that time, I set a lot of goals: improve my Japanese, visit Tokyo Disney, and eat copious amounts of *okonomiyaki*. However, there was one goal I made that I have carried through into my time on JET: Try every flavor of Kit-Kat that I can find. I had read articles about such strange flavors as cheese, pineapple, and even soy sauce!

The background of Kit-Kats in Japan is just as interesting as the many flavors they come in. The Kit-Kat brand came to Japan in the 1970s through the confectionary company *Fujiya*. In 2000, Nestlé bought their shares. A lot of successful marketing comes from the fact the word "Kit-Kat" in Japanese (キットカット, *kitto katto*) is very similar to the phrase "キットかつ" (*kitto katsu* "sure to win"), which is said by school children to wish others luck before exams.

Even now, some students are given Kit-Kats before exams, and you can purchase ready-to-send Kit-Kat packages at the post office or even around New Year's as gifts. Nestlé has produced over 200 flavors in Japan alone. A lot of flavors are based around famous foods from certain areas, such as Uji Green Tea for Kyoto. Kit-Kats of such unique flavors are sold as *omiyage* rather than snacks you buy at 3 AM at the convenience store. Occasionally, you can find seasonal flavors such as raspberry (summer) and pumpkin (autumn) at local stores.

The first flavor I ever tried in Japan was Hazelnut Strawberry. It was a strange combination of nut and fruit flavors. While not an appetizing flavor itself, it started my Ash Ketchum quest, collecting Kit-Kats instead of Pokémon. I only got more excited when after a few months in Japan for JET, the world's first Kit-Kat store was opening in Tokyo, and was said to sell flavors that weren't available anywhere else. I knew that for my quest, I needed to try something so exclusive. The store had beautiful displays of chocolate and memorabilia. The store only sold less than 10 different items, including a CD which came with some regular Kit-Kats. Unfortunately, they had sold out of their limited edition "sublime bitter chocolate" flavor; only so many are made by hand daily. However, I was happy to buy some cream cheese and chili-flavored chocolates.

At the time of writing this article, I have tried thirty-one flavors of Kit-Kats. My favorite flavor has probably been the Kyushu/Okinawa-limited Sweet Potato flavor. Its light-purple color makes it playful, and the blend of sweet potato and white chocolate is not too sweet and leaves a good after taste on the tongue. The worst flavor I ever had was *Yuubari* Melon from Hokkaido. The after-taste left a foul, sour taste in my mouth. However, it was worth the experience of traveling an hour just to find a store that sold them.

With so many flavors all over the world, my journey is never-ending, but it's a tasty road ahead of me.



left: A delicious Kit Kat care package

above: The Kit-Kat store at Seibu Ikebukuro in Tokyo



Some of the weird and wonderful flavors

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1. <http://www.nestle.com/investors/brand-focus/kitkat>
2. http://eatocracy.cnn.com/2012/02/02/how-did-kit-kat-became-king-of-candy-in-japan/?hpt=hp_bn8
3. <http://japanese.lingualift.com/blog/kit-kat-japan/>
4. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lydiah/35-kit-kat-varieties-from-around-the-world-18d7>

SPORTS

EDITORIAL

Why You Should Watch the World Cup

Chances are that over the next few months you'll be asked for your opinion about the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The tournament, which is being hosted in Brazil, doesn't start until June 12th, but I've already been asked for my opinion on how well both England and Japan will do, and who's likely to win the final. With this in mind, I believe that, as JET, there's a lot to be gained from tuning in to watch the World Cup this summer.

There's been a massive increase in the popularity of football within Japan over the last twenty years. Working as an ALT, I've seen some of the positive effects of this international sport's popularity. The presence of Japanese players within high-profile foreign teams has meant that some of my football-obsessed students have a greater interest in certain foreign cities—usually Manchester and Milan—and more motivation to study English so that they can play football for a foreign team, like current AC Milan player, Keisuke Honda, whom they've seen speaking in English at press conferences.

I've tried to incorporate the sport into classes, partly through conversations with students about their favorite foreign teams and by using English Premier League football stickers as a reward for hard work. Football hasn't just been useful for getting students to learn English though. Teachers in the staffroom and Japanese people who I meet outside of work often want to talk to me about the sport. I've also played in local football tournaments and been to watch J1 League games with my co-workers, and, when I first arrived in Japan, I found that playing in local 'futsal' matches was a great way to meet people.



I believe that this summer's World Cup also represents a great opportunity to engage with students, colleagues and people in the local community. As the United States, Australia and England have all qualified for this year's tournament, many JETs will find there are good opportunities to talk about their home country.

At school, it might be beneficial to mention the tournament in classes, or at least, talk with the more football-obsessed students about it during lunch breaks. Outside of work, following the tournament from Japan should be hugely entertaining as well as a great opportunity to promote internationalisation by mixing with local people who are likely to be interested in how well your national team's doing. I recommend making the effort to view at least one game locally if there's a venue, like a sports bar, that's showing the tournament near where you live. At least, that's what I'm planning to do anyway.

THIS MONTH IN SPORTS...

It's the last sports section for a couple of months, but thankfully we're going out on a high. First up, we have a fantastic introduction to Japanese baseball written by Kagoshima JET Adam Carter.

Adam, who recently saw the Fukuoka Hawks play at the Yahoo Dome, briefly explains how baseball arrived in Japan and why it's proved so popular. He also provides a fascinating insight into the history and cultural significance of Japanese baseball's cheering groups, known as 'oendan', and reflects on some of the rituals favoured by Japanese baseball fans. Having attended countless baseball games in the States, he also notes some of the ways in which the conduct of Japanese fans and players differ from those of their American counterparts.

Next up, we have an article for anybody who is planning on watching this summer's FIFA World Cup. Akita JET Jonathon Morris' article begins with an overview of the tournament's structure. He then looks at Japan's chances of success and describes the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents in the scheduled group matches. Check it out!



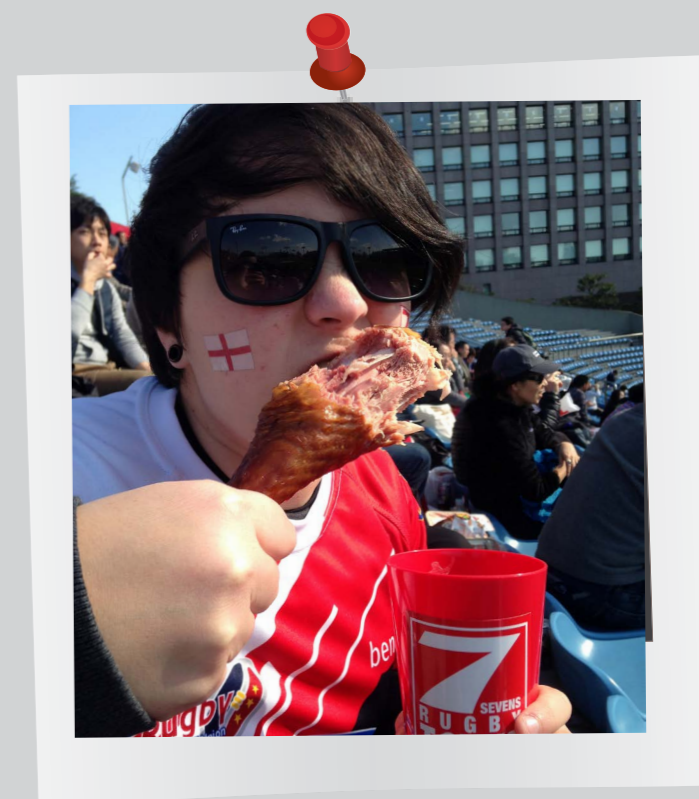
SPOTLIGHT

Nicole 'Doughnut' Moore, Wilderness Rugby Player

Having worked like a dog (drinking, training, drinking, rugby, drinking, and sometimes studying) at University, Doughnut left with a degree, two seasons as Captain, two international tours for the Philippine National Squad and an ankle dislocation. But that wouldn't stop her love for the game!

Occasionally seen in the wilds of the *inaka*, 'running' with a rugby ball like a crazy person, Doughnut is surviving in a women's rugby-free environment. She arrived excited for the 2019 World Cup and discovered a nearby rugby stadium. However, it's only used at 9:30am on Saturdays by 9 year olds and women's rugby is nowhere within commutable reach. After ordering an over-priced rugby ball from amazon.co.jp and cuddling it to sleep for a week, she recovered from the shock and built a home gym. She keeps to a diet of free weights and cardio on weekdays, a 'real' gym in Tottori on the weekends for Olympic lifting and annoying her students by joining in with as many of their sports activities as she's allowed.

After chilling in the sun at Tokyo Sevens (and running into the Japanese women's team), she's now back to training hard for a tournament in the Philippines in June!



THE DAY I BECAME A CHEERLEADER

Adam Carter, Kagoshima

Having been a seat usher for three seasons and a beer vendor for another 17 summers in Chicago's baseball stadiums, I was curious to see how a baseball game in Japan would measure up to the 2,000+ games I had worked in my hometown. I headed to Fukuoka to visit the famed Yahoo Dome where the hometown Hawks were hosting the Orix Buffalos (Osaka) in a heated battle between the number one and number two teams in the Pacific Division.

Though I'm generally not a fan of domes, as I prefer the natural grass and sunshine as part of the experience, I must say the energy inside is palpable. The stadium itself is a lot cleaner and sterile than the gritty "friendly confines" of Wrigley Field, but that is to be expected as the Yahoo Dome in Fukuoka was built in 1993, nearly eight decades after Wrigley.

I'd heard Japanese baseball fans were "crazy" with passion, but having watched so many American fans let it all out—after I'd sold them plenty of product—I found it hard to believe that the reserved Japanese could outdo them. Soon enough though, I heard the *oendan* start their endless chants.

The *oendan* are cheering groups that lead their spectators in cheers that are accompanied by *taiko* drums, trumpets and whistles. Reminiscent of European football cheering groups, they sing songs that range in length and tone.

Being an outsider, it was wild to see all of these fans so passionate about the game. Eager to learn more, I delved into the history to shed some light on these amateur cheerleaders. Professor William Kelly of Yale University observed that, "the fundamental rhythmic pattern of the cheers is reminiscent of the agricultural song cycles from medieval centuries, which appeals to the gods for fertility and harvest." So, these ancient chants were messages from the gods to humans, and today the cheers are seen as a call to both the players and the gods for success and victory.

But is there really a religious element to this tradition? Actually, yes. Some groups, like those supporting the Hanshin Tigers, go to a nearby shrine to pray for their team's success before the game. The roots of this *oendan* tradition can be traced back to the Meiji Restoration. Before then, during Japan's self-imposed isolation, the Western concept of sport was virtually unknown. Yes, sumo existed, but that wasn't purely a spectator sport, as it had religious origins, and other athletic activities—like kendo, judo and horseback riding—were geared towards military training purposes. But when Japan opened its doors to the rest of the world to embark on a period of modernization, they started to import many cultural components of Western civilization. During this time, visiting professors and missionaries introduced Japan to sports like tennis, baseball and crew racing. Soon thereafter, the Japanese developed their penchant for "*besuboru*" which they dubbed *yakyuu* (野球 lit. "field ball").



The celebratory balloons



Posing with the 'team'

Baseball became popular as it synced with the Japanese group mentality, giving people an opportunity to come together to express their renowned group instincts in an athletic setting. In addition, the Japanese found the batter vs. pitcher psychological confrontation similar to the martial arts. The government even endorsed the sport; the Ministry of Education pronounced baseball, "good for the development of the national character."

At the turn of the twentieth century, high school and college leagues were established and the *oendan* became a part of the Japanese baseball tradition. These highly organized groups provided students and supporters with an effective way to demonstrate school loyalty. During this time, post-game confrontations between rival cheer groups often erupted.

The Japanese professional baseball league was founded in 1935, and unpaid volunteers quickly formed cheering groups. Professional baseball wasn't a huge craze at first, but its popularity took off after World War II, as the sport came to symbolize the new order of democracy and progress that had taken root in Japan.

Now that baseball has become such an important part of Japanese culture, the *oendan* has become ingrained as an integral part of that tradition. Each player has his own "hitting march" that the fans chant during his entire at-bat. There are also "reward chants" if the player gets a hit or scores a run. Some fans blow horns, wave flags or pound on drums, raising the energy level. In a spin-off of the American "seventh-inning stretch," the Japanese celebrate the "lucky seventh" inning fight song. In Fukuoka, professional cheerleaders run onto the field to lead the entire crowd in the Hawks' team song. Fans inflate specially designed yellow balloons—which everyone agrees look like sperm—which are then shot into the air at the conclusion of the song. If the Hawks go on to win, as they did on this day, the fans continue singing the hitting marches and the *banzai* cheer.

It's fascinating to watch a reserved Japanese fan sitting with all of the restraint and decorum in the world until some guy with a big flag jumps up and starts rallying his troops. Suddenly, the once-demure fan jumps to his feet and joins in with the cheer, yelling his support for his favorite player at the top of his lungs. Maintaining these cheers for an entire inning can be exhausting. As one student said proudly, "We're in better shape than the players." But even though they may look like raucous fans, they retain their Japanese restraint as they avoid the vulgarity that their American counterparts often display. Thankfully, they

eschew some of the brashness of American fans, refusing to insult other teams' players or fans wearing the wrong T-shirt. This fits into the polite norms of Japanese culture, which is also comically evident in the way fans return foul balls to ushers instead of keeping them.

Most Japanese fans still look unfavorably upon the *gaijin* players because of their flashy attitude and focus on money, which runs counter to the team mentality that the Japanese treasure. With this in mind, one refreshing aspect of Japanese baseball is the way players play their entire careers for the same team. In the MLB, players jump from team to team based on who offers them more money. Many fans, like myself, have been crushed when one of their favorite players suddenly deserts them to join a hated rival because they were offered a better contract. Here in Japan, the players don't demand more money as this would be placing their own wishes above the team's interests. Though they may not make enough money to retire as multi-millionaires, their allegiance is rewarded as they are often given jobs in one of the companies that sponsor the team.

When the game is over, and the *oendan* fans have finished their cheers, they resume their polite behavior and sit on the bus home in complete silence. Seeing Japanese fans go from quiet to loud and then back to silent and demure again speaks volumes about their cultural contrasts.

Is there a deeper meaning for these *oendan* groups? It's been noted that like the annual *matsuri* festivals, baseball games provide a well-needed release from the everyday routine of rules and propriety. Many have hailed them as an example of democracy at work as anyone can participate and fans of different ages and genders all participate together. Being such a fan of America's national pastime, it was fascinating to see how the sport's been customized for Japanese culture. Watching the *oendan*, with their emphasis on group allegiance and regulation, drove home this point and when I joined in with them, I could feel the swell of team pride start to bubble within me. Go Hawks!

Adam Carter is a 1st year Kagoshima ALT who served as beer vendor in Chicago's baseball stadiums for 17 years. During that time, he appeared in several news stories, newspaper/magazine articles and a documentary film about the Chicago Cubs. His website www.beerguy.org was created to get baseball fans involved in his non-profit Cause & Affect Foundation.



Adam with his very own baseball card and fan



A particularly dedicated fan



This June, the spectacle of the 2014 World Cup takes place in Brazil. Whether you're a football fan or not, the World Cup this summer is sure to be an incredible extravaganza. Football has been steadily increasing in popularity in Japan, especially since the 2002 World Cup that was co-hosted by Japan and South Korea. Japan has also been lucky enough to have their official mascot for the 2014 World Cup as Pikachu. Not to mention that Adidas has recruited Japanese pop mega stars AKB48. I'm sure you're all looking forward to the soon to be aired Adidas commercial featuring AKB48 in Japan shirts (come on, I know you're all secret fans).

In this article we will take a look at some of the structure of the tournament, a selection of Japan's key games, and assess Japan's chances whilst identifying key players to look out for. Hopefully, this will equip you to get into some dedicated World Cup conversations with students, co-workers, or friends.

Tournament Structure

For those unfamiliar with the World Cup, it kicks off with 32 teams from all over the world playing in groups of four teams. All the best-ranked teams ('seeded' teams) are deliberately put in different groups. The teams play each other once, with three points for a win and one point for a draw. After all four teams have played each other; the top two teams from each group go through to the next round, which is a knockout stage. Japan is in Group C along with Colombia, Greece and Cote d'Ivoire.

Jonathon Morris, Akita

Key Games for Japan

(All times below are Japan Standard Time)

Japan's first game is at 10am on Saturday June 14th against Cote d'Ivoire, followed by Greece five days later on Thursday 19th June at 7 AM. Then, for the most dedicated fans, arguably their toughest group game is against Colombia on Thursday the 24th June at 5 AM.

This group is very difficult to predict because of the diversity and strengths of the teams. Cote d'Ivoire have a squad of players that almost all play in the top European leagues including, three-time African Player of the year, Yaya Toure, a fantastically versatile midfielder who can seemingly play in almost any position. Manchester City fans are used to seeing him switch from defensive to attacking positions in every match. Japan may have difficulties in dealing with the overall size and strength of this team. Defensively however, Cote d'Ivoire have not always been the most solid international team. So expect goals.

Apart from a few players who play for teams in other parts of Europe, the majority of Greece's squad plays in Greece. They are experienced and notoriously difficult to break down. Renowned for playing very defensively they are not the most entertaining side to watch and Japan will have to be wary of set-pieces. Five of their eight victories in the qualifying round have been 1-0 score lines. So don't expect a thriller from this one.



Keisuke Honda



Pikachu supporting his country's team



Pokemon dressed in their finest Japan blues

The final game of the group is Colombia. Tipped by some as dark horses to win the World Cup, 'Los Cafeteros' (The Coffee Growers) appear to have it all: pace, power, technical skill and height. That means they are able to adapt their style of play depending on their opponents. An injury means that there are doubts surrounding the including of their star player, Radamel Falcao. Even without Falcao though, they are still capable of scoring as they have a more than able replacement in Jackson Martinez. The aerial passes will be a particular problem for Japan to cope with, but with questions over 'Los Cafeteros' defence suggest that Japan will have chances to score. For those of you dedicated enough for the 4am start, you can expect to be rewarded with goals.

Japan's Key Players

Keisuke Honda is vital to Japan's chances. The versatile attacking midfielder has been playing for AC Milan in Italy since January, but hasn't been in form. Honda has so far only played on the wing for AC Milan, despite the centre being his favoured position. Japanese fans will be hoping that the blonde talisman is out to prove himself on the world stage.

Japan's other famous midfielder, Shinji Kagawa, has also been played in positions that haven't suited him at Manchester United. The 25-year-old Hyogo-born midfielder has shown glimpses of his talent this season, but Japanese fans will be hoping he can rediscover the form that he was displaying a year ago when he became the first Asian player to score a hat-trick in the English Premier league.

Another player to look out for is Shinji Okazaki. Hyogo-born Okazaki, who currently plays in Germany for FC Mainz, has

scored 35 times for Japan, making him the national team's fourth highest ever goal scorer.

The Manager

Alberto Zaccheroni, an Italian national, who has previously managed clubs like Juventus, Lazio and AC Milan, currently manages the Japanese national team. In this role, he's given younger players a chance and instilled an attacking brand of football into the team.

Japan's Chances

Whilst Japan's group isn't the easiest, it's far from the most difficult. Japan's victory over Belgium and a draw against the Netherlands in late 2013 gives us reason to believe Japan is capable of competing against much stronger sides. Japan will be eyeing the opening two fixtures for maximum points, so we can expect goals. Let's hope we hear plenty of 'NIPPON OLE' this summer.

Jonathon is a first year High School ALT from the UK currently living in Noshiro City, Northern Akita Prefecture. When he is not keeping up to date with football he has an insatiable interest in international relations and world affairs. Since arriving in Akita Prefecture, Jonathon has acquired a passion for skiing and nihonshu (but has yet to combine the two). He can confirm he is available for selection for several teams taking part in the World Cup, and is optimistic about receiving a call up to join any day now despite concerns over his fitness, ability, eligibility, experience and age.

TRAVEL

EDITORIAL

Managing Your Trip Like a Pro

A reader asked for advice on managing her holidays more effectively to maximise time off. As a travel writer/editor/addict, I've perfected the art of making the most of every available second of my annual leave. My travel planning tips below might seem like common sense, but I am constantly surprised at how often people forget them.

Make the most of your nenkyuu

Depending on your work situation, combining nenkyuu with national holidays gives you more bang for your buck. During Golden Week this year, for example, taking time off between the national holidays would have wrangled you an 11-day break for the price of only four nenkyuu days—enough time for a holiday overseas or trip home. Often a holiday abroad will end up cheaper than travel in Japan at this time.

If your school or BOE insists you only take time off during school holidays, you can still take extended breaks at other times of the year by adding just one day of nenkyuu to a national holiday that falls either side of a weekend (this year in July, September, October and two in November). Four days off is plenty of time to check out local destinations when prices—and crowds—have gone down.

Use sick days

I often hear of people being told to use nenkyuu when they are sick—and doing so without question. I'm not suggesting you get into fisticuffs with your Kyoto sensei, but we have sick days in our contracts for a reason. Certainly, your Japanese colleagues won't take nenkyuu for minor illnesses, such as colds, leaving it instead for serious illness or a prolonged hospital stay. They will generally default to telling JETs to do the same thing, because they aren't used to our culture of being able to use sick days for when you are actually, you know, sick.

Says AJET's Director of Public Relations and Block 8 Representative Julia Mace: "Every JET participant is entitled to paid sick time and vacation time, just like any other public servant. Find out the requirements needed for you to take sick-time directly from your supervisor and follow the system set forward by your contracting organization."

Plan like a pro

Sure, the idea of 'winging it' is a romantic one, but in reality, not booking ahead or doing your research can cost you more money and eat into precious holiday time. Use comparison sites to find cheap flights—set up an alert if you want to monitor prices. Same applies for accommodation. There are bargains galore to be found if you start planning early. It's also imperative you do your research on visas and vaccinations for travel overseas as they often need to be organised months before departure. I also recommend insurance. Check the fine print for non-inclusions and confirm what the company considers your 'country of residence'. World nomads (www.worldnomads.com) for example, says your country of residence is where you'd want to be repatriated in an emergency, so consider that when you buy.

Join JET-setters!

This JET-affiliated Facebook travel group has around 1,000 members who are always happy to help with any specific questions you have about travel in Japan or abroad. It also has a fantastic list resources for everything from booking flights, accommodation and transport, to visas, travel insurance and packing tips, as well as a bunch of travel blogs for inspiration.

I hope these tips will help when you start planning your next holiday. If you have a question, or some planning tips of your own, get in touch connect.travel@ajet.net

Visas:

www.visahunter.com

Vaccinations:

www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1072.aspx?CategoryID=67

Accommodation:

www.hostelworld.com
www.agoda.com
www.couchsurfing.org/

Flights:

www.skyscanner.net
www.kayak.com/

THIS MONTH IN TRAVEL...

Through pure co-incidence, our bumper Travel section in this final issue of Connect for the JET year has a distinct reflective feel. Martin Yearley ponders the idea of ecotourism after a trip to Iriomote and Ishigaki islands in Okinawa, while Katie Strong shares her beautiful, unexpected moment experiencing hanami, Korean style. Jessica McSavage introduces us to the exciting adult game of geocaching, and thrill junkie Alexandra Brueckner touches down to tell us all about the exhilarating experience of paragliding over Pokhara in Nepal.

In our Spotlight, Simon Griffin rediscovers his inner explorer through solo travel, and I give you some tips on managing your trip like a pro in my final editorial. As always, I hope these pages inspire you to get out there and see the world. Happy reading!



SPOTLIGHT



Simon Griffin, Going Solo

This year I've already travelled a few times with friends, and am looking forward to a few more social trips I have planned, but for the March long weekend (all hail the equinoxes!) I travelled alone; something in which I find a lot of enjoyment.

I decided on Nagoya; a place I've visited a few times already, but which is still exotic enough to still feel fresh and unexplored. Travelling alone really allows me to rediscover my inner explorer. Admittedly, it's urban-sprawl, not 'The Lost Kingdom of Atlantis', but still, the excitement of following new streets or venturing into unknown areas is perhaps felt strongest when alone, and where the only time-limit upon your meander is a self-imposed one.

It may sound cliché, but being alone also allows me to be with my thoughts for a while. It's rare these days for us not to be connected in some way, and constantly surrounded by conversation, so it's easy to almost forget the sound of your own mind. Stopping to grab a lunchtime coffee, or relaxing in my room after a zoo-filled day, I enjoyed listening to my thoughts, sorting through the backlog of my experiences, and allowing myself time, to simply think.

As always, the city was enjoyable and, squeezing in as much as I could into the few days, I came back feeling pretty physically tired. However, my mind returned refreshed, happy to have spent some time to redefine itself, and looking forward to catching up with friends once I'm home.



WHAT IS ECOTOURISM REALLY?

Martin Yearley, Ishikawa



Ecotourism, by loose definition, offers us a way to explore the most remote parts of our planet, while at the same time, protecting nature and benefitting locals. Having recently come back from a brief stint of ecotourism in Okinawa, I decided to write about my experience and hopefully inspire more environmentally conscious travel amongst others. Truth be told, I ended up being completely unconvinced that ecotourism was 'environmentally friendly', but I do see many benefits to reconnecting with nature and with ourselves. Read on, and perhaps you will decide to 'go eco' for your next burst of tourism.

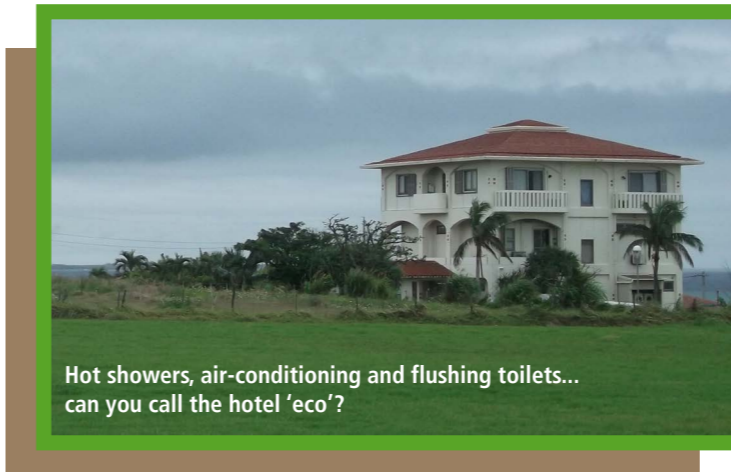


Two English chaps enjoy seeing something called a 'sun' on Iriomote

Last month, my Dad and I travelled to two islands in Okinawa prefecture. We spent four nights on Ishigaki, then caught a high speed boat to Iriomote for two nights. The differences between Ishigaki and Iriomote are vast. Ishigaki has a population of around 48,000. Iriomote—while slightly bigger—has a population closer to 3,000. Ishigaki boasts a small airport. Iriomote is 90 per cent dense jungle and mangrove swamps. Ishigaki was full of snack/girls bars, Iriomote was full of *habu* (a dangerous snake). Unsurprisingly, it was Iriomote that was touted by our travel agent as offering 'ecotourism'.

I would describe the experience of ecotourism as beautiful, inspiring, enlivening, restorative and bloody expensive. Ironically, the one word that doesn't jump immediately to mind is 'ecological'. Ecotourism is marketed as a greener alternative to commercial tourism, but greener doesn't necessarily mean green. We drove around the islands, we had hot showers, we used air-conditioning, we flushed toilets, and we met many other tourists doing the same. The environmental impacts of such actions are often overlooked, and the new infrastructure they necessitate opens the door to even more tourists in the future. As my Dad put it, ecotourism could be the "thin end of the wedge" that escalates into more tourism, and more tourists = more impact.

Ecotourism has been accused of depleting natural resources, inviting excessive amounts of tourists and requiring relatively more fuel to travel to than non-ecotourism destinations. Worse still, as Ole Kamuaro points out in his article 'Ecotourism: Suicide or Development?' are reports that local people, such as the Maasai tribes in East Africa, are losing their land as a direct result of ecotourism. Done correctly, ecotourism should go some way towards solving the problems of mass tourism without



Hot showers, air-conditioning and flushing toilets... can you call the hotel 'eco'?

introducing new ones, and quite obviously the turning of native tribes into commodities to 'sightsee' is a sign of ecotourism done incorrectly. It's also frustrating that, despite the concerns of environmental groups, the response of many tourist companies is not to steer away from ecotourism, but rather to spend more on marketing to counter the bad publicity.

A further problem is the lack of a universal definition, accreditation and regulation of the term 'ecotourism' because, until such a system is in place, travel operators are able to exploit eco-conscious travellers with their 'greenwashing' of environmentally destructive holidays and tour packages, which are a lot less eco-friendly than they are portrayed. We live in a time when food is touted as 'organic', cars as 'low emission' and just about everything has been prefixed with 'eco', because 'eco' sells. Can we ever be sure such claims are legitimate?

Saying that, being fully immersed in nature was a wonderful experience. I was greatly impressed by Iriomote. It was not necessarily that the nature was more beautiful there than Ishigaki, but the sheer volume of it was overwhelming. During a riverboat tour, we cruised around for more than an hour and



Full immersion - Iriomote sans civilisation

never once saw any sign of urbanisation or civilisation. At the hotel, we were also surrounded by greenery, and we were forced to relax through a sheer lack of things to do after it became dark. There was only one small restaurant within walking distance and no bar—certainly no girls bar—for miles around!

Two of the words I mentioned earlier to describe my experience were "enlivening" and "restorative". Indeed, psychologists have researched this. Rachel and Stephen Kaplan discussed in their book, 'The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective', findings that those with access to nearby natural settings are "healthier than other individuals" and that the long-term effects of living close to nature include "increased levels of satisfaction with one's home, one's job, and with life in general". The plethora of potential mistakes that just rang alarm bells for readers with

research-based degrees aside, 'Attention Restoration Theory' has garnered ample support over the decades and is now generally accepted within the field of Environmental Psychology.

But why is it so important to treat the environment nicely? Fictional DJ Alan Partridge once remarked that paving paradise to put up a parking lot is "a measure which actually would have alleviated traffic congestion on the outskirts of paradise". Albeit tongue-in-cheek, it is a well-made point. Pollution is an entirely necessary byproduct of our modern lifestyle and so when it comes to 'saving the environment' all anyone can sensibly advocate is a reduction in energy consumption and hope for is a slowing down of the inevitable—an opinion corroborated by the second law of thermodynamics, which states that in a closed system, everything turns to poo (paraphrased). If that seems bleak, perhaps it is because we inexplicably think of 'humankind' and 'nature' as separate entities.

Here's an alternative viewpoint. Essentially, we need the environment; but literally, we are the environment. Religion and science alike both tell of life originating out of the planet—not arriving on it. Whether God formed man of dust from the ground or life began in a warm little pond, we are physically comprised entirely of matter from our environment, quite literally, as Carl Sagan put it, "starstuff contemplating the stars". And if we are the environment, perhaps we should learn to take better care of it; of ourselves

I was originally hoping to write a pro-ecotourism article for Connect, but instead I find myself warning that people not fall for expensive, greenwashed holiday packages. It would be cool if ecotourism could conserve the environment as it purports to, but this is not generally the case. To me, the three letter prefix denotes that we can experience and enjoy the environment—not that we can save or protect it. Perhaps all that we can do, short of leaving these places unseen, is offset damages to the environment in other ways. On that note I encourage anybody reading this to recycle, cycle, hitch-hike, sleep in tents, turn taps off when brushing teeth and to use the marvels of nature observed during unavoidably harmful tourism as inspiration to continue such earth-friendly activities. Let's not necessarily book ecotourism holidays, but let's be eco-minded tourists.



It's about being eco-minded, not eco-tourists

Martin Yearley is a second-year ALT in the home of cannibal eggs; Nanao City, Ishikawa Prefecture. When not studying Japanese he is most likely getting his ass handed to him at karate. If you would like more information on anything mentioned above (including the cannibal eggs) you can contact him with questions or comments at martinyearley@gmail.com.



HANAMI: KOREAN STYLE

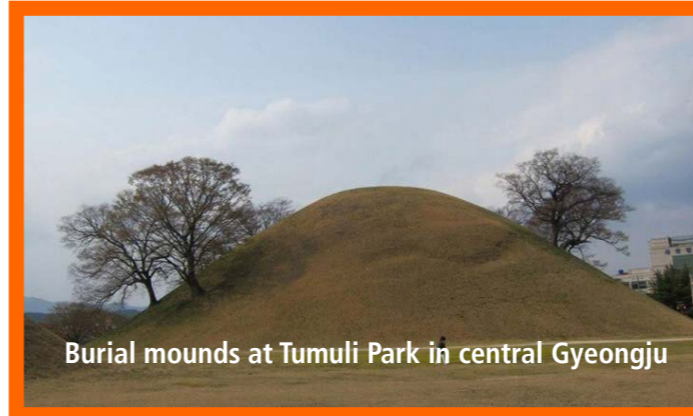
Katie Strong, Okinawa



Cherry blossoms in Gyeongju



Daerungwon Park in Gyeongju



Burial mounds at Tumuli Park in central Gyeongju



More cherry blossoms in Gyeongju

My small town in Okinawa is home to the first cherry blossom festival in Japan. Every January, we're flooded with enthusiasts eager to see the small, hot pink blooms that decorate the hillsides. Everything in town turns fuchsia, including the food. Some businesses even decorate their building exteriors to match! While there's a certain charm and trademark Okinawan exuberance in the bright flowers, I was beginning to think that I'd end up spending several years living in Japan, and never get the more traditional cherry blossom experience.

This spring break, as I was heading to South Korea, I had resigned myself to missing the pale, pink flowers again. My path through the Korean peninsula was simple: start in the north, gradually make my way down to Busan—where I'd catch a last-minute flight to the capital—then home to my island. I arrived in Seoul to frigid cold, and was immediately reminded that there were parts of the world that weren't already enjoying shorts weather. As I moved south, however, I watched the seasons change. In those two weeks, I experienced winter in Seoul, summer in Busan, and, most unexpectedly of all, spring in Gyeongju.

Gyeongju is the Kyoto of Korea. The seat of the ancient capital of the Silla Empire, this "museum without walls" boasts ancient buildings, castle ruins, royal gardens and earthen tomb mounds. During my 10-day (and four city) tour of Korea, it was easily the highlight. World Heritage Sites and national treasures are scattered haphazardly among schools, government buildings, as well as business and residential districts.

The small city roads often detour around historical points of interest. The best way to see the city is by bike, so after checking into my hostel, I rented one. Armed with a map, I started to make my way through the city.

My first stop was Tumuli Park, a beautiful city square filled with mounds. These giant hills are actually tombs for long-gone royalty and this park has one of the largest concentrations of mounds in the city. The mounds are technically off limits, but trails in the grass show that some people can't resist the temptation of a picnic on top. Next stop was the Daereungwon Tomb Complex to check out Cheonmachong, the only mound that has been partially excavated and open to the public.

As I approached, I could hear faint music. I followed the sounds to a side road, where the amount of traffic and pedestrians suddenly increased. Eventually, the road came to a dead-end at a huge, open park. In the foreground was an open field, which gradually gave way to grass paddies and then to hills and forests scattered with palace ruins. The ubiquitous "Gangnam Style" blared from giant speakers, and I could see a stage rising from the center of the field. High school students were dancing. I'd arrived in the middle of the town's cherry blossom festival!

The hills shimmered with white flowers. Blossoms littered the streets and fell on the top of vendor stalls. Everything was covered with velvety, soft petals. Laughing, I ran my fingers through my hair to find that it too was decorated with fallen flowers.

I bought some cotton candy and waded into the crowd. Small children ran trailing kites, students in uniform flirted by the stage, and families set up blankets under the white canopies. I found an empty tree and plopped down at the base, resting my back against the trunk. For a while, I just took in the whole scene. Despite living in Japan, it was my first time seeing these flowers and I was struck by their beauty. They seemed to dance on the branches, shivering in the slight breeze. When they fell, they were weightless, taking their time to gently drift to the ground.

I took out my Kindle and started reading, but soon felt a slight tug at its other end. It was a small child wearing a pink-flowered outfit and a flowered comb pinned in her goose-down hair. "Here," I said, and turned it around so she could look at the screen and see the "pages" turn. She clapped her hands and plopped down on the ground next to me. I put the Kindle in her lap, and let her play with it, while her parents sat watching a few trees away. Next to them sat a cooler of drinks, and a lacquerware picnic box. I flashed them my best smile. "No, your daughter isn't bothering me, and I'm not at all someone to be afraid of either," it was supposed to say. Nevertheless, I could see a wrinkle between the mother's eyebrows. She called her daughter, who obediently struggled to her feet and returned, proudly carrying my Kindle. Contorting their faces in both amusement and mortification, they promptly told her to return it to me. Crestfallen, she shuffled back.

"Thank you," I said and she smiled at me before running back to her parents. When she returned, her father reached into their cooler and pulled out a can of Sprite, handing it to her and pointing at me. She waddled back and dropped it in my lap. I glanced over at her parents, who had picked up their drinks and were toasting me. I bowed my head to thank them, and popped the lid on the soda. We raised our cans to one another. I drank gratefully, happy to be sharing this, my first *hanami*, with these strangers.

Katie is a 3rd year ALT in beautiful Okinawa. She has an incurable case of wanderlust and spends her free time exploring—both on and off her island. It is her opinion that the most important things in a suitcase are a good book, and a toothbrush.

Getting There:

While Gyeongju is unquestionably a highlight of any trip to South Korea, getting there can be a bit of a logistical challenge. The city doesn't have an airport, so you'll first have to fly into either Seoul or Busan. Budget airlines like Peach and Jin Air have frequent cheap flights to Seoul from Japan. If you watch the rates, you can easily get a round trip for around 10,000 yen. From there you can take either a bus or a train. I recommend the KTX (Korea's High Speed Rail), which will take you there directly, but drops you at a station on the edge of town. From there it's about a 15 minute bus ride to the city center. Alternatives include a slow train (about five hours from Seoul), which will leave you at Gyeongju Station in the middle of the city, or a long distance bus.

Accommodation:

There are tons of hostels and hotels in Gyeongju to choose from. I stayed at Nahbi Guesthouse and would recommend them. The rooms were clean and comfortable, and the staff amazingly helpful. I lost my cell phone while on a day trip to a neighboring city and one of the staff spent the afternoon calling the police station and tourist help center. Not only were they able to track down my missing phone, but also arranged to have it waiting for me at the bus station.

HIDE AND GEOCACHE



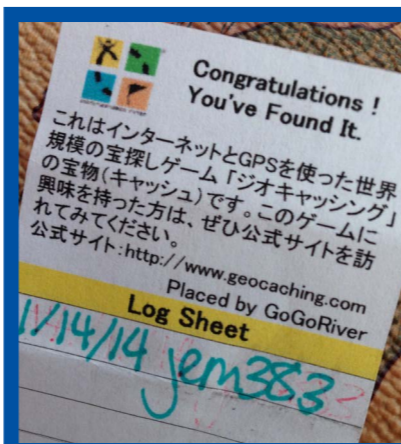
A Travel Bug

Jessica McSavage, Hyogo

Besides finding caches, players can also send out “travel bugs” (key chains with a trackable code) to travel the world. Players can specify a certain goal for the travel bug and watch as fellow geocachers take it from cache to cache and player to player to achieve its goal. I found a Travel Bug in Canada that wanted to travel the world, so I brought it with me and dropped it in a cache in Kobe’s Meriken Park. It has since travelled to Tokyo and will hopefully reach another country soon!

Geocaching is a low-cost and high-reward activity. There is a free app and full version app offered by Groundspeak, owner of geocaching.com, available for smartphones. Membership on the website is free, although premium memberships may be purchased at a low annual cost for extra perks. The website has amazing video tutorials and resources for geocachers of all levels and posts regularly on Facebook, Instagram and the geocaching blog.

So, if you feel like an adventure in a new destination, or want to rediscover a frequently-visited spot, why not give geocaching a try? I’m always available for geocaching adventures, so look me up on geocaching.com as jem383!



Geocache logbook sheet



Me (right) and a friend with her first ever geocache in Seoul, South Korea

Jessica McSavage is a first-year ALT in Hyogo Prefecture. When not listening to movie soundtracks or geocaching while on her travels, she’s watching soccer. Here’s hoping the Toronto FC does better this year. Follow her adventures at oneredheart.wordpress.com

SKY HIGH

Alexandra Brueckner, Aomori

The two weeks I spent in northern India and Nepal during winter vacation gave me an endless supply of unforgettable experiences. However, the single chunk of time that stands out most vividly, was the half-hour I spent paragliding over Pokhara, the second largest city in Nepal. Pokhara is a backpacker’s haven. Nestled in the foothills of the Annapurna mountain range and flanked on one side by Lake Phewa, it’s the perfect base camp for extended treks and other adventuring. If you just want a small dose of adrenaline, though, a tandem paragliding flight should be your activity of choice.

Most paragliding flights take off from Sarangkot—a nearby hilltop that overlooks Phewa—and soar up to 1700m. One minute you’re standing firmly on the ground, the next your pilot is urging you to start running. “Run?”, you think to yourself, “I’m on a cliff!”. But your feet are already moving and, after a few seconds, your legs are churning in the air. Then your parachute catches the wind and you’re soaring. Lake Phewa is below you, the Annapurna are within sight and you have the sudden thought that birds—some of which are flying within 15 feet of you—are the luckiest creatures on earth.

Paragliding is one of the most popular recreational activities in Pokhara, so you’ll never have the sky to yourself, but that doesn’t lessen the enjoyment one bit. The multi-colored chutes, as they wheel and soar over the forests that surround Pokhara, make up the strangest and most beautiful flock of birds you’ll ever see.

When you paraglide, it’s an odd mix of calm and thrill. Catch a thermal and you are effortlessly soaring to a higher altitude. The silence that encompasses you as you look out over the lake is completely serene. (Unless it’s interrupted by your pilot’s phone ringing, as it was for me!) Once you start doing corkscrews and other heart-pounding acrobatics, though, it’s a thrill junkie’s dream come true.

Alexandra Brueckner is a third-year high school ALT who lives in the frozen expanses of Aomori and suffers happily from a serious case of wanderlust. When she’s not planning her next adventure abroad, stuffing her 別腹-equipped body with as much sushi as it can handle or consuming a healthy amount of geek pop culture (especially all things that involve Joss Whedon, Doctor Who, and Sherlock) from the toasty comfort of her kotatsu, she blogs at theglobetrottinggeek.wordpress.com and tweets from @halloitsalex.



Above Lake Phewa



Paragliding below the Annapurna mountain range

Need to know:

Getting there: Most international flights to Nepal will fly from Narita into Kathmandu’s Tribhuvan International Airport. From here, there’s no shortage of buses that run to Pokhara. Stick with the regular speed buses (about six hours), as the “fast” buses (around three hours) have a reputation for crashing on the mountain roads.

Paragliding: In Pokhara, there are plenty of companies that offer tandem paragliding flights. I flew with Take 5 and, with their energetic staff and included hotel pickup, I definitely recommend them.

Cost: A half-hour flight will run around \$85 USD. Another \$20-25 will get you a disc full of in-flight pictures and a five-minute video.

Best time to go: Most companies run three flights per day. Avoid the first flight (around 9:00 a.m.), because the fog will likely obscure your view of the Annapurna mountains. I flew at noon and had a perfect view.

Pro tip: Don’t eat beforehand or banshee shrieks won’t be the only thing coming out of your mouth!

VOLUNTEERING

THIS MONTH IN VOLUNTEERING...

With summer coming up soon it's time to get outside and volunteer.

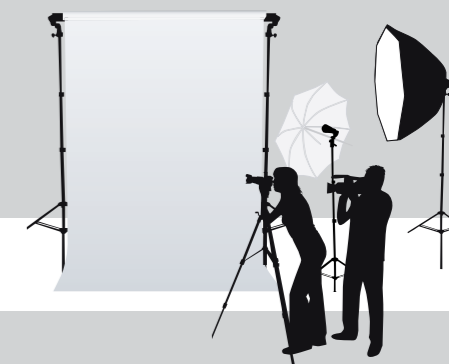
Our Spotlight for the month, Amy Chavez, shares her goal to create a Shiraishi Island Pilgrimage Association to help revive and maintain the 10 km route which serves as a mini version of the 88 temple pilgrimage in Shikoku.

Em Bettinger, the founder of Pose and Paws, practices selfless service by helping animals that have been affected by the disaster in Tohoku. There events include pet food drives and outdoor yoga classes where students make a monetary donation.

Robert Williams, from the Knights in White Lycra cycling club, will ride for four days with 22 riders to raise 5 million yen for OGA (www.ogaforaid.org) which helps rebuild lives with sustainable projects.

Andrea Miyata, from Kaigai Connection and a former JET in Okayama, lets us catch up with her about her post JET Programme life and how she incorporates fundraising for UNICEF as part of her community outreach plan.

And in case you want to know about more organizations that you can volunteer for please check out the volunteering section of the ajet.net website.



SPOTLIGHT

Amy Chavez, Shiraishi Island's Pilgrimage PR

My goal is to create a Shiraishi Island Pilgrimage Association to help preserve our island's ancient Buddhist pilgrimage. This historic route, which follows the perimeter of the island, is a replica of the 1,350 km 88-temple pilgrimage in Shikoku. During the Edo Period (1603 to 1867) many towns in Western Japan created such mini-pilgrimages to assist those who could not make the long journey to Shikoku.

Contact Amy shiraishireservations@yahoo.com
Find out more about Shiraishi Island by visiting Amy's homepage www.moosobar.com

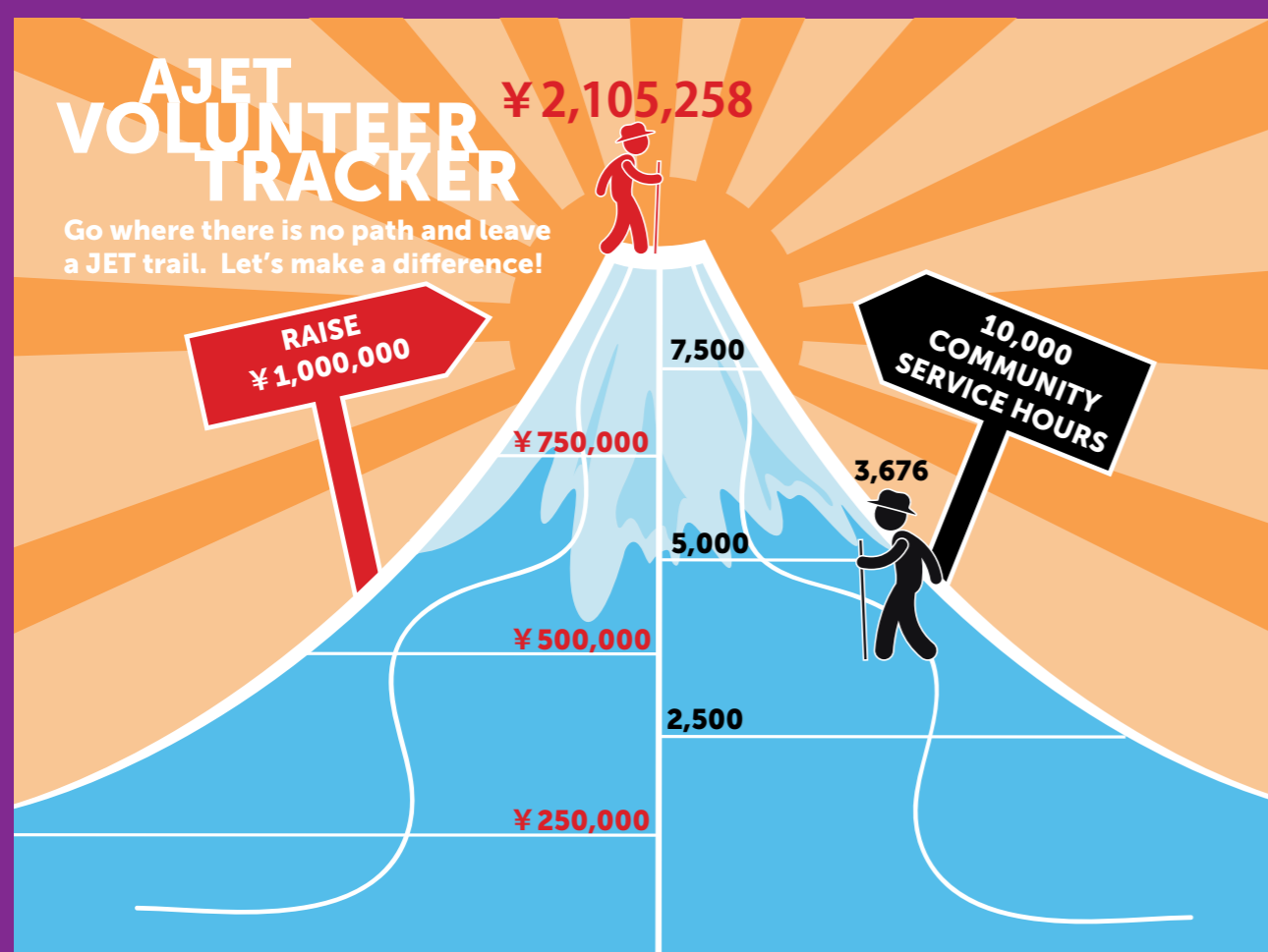
The Shiraishi course features 88 stone deities scattered along 10 km of wooded trail. Until recently, the elder ladies on the island used the route during the spring and fall equinoxes (*o-higan*). The locals clean the road of leaves and debris twice a year. But as the island's population ages, the number of volunteers is decreasing. As a result, this beautiful trail is becoming overgrown.

I hope to revive it with the help of volunteers like you, who are interested in helping preserve Japan's ancient traditions. Our next clean-up is May 11th at 10 AM. Once you see this beautiful little island, you'll probably want to come back to the beach in the summer time or to complete this pilgrimage with your friends! If you plan to do the Shikoku Pilgrimage during your stay in Japan, you can use the Shiraishi Pilgrimage to get your feet wet.



AJET VOLUNTEER TRACKER

Go where there is no path and leave a JET trail. Let's make a difference!



The JET Community Service Tracker and the Race to the Top Challenge!

AJET wants to help you help others! Be the #1 prefecture in one of these categories and win ¥30,000 to help fund your next AJET Prefectural Community event/project!

Top 3 Prefectures: Charity Money Raised*

1. Saga - ¥ 400,000 (48 JETs)
2. Niigata - ¥ 551,888 (80 JETs)
3. Oita - ¥ 185,019 (102 JETs)

Top 3 Prefectures: Community Service Hours*

1. Yamagata - 1,189 hours (81 JETs)
2. Saga - 294 hours (48 JETs)
3. Hokkaido - 1,476 hours (263 JETs)

*Charity Money raised and Community Service Hours are recorded by using this form [HERE](#). Did you recently hold a charity event or volunteer for any organization? Then fill out this form! Let's show how much impact JETs are making. Get involved!

POSE & PAWS BRINGS YOGA AND ANIMAL RESCUE TOGETHER

Em Bettinger, Tokyo



Partner yoga brings four yogis together at Pose & Paws park yoga. Photo by Draycat.

Pose & Paws organizes charity events to raise money in support of Animal Friends Japan—an animal rescue center in Niigata that has been at the forefront of animal rescues in and around the Fukushima area since the Great Tohoku Earthquake in March 2011.

Pose & Paws was founded in 2012 by Em Bettinger, a Tokyo-based yoga teacher. It was created to give people an avenue for making donations to help animals who had been affected by the triple disaster in 2011. Em says “It seemed that the animals in Fukushima had been forgotten, and the animal shelter that seemed to be doing the most was Animal Friends Japan. So, I wanted to do something that would raise awareness of these issues and allow people to help the animals affected.”

The group’s events over the past two years have included pet food collection drives, where the food is delivered directly to Animal Friends Niigata. The drives are usually done around the holiday season, and over the past two years, over 75 boxes of pet food have been collected for the animals.

Additionally, Pose & Paws hosts outdoor park yoga classes where all the students make a donation. In 2013, there were six outdoor yoga events in Yoyogi Park, Tokyo, with between 20 and 40 people participating. In total, over ¥500,000 in donations was collected from these six events for Animal Friends Japan.

The park yoga classes were so successful that they are being expanded this year, with nine events being held between the end of April and October with some events happening in Yoyogi Park and others in Yamashita Park in Yokohama.

“There are a lot of people who love animals in Tokyo, both foreign nationals and Japanese” says Em. “People with pets are often happy to help other animals with any small gesture. These events give people an opportunity to do something to help animals. And

a number of attendees to past park yoga events have actually adopted pets from Animal Friends.”

In the future, Pose & Paws hopes to organise volunteer weekends, where people could go to the shelter in Niigata for the weekend and help take care of the animals or contribute to specific projects, like the construction of a new rabbit enclosure.

All is to benefit the animals. “That’s why we’re doing it” says Em.

For more information about Pose & Paws and their upcoming events, visit www.poseandpaws.org or find them on Facebook (www.facebook.com/poseandpaws).

Em Bettinger, founder of Pose and Paws, is delighted to have united her two passions, yoga and her love of animals. She originally trained as a contemporary dancer in London, but life brought her to Japan, where she currently works as a yoga teacher at Sun & Moon Yoga in Gotanda (Tokyo).

She did her yoga training in Thailand, and she immediately felt a strong connection to karma yoga, meaning selfless service. Since then, she has been donating her time to various organizations, and eventually she established Pose & Paws to focus more on animal charities.



Park yoga attendees get into their downward dog to help the animals. Photo by Draycat.

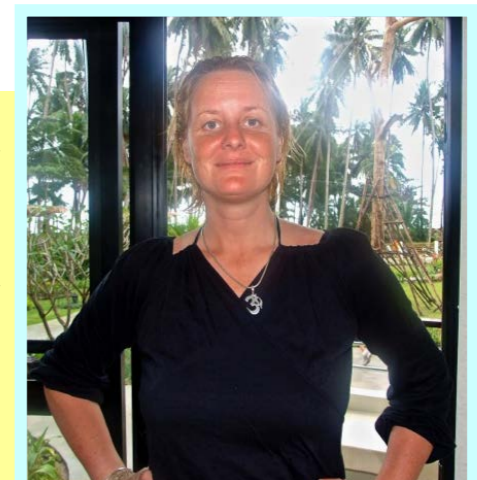
The Pose & Paws Chair Race. Photo by Draycat.



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KNIGHTS IN WHITE LYCRA



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On 15th May 2014, twenty-two “Knights in White Lycra,” all Tokyo-based salarymen and one lady, will put down beers, suck in stomachs, wedge themselves into lycra, and cycle 470kms from Tokyo to Minamisanriku over four lung-busting days—all for charity. The riders’ ages span four decades; none of whom professionally cycle, some who need to shed a few pounds, and a greater number who have long lost their youth!

With sponsorship from businesses and donations from individuals, the riders aim to raise 5 million yen for OGA for Aid (www.ogaforaid.org). The funds will support people in Minamisanriku, one of the worst hit towns on 3/11.

We spoke to founding member of the Knights in White Lycra, long-term Tokyo resident, Rob Williams.

How did your cycling club start?

I host a lunch club for British expats, and some attendees had a common love of cycling. We wished to put our hobby to good use and thus was hatched the idea of a long-distance charity cycle ride. Easy for some, but we were Middle Aged Men in Lycra (MAMILs) with a love for pies and pints and most certainly not described as elite athletes! Most of us were in Japan on 3/11 so that April we rode to Minamisoma, Fukushima, 340kms from

Robert Williams, Tokyo

Tokyo to support the Save Minamisoma Project. We really enjoyed the experience, so we decided to make it an annual event.

What is Knights in White Lycra?

KIWL is an informal cycling club for Expats and Japanese, and men and women—despite the name! The nickname was spawned during drunken karaoke when someone chose the famous hit “Nights in White Satin” by the Moody Blues. We organize weekend rides, but those with flexible schedules head out on weekdays as well. The idea is to get fit, enjoy Japan’s nature, arrange an annual charity ride and drink beer!

What other events have you organized specifically for Tohoku?

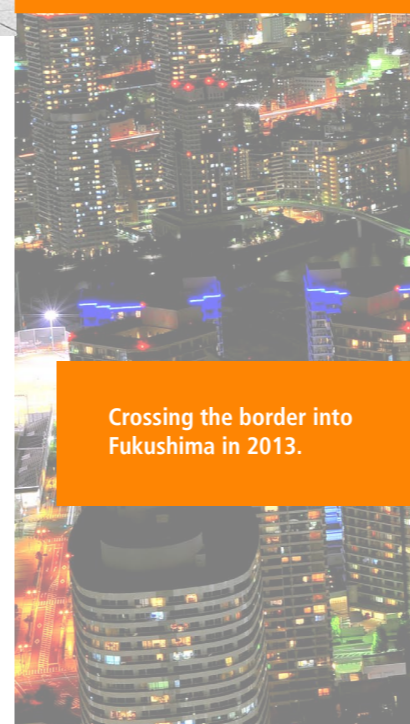
We like pubs, so we recently held a Quiz Night at Finn McCools and a Craft Ale Night at the splendid Two Dogs pub. We cannot think of a better way of supporting charity than from a pub and the two events raised nearly 200,000 yen. We shall also be at OGA’s Enchanted Lights dinner party at the Conrad Tokyo on Friday April 25th. When we have completed the ride, we shall have a celebratory party to raise yet more funds for OGA.

What are your current and future projects?

The 2014 charity ride is bigger and better with 22 cyclists from four countries. As for 2015, we hope to double the number of riders, so if anyone wants to join, please contact us on Facebook.



A determined looking bunch of MAMILs (Middle Aged Men in Lycra) ready for a training ride.



Crossing the border into Fukushima in 2013.



This year we support OGA because it helps re-build lives through sustainable projects. The Green Farmers Association uses fields donated by landowners for growing, processing and selling vegetables. Five million yen builds a modest processing factory near Minamisanriku giving employment and a sustainable income to employees.

People can sponsor us via OGA’s website, <http://www.ogaforaid.org/en/kiwl.html> and can like and share our Facebook page, track our training, and follow the ride itself; www.facebook.com/cycle4tohoku

Rob Williams is a long-term resident of Tokyo, leaving the UK behind 15 years ago. He is married with two children and calls Japan his home. Rob works for IFG Asia in Tokyo and has worked in the financial planning industry for 23 years in the UK and Japan. Apart from family his real love is for cycling, soccer, and music. Rob also organizes and hosts a monthly lunch club for British expatriates called Brits at Lunch which holds its events at various Tokyo venues on the first Friday of each month.

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KAIGAI CONNECTION

Andrea Miyata, Okayama (1995-1998)

Last year, a group of fellow foreign residents and I founded a group called Kaigai Connection. We offer a range of services from homepage design, branding services, language support services, including translation, interpretation, document creation, and editing in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean, photography, video production, and event planning. There are four of us in the core group, two of whom are ex-JETs. We also collaborate on projects with other foreign residents in Okayama, some of whom are JET alumni. Our client base is comprised mainly of Japanese companies who are seeking to take their products overseas, as well as companies who want to increase foreign clientele in Japan.

We got together by chance while participating in an event to encourage young people to follow their dreams and to pursue higher education. Although we knew each other prior to the event, we found that we possessed a set of skills that meshed well. It didn't take long for us to find that we could apply these skills to other fields. We also found that we have in common a respect for Japanese people, culture, and society, and this has opened opportunities that are not always visible to businesses from abroad. Our individual work experiences before coming to Japan are assets for businesses looking towards foreign markets. The diversity of ideas, abilities, and backgrounds within our group is one reason for our success.

As we are all long-term and permanent residents of Okayama, we also give back to our communities by volunteering. One way we do this is through an ongoing campaign to increase foreign awareness and participation in Okayama UNICEF; as such, we made and maintain an English homepage and Facebook page for Okayama UNICEF, and are assisting with event planning and production. One upcoming event is a photo exhibit on Syria, which will highlight effects of the war and UNICEF relief efforts; the exhibit will be held at the Okayama Orient Museum from July 1 through August 31, 2014.

We enjoy the work we do, but the most difficult thing about the job is finding recognition among the business community. We are frequently asked to prove that we can perform the work before receiving commitments for subsequent projects. The best part about the job is being proud of offering a set of services that no Japanese company can match.

For the upcoming year, our goals include increasing the number of projects that we are able to accept as well as continuing to deepen relationships in our respective communities. A large aspect of achieving these goals is getting out into the community and getting our name known.

We would love for the JET community to participate in events and campaigns that we are planning for the foreign community in Japan. We would also be interested in assisting any JETs who are planning on remaining in Japan and are wondering what work options are available in the area.

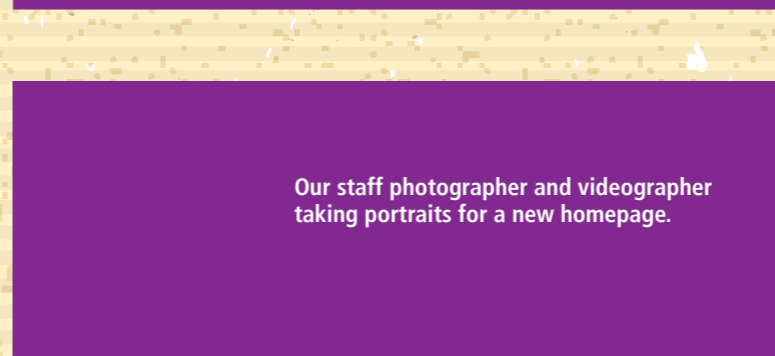
We are organizing a kayak tour of the Seto Inland Sea on May 24th, 2014, and working with a kimono rental shop in Kurashiki city in Okayama to promote rentals to foreign visitors.

For more information, please see our homepage and Facebook pages.

Homepage: <http://www.kaigaiconnection.jp>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/KaigaiConnection>



Shin Koyamada Foundation: Interpreting at an international exchange event held to encourage young people to pursue higher education.



Our staff photographer and videographer taking portraits for a new homepage.



UNICEF: One of our core members giving back to the community by volunteering at a UNICEF fundraising events.



Andrea Miyata was a former JET in Funao-cho and Yorishima-cho, Okayama-ken 1995-98. Originally from Kansas City, Missouri (USA), Okayama is now her permanent home. She has experience in education, administration, translation, interpretation, and technical writing. She enjoys meeting and working with new people from all countries and promoting better intercultural understanding.

EVENTS

EDITORIAL Beating the Craft Beer Blues

When my husband and I arrived in Japan nearly three years ago from Austin, Texas—one of the best US cities for craft beer drinkers—we weren't expecting to be so quickly disillusioned by the streams of Kirin and Asahi that flow from our neighborhood *izakaya*. Don't get me wrong; we like them too, and there's not much else that's as satisfying during the humid summer months. But we started to crave beers with unique characteristics, and save for a trip to Popeye's in Tokyo our first month in Japan, we didn't know what we were missing.

The Big Four—Kirin, Asahi, Sapporo, Suntory—had the beer brewing market on lockdown until the market's deregulation in 1994, which allowed small and midsize breweries to operate. Home brewing is a legal grey area ¹, but that's a separate column. The official statistic is that craft beer accounts for less than 1% of Japanese market share ², but if you've been paying attention, you've probably noticed this market share growing. A lot. It seems like a new craft beer, or 地ビール (*ji biiru*), is tapped everyday and a new brewery sets up shop every month. What was forbidden 20 years ago has grown to be a thriving, even robust industry.

Enter the beer festival. The beer fest is not unique to Japan, but something the Japanese have effectively adopted and continue to masterfully deploy. There are few things Japan loves more in summertime than a beer festival. They come in many flavors: indoors, in urban parks, on a mountain, family-friendly, Belgian-beer-only, Oktoberfest, in the club, in the countryside, with live music, with DJs, paired with local foods. If you like beer, there's probably a festival you can get into.

To help you get your fix, we've found some of Japan's most popular summertime beer festivals, many of them featuring domestic and imported craft beers. Bottoms up!

- 地BeerFest Daisen: Located halfway up Mt. Daisen, the fest offers 70 craft beers, free camping, a babysitting service, "tempting cuisine," and live music. Read up on it here: <http://beerfestdaisen.com/en/>
- Oktoberfest Japan: Despite the moniker, Oktoberfest in Japan begin as early as April. There are 12 Oktoberfests planned for 2014, many of them in the Tokyo area. This year Nara and Nagasaki join the fun, too! <http://www.oktober-fest.jp/>
- Toyama Tanabata Craft Beer Festa: This event returns every July to Toyama City, boasting a line-up of Japan's most elusive microbrews from the Hokuriku region. For more information: <http://www.beerfesta-toyama.jp/index.html>
- Belgian Beer Weekend: Exported from Brussels in 2010, event coordinators claim this festival is just as much about the cuisine and music as it is the beer. The fest travels to the larger cities in Japan from May through September, so check dates and locations here: <http://www.belgianbeerweekend.jp/en/>
- The Great Japan Beer Festival: The penultimate event for craftheads in Japan, officially sponsored by Japan's Craft Beer Association. The roving festival attracts thousands each year, and for good reason. Find out where and when: <http://www.beertaster.org/index-e.html>

¹ <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/1999/11/11/life/homebrewing-for-fun-taste-and-profit/>

² <http://japanbeertimes.com/>

THIS MONTH IN EVENTS...

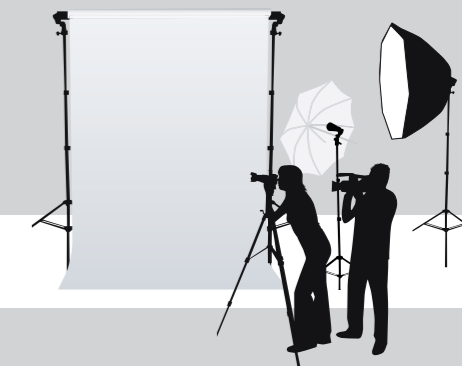
The Events section gives a hearty "Cheers!" to its readers this month. Read up in the editorial space on some of Japan's best summertime craft beer festivals. And if you feel like traveling to Tokyo, but not for a beer fest, check out the Museum Map on pages 70 and 71. We've done all the work finding special summertime exhibitions in Tokyo's museum scene.

Joe Pournovin, the creator of the Yamathon, that famed trot around Tokyo's Yamanote line, is profiled in this month's JET Spotlight. He tells us how he got involved in event planning and fundraising, and what sets apart this year's Yamathon. Though Joshua Grover's article is not the first in Connect's pages on the Oita Charity Bike Ride, his is all about the people behind the event. Read on for more on how JETs supported one another before and during the ride, and for an interview with the organizer. And rounding out the events contributions is Andrew Massey's entertaining article on the upcoming Nagasaki ALT undokai. The date has yet to be decided, but Block 10 JETs should watch the Facebook group page for more info.

With the help of our savvy Layout Queen, Melinda Lange, the Events Calendar was expanded this year to include more events going on where you are. This month the calendar includes some



of Japan's biggest summertime events, not only those happening in May. So dig out your yukata, buy those music festival tickets, and have a blast!



SPOTLIGHT

Joe Pournovin, The Man Behind the 'Thon

Joe's first years on JET were all about traveling, making friends, and falling in love with Japan. He was the VP of Shizuoka AJET, but he wasn't satisfied. Why organize drinking parties when he could do something more positive for the community, he thought.

Joe was familiar with Oxfam's activities, so he went to Tokyo to see what Oxfam IVG was about. He met amazing teachers and successful people working for multinational companies giving their time for others, inspiring him to get more involved. He became IVG's Awareness Coordinator in early 2010 and focused on facilitating awareness workshops and an occasional fundraising picnic.

But it wasn't enough. Raising as much money as possible and reaching out to as many people as possible became an addiction. Joe and some friends came up with Sea to Summit, an endurance event climbing Mount Fuji from the seashore. The first Sea to Summit event was published on page three of the Japan Times, which was fantastic to see, but, again, it wasn't enough.

Cue the Tokyo Yamathon, a challenge daring teams to walk or run the Yamanote Line in under 12 hours. Joe was amazed to see over 100 people at the first opening ceremony in November 2010. If we can attract 110 through Facebook, he thought, what numbers will we attract with an actual website? The last Yamathon attracted 450 people and raised almost 2 million yen and attracted official sponsors.

Oxfam IVG's next Yamathon is on Saturday, June 21. Get involved, spread the word, and come walk Tokyo!

The last Yamathon had JET teams from Saitama, Yamanashi, Aomori, and Kyushu. You can get in touch with Joe at oxfamjp.ivg.events@gmail.com. Get your Yamathon team together and register at <http://www.tokyo-yamathon.com/>.



Joe Pournovin and friend and fellow IVGer Koji Oishi near the peak of Mt Fuji during 2013's Sea to Summit event.

TOKYO MUSEUM MAP

THE SUPER SPECIAL SUMMER 2014 EDITION

Summer is a popular time for JETs to travel, and Tokyo is a popular place for them to travel to (but, ye gods, bring your *sensu* or *uchiwa*). Tokyo has a world-renowned array of museums, and we've gone through them just for you, searching for special exhibitions that will be in the city only for the summer. If you see something here you're interested in, click on the museum's name for more information. We did our best to be thorough, but don't consider this a compendium; do your own research if you know of a special exhibit and don't see it here—better yet, email us about it at connect.events@ajet.net.

A couple pro tips for museum-goers:

- ◆ Most major museums offer free volunteer tour guides in English, so if your Japanese is *chotto*, don't be afraid to ask.
- ◆ If you want to make a weekend of it, consider picking up a **Grutt Pass** for 2000 yen. The pass allows one-time admission or discounts for more than 70 museums and other facilities in Tokyo, making it a worthwhile investment if you plan to go to two or more museums within the valid two-month period.

CLASSICAL AND MODERN ARTS

A. **Nezu Museum** – *Colorful: Chinese Imperial and Export Wares*, May 31–July 13; *Cool and Breezy*, July 26–Sept. 7

B. **Mori Art Museum** – *Go-Betweens: The World Seen Through Children*, May 31–Aug. 31

L. **National Art Center** – *Ballet Russes: The Art of Costume*, June 18–Sept. 1; *The Birth of Impressionism – Freedom in Painting: Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay*, July 9–Oct. 20

D. **National Museum of Modern Art** – *Guess What? Hardcore Contemporary Art's Truly a World Treasure: Selected Works from Yageo Foundation Collection*, June 20–Aug. 24

E. **Suntory Museum of Art** – *Essays in Idleness: Enjoying Classical Literature Through Art*, June 11–July 21

F. **Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography** – Different exhibitions change roughly each month on each floor. Check the summer schedule here: <http://syabi.com/e/contents/schedule/index.html>

G. **Bunkamura** – 25th Anniversary Special Exhibition: *Rétrospective Raoul Dufy*, June 7–July 27

H. **Kodansha Noma Memorial Museum**– *Ink Painting of Modern Japan*, May 24–July 21)

I. **Ukiyo-e Oota Memorial Museum of Art**– *Hiroshige Blue: Blue Attracted the World*, May 1–28); *Sumo Wrestlers in Ukiyo-e*, June 1–26

J. **Watari Museum of Contemporary Art**– *Rudolf Steiner: Das Reich der Angeli*, until July 13

HISTORY AND SCIENCE

K. **Edo-Tokyo Museum** <http://www.edo-tokyo-museum.or.jp/english/special/now/index.html> – 20th Anniversary Special Exhibitions: *The Flowering of Edo-Period Painting: Japanese Masterworks From the Feinberg Collection*, May 21–July 15; *Flowers in Bloom: The Culture of Gardening in Edo*, July 30–Sept. 1; *NHK Taiga Drama Special Exhibition: 軍資勤兵衛 (Gunshi Kanbee)*, May 27–July 13; http://www.nhk-p.co.jp/tenran/20131203_134916.html

L. **National Museum of Ethnology Collection @ The National Museum of Art** http://www.nact.jp/english/exhibitions/2013/power_of_images/index.html – *The Power of Images*, until June 9

M. **Tokyo National Museum** – *Treasured Masterpieces from the National Palace Museum, Taipei*, June 24–Sept. 15

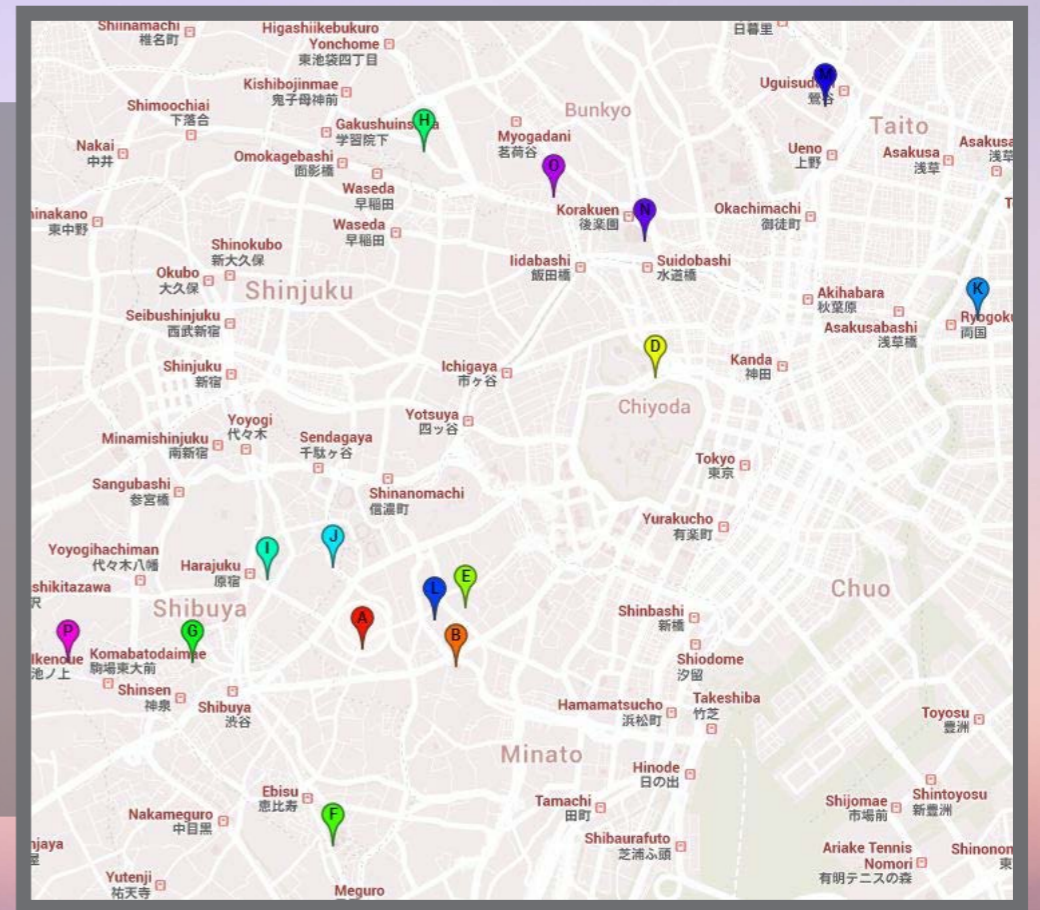
N. **Japan Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum**– *Bats Used by Star Players*, until May 18

O. **Printing Museum of Tokyo**– “Welcome to 3D Printing World!” until June 1; *GRAPHIC TRIAL 2014*, June 7–Aug 14

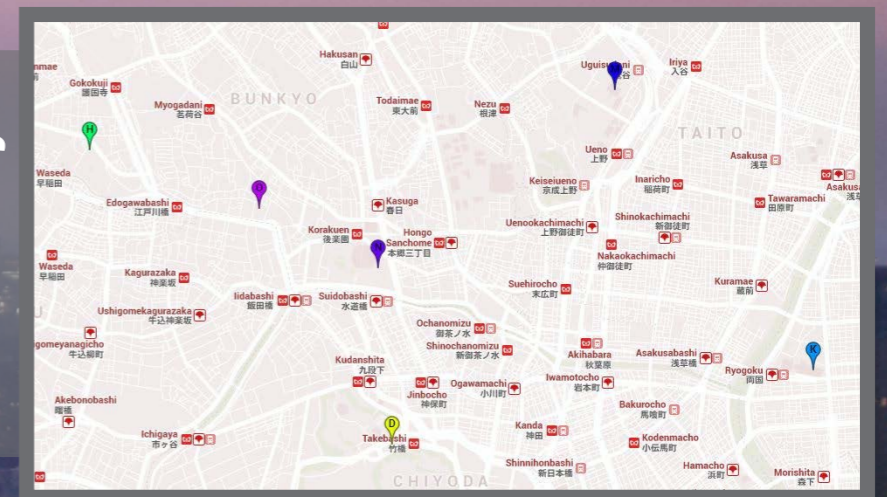
P. **The Japan Folk Crafts Museum**– *Ceramics of Kyushu*, until June 8; *Shoji Hamada: Commemorating the 120th Anniversary*, June 17–Aug. 31

Click on the maps to the right or the museum names on this page for more information!

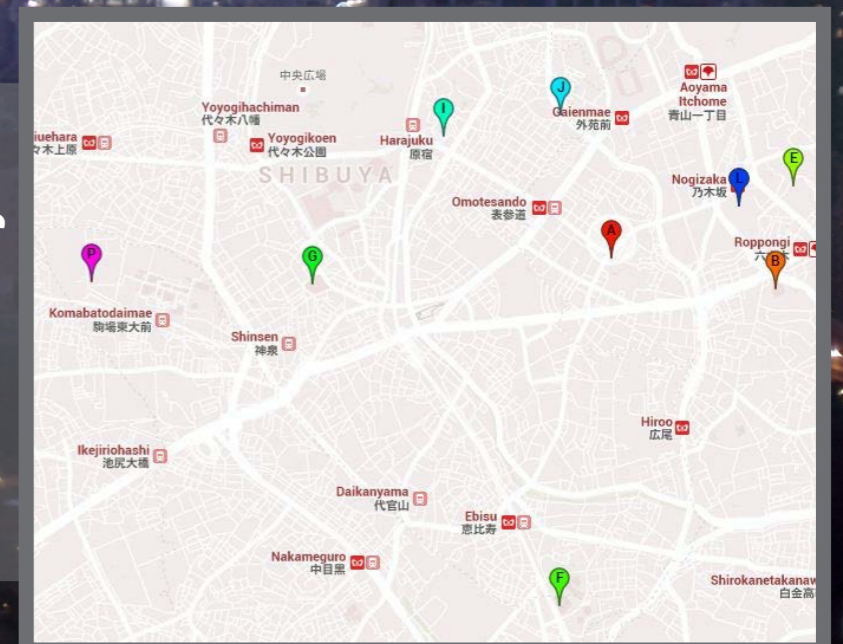
Tokyo museums



North Tokyo



South Tokyo





LET'S RIDE FOR THE PHILIPPINES!

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE OITA JET CHARITY ORGANISERS

Josh Grover, Oita



A great day to ride!

place for the ride. Five JETs—Kane Mercer, Rieko Sasaki, Scott McLellan, Bridget Makol, and Jillian Engel—opened their homes for riders coming from different areas of Japan.

James Shoesmith, a 2nd-year ALT living in Tsukumi, Oita, was the route planner for this year's ride. As he's been crazy about cycling since he can remember, James jumped at the chance to be able to create the route for this year's charity ride. Another one of the primary organizers, K.J. Hansen, is a 2nd-year ALT in Bungo Ono, Oita. He helped with the driving preparations for the trip, such as scouting out the ride and transporting all the food from Fukuoka.

Penny Fox is a 5th-year ALT living in Shiroishi, Saga, and the current National AJET Block 10 representative. Penny participated in the Oita Charity Bike Ride as a support-team volunteer last year and was super keen to get involved again on a larger scale. She was unable to make the day of the event, but did plan a delicious dinner and breakfast to satisfy the hungry riders.

The event's main volunteer coordinator is Martyn Jasinski, an ALT in Usuki, Oita. He organized the flow of automobiles between checkpoints and ensured riders were safe and on route. He went into his role with the knowledge gained by observing previous organizers during the years he participated in the charity ride.

Having ridden myself, I was grateful for the encouragement from drivers, sign holders, and supply vehicles. They made the weekend as enjoyable as it was physically exhilarating.

The following interview is with Martyn, in which we learn what's needed for a successful charity event, some considerations regarding event organization, and the rewards from it. This year the Oita Charity Bicycle Ride raised 738,505 yen.



Day 2 was a great day to ride for a great cause, by Emma Halawi

Why did you choose the International Children's Action Network?

We were mainly inspired by the efforts of an ALT in Oita, Michelle Lee, who had been doing a tremendous job organizing fundraising activities for disaster relief in the Philippines in our area at the time we began planning the event. The disaster had struck only a few weeks before, so at that time it was still very fresh and urgent. We knew that the funds raised by the event would be donated several months in the future, but with a catastrophe like this, help is needed for way longer than just the initial emergency. Initially we had planned to donate the proceedings to the Red Cross, but in the end it turned out that by the time the event was over they were no longer accepting donations for the Typhoon Haiyan disaster aid! The organizers and participants put our heads together and decided to donate the funds instead to the International Children's Action Network.

What is the first step in organizing an event like this?

I guess first of all, it was that fateful night way back at the Oita JET *bounenkai* last summer, where, like the historical press-gangs of the Royal Navy, last year's organizers jumped me in my drunken stupor, pinned me down and forced me to sign up to take over against my will! I kid, of course—I was delighted to take the reins—but that initial "Sure, how hard could it be?" was nonetheless a way bigger decision than I knew at the time!

Where did the route travel this year?

In an effort to make it easier for folks from other prefectures to join in, we chose the easily accessible *onsen* city of Beppu as our start point. The rest of the route was then pretty much decided by the location of the campsite; some Google searching led us to a campsite at the very north of the prefecture in Kakaji, which meant that unless we were going to make everyone ride right over a huge mountain range, we had to follow the coast all around the peninsula. A beautiful course, but those ocean winds proved quite a struggle for our poor riders, who faced some pretty crazy headwinds on the first day! The second day took us back down to Beppu via a more inland route, past the Sanrio-themed amusement park Harmony Land and over some wicked hills.



Hill climbing can be fun when your spirits are high, by David Webb

When did you start organizing this charity cycling event?

To give a rather flowery answer, the organising started years ago as it was thanks to the legacy left to us by our predecessors that we could even get started. A thorough excavation of the mountains of planning materials left by our forerunners and more than a few facepalms on my part—upon realising the amount of work before us—was quickly followed by an enormous sense of gratitude for everyone who paved the way for us.

More realistically speaking though, James, KJ, and I started planning in November. In previous years, the event has been organised solely by the Oita chapter of AJET, but this year we were reached out to by Penny Fox, the block rep for the whole of AJET Block 10 in northern Kyushu. She proposed expanding it to a block-wide jam, an idea which we instantly jumped on, and ultimately this turned out to be an extraordinarily wise decision as Penny was the catalyst that really got us out of our office chairs and kicked us into gear! Thanks to her we started to plan in earnest sometime in early December. I can honestly say that without Penny's event-organising chops the event would never have been such a success as it was!

How about the decisions on food for such a large physically grueling event?

Once again Penny came to the rescue and planned a great meal of tacos for the evening of the first day, which was devoured by our hungry riders in a matter of minutes. Unfortunately, it came to pass that she couldn't actually attend the event and had to hand over all the food to KJ the weekend before after what must have been a very long trip to Costco in Fukuoka! Combined with my (very British) total inexperience with anything involving salsa



THE NAGASAKI ALT UNDOUKAI

Andrew Massey, Nagasaki

Undokai are a big deal in Japan. The weeks leading up to them are chock-full of sore muscles and sweaty brows as students train and practice well past suppertime. When the big day finally arrives, the air is abuzz with an anticipation and excitement that's almost electric. Sports days are no joke.

While undokai are more often than not "serious business", ALT undokai are a little more light hearted. Ok, maybe a lot more. In fact, it may be more of a farce than anything else. But that may be the whole point. The participants are energetic, the events are absurd, and of course, the name of the game is to have fun.

Nagasaki AJET's ALT Undokai is a chance for JETs from all over the prefecture to get together and exercise their basic human need to be silly. While all the sports day standards like obstacle courses and tug of war will be featured, there are a few events that are Nagasaki originals. Nagasaki is famous for *mikan*, so of course, there's a mikan-eating contest. It's really not as easy as one might imagine. There's also the "Arcade Girl Relay", which is inspired by the fashion-forward *femme fatales* who can be found roaming Sasebo's Ginza Arcade. In this event, teams designate an "arcade girl" to be adorned with questionable clothing choices. The rest of the team runs one by one to the relay station, dons a single article, runs back, disrobes, and dresses the arcade girl. Once fully dolled up, the arcade girls will strut their way to the relay station and back in a final dash. Though victory goes to the first team to finish, the real winners are the spectators.

This is big part of what the ALT Undokai is all about—the spectators. ALTs can watch each other humiliate themselves in a variety of entertaining ways. Through this mutual humiliation, we're often left with a better understanding of one another and a stronger sense of community, kind of like how most families work.

Of course, ALTs are not the only spectators present. The venue is the Matsuyama athletic field in the heart of Nagasaki. With such a location, the general public will get to see a bunch of foreign nationals in matching outfits engaged in wacky activities and generally having a great time. Whether this makes us more or less approachable may be unclear, but one thing is certain: activities like this can show Japanese citizens that *gaikokujin* aren't so scary after all, that and we may even be a lot friendlier than they originally thought.

This year's ALT Undokai will offer plenty more of what made past undokai such a runaway success. We'll be running some brand new events this time around as well. For example, there will be a "frozen t-shirt contest". As the name suggests, the event will involve a soaked t-shirt that has been folded and frozen in place. The first team to thaw out their shirt and have a team member wear it will be declared the winner. It's like a wet t-shirt contest in reverse, but much cooler. So cool, in fact, some may say it's... ice cold.

CONNECT
May Issue 2014



The human-pyramid contest.

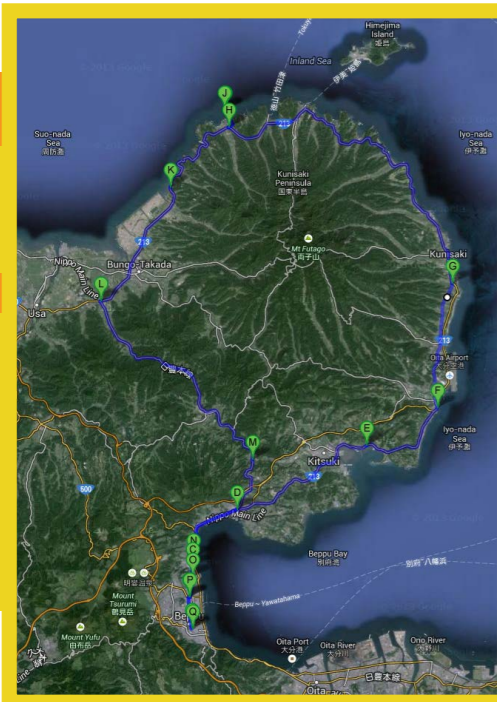


A good ol' fashioned tug o' war.



The deceptively challenging mikan eating contest.

Andrew Massey is a 1st-year ALT from Toronto, Canada, who lives in the suburbs of Nagasaki City. He enjoys looking at things and thinking about them. His more frequent activities include sitting in chairs and describing himself poorly.



Trail map



Support vehicles are always appreciated, by David Webb

What is the greatest challenge? What was the working environment like?

It's hard to say. I think on the whole everyone did a great job, especially considering how inexperienced some of us were in this sort of thing. The delegation of roles—who would take care of what part of the planning—was challenging sometimes, and was heightened by the fact that one of our members couldn't make it on the day. Compounded by some very unfortunate bike troubles and a couple of subsequent hiccups with the support team, tensions were running high on the day of the event, but eventually everyone pulled through and kept it together commendably. I am eternally grateful to the volunteers who offered to be a part of the support team, who really did a tremendous job and without whom we really couldn't have done it.

Do you have any advice for other groups that would like to plan an event of this scale?

Embrace Google Drive! It was seriously a tremendous help during the planning stages having shared documents in the cloud modifiable from everywhere. Also, don't procrastinate and get your plan sorted out as early as possible. Lastly, have a contingency plan! We really suffered from some big hiccups that, while unavoidable, could have been dealt with better had we been better prepared. Oh wait, one more: no matter how many times the campsite tells you they have futons and bedding, do not believe them until you have seen them with your own two eyes.

Will you do it next year?

Absolutely.

Joshua Grover is a 4th-year ALT from Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, who lives in Tsukuba, Ibaraki, in the Kanto Plain. He enjoys cycling, snowboarding and has recently taken up surfing. His interests involve pretty much anything that is outside, fast, and allows him to explore Japan's landscapes.

and a disastrous turn of events—which led to a delay of several hours before the cooking utensils arrived at the campsite—all of Penny's hard work in planning the meal ended up in somewhat of a free-for-all. Note to self: taco shells don't fare well in bumpy car rides! Thankfully it was all delicious.

Oh, and now I think of it, the purchase of several litres of Aquarius turned out to be one of the most popular decisions of the trip! I had no idea that drink would be so popular, but as it transpired, that drink is seriously like the nectar of the gods for thirsty ALTs on bikes. I just thank the Buddha I didn't go for the non-branded version!

What level of language skill was needed to organize the event?

Well, Penny is aiming to become a Japanese language teacher once time on JET is up, so that should give you an idea of her level! As for me, I'm aiming to take the JLPT N2 in summer. We only had a couple of non-English speakers this year—something I hope to improve upon next time round—so the majority of our communication with our participants was in English, but in order to get in contact with the police, book the campsite, order t-shirts from the printers and so on, I'd say a conversational level of proficiency was needed at the least.

What is the greatest thrill for you?

The event itself was great fun. Seeing everyone's smiley faces at each pit stop, and at the end, was really very rewarding. I have to say, though, that one of the most memorable parts was when I got home in the evening and poured everyone's cash donations out onto my kotatsu. It was seeing it all there together in physical form, rather than just some numbers in a bank book, that I was struck by the tremendous efforts and generosity of everyone who had contributed to and taken part in the event, coming together to help people in need.



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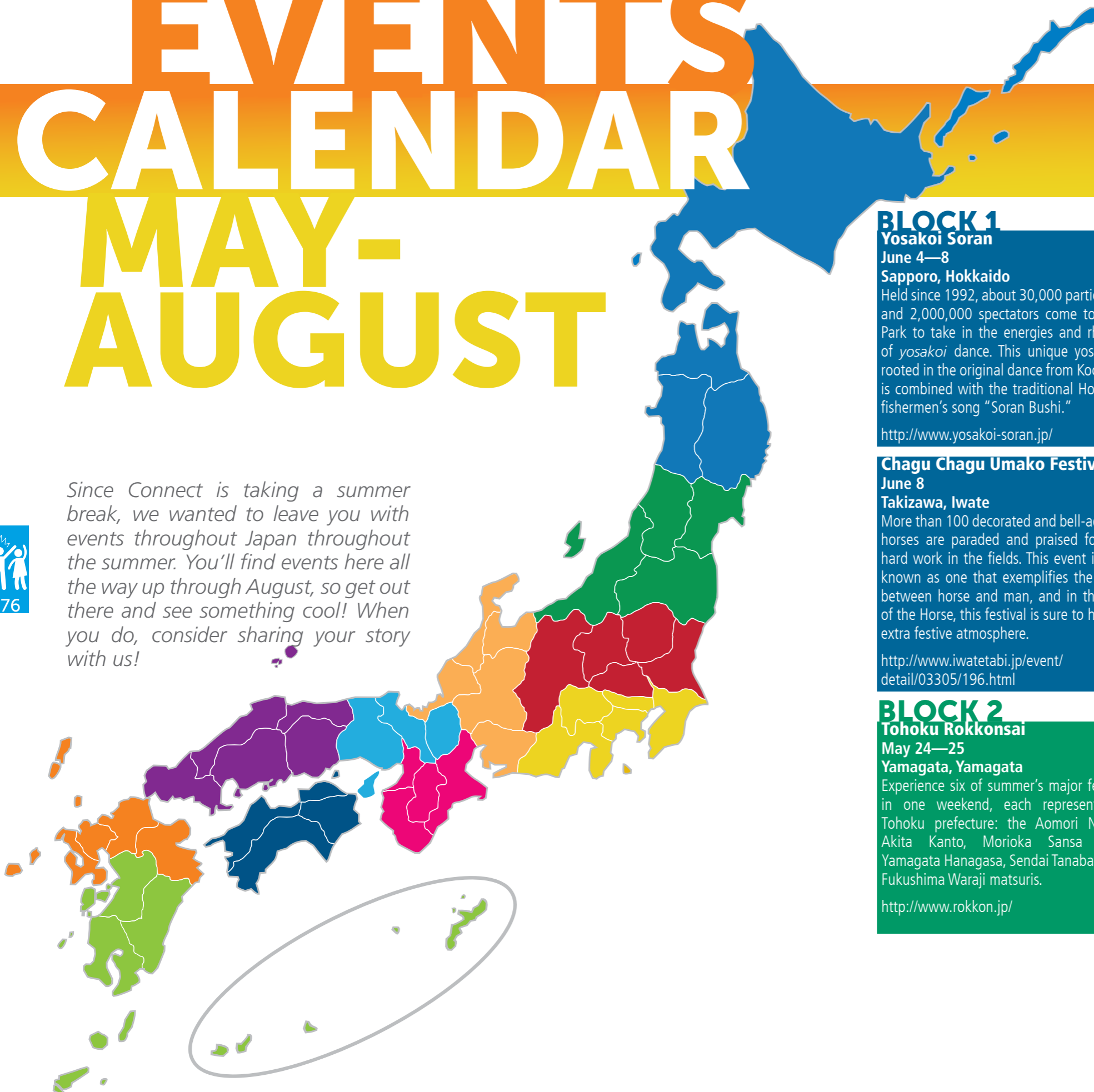
EVENTS CALENDAR MAY- AUGUST



Since Connect is taking a summer break, we wanted to leave you with events throughout Japan throughout the summer. You'll find events here all the way up through August, so get out there and see something cool! When you do, consider sharing your story with us!



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BLOCK 1

Yosakoi Soran

June 4—8

Sapporo, Hokkaido

Held since 1992, about 30,000 participants and 2,000,000 spectators come to Odori Park to take in the energies and rhythms of *yosakoi* dance. This unique *yosakoi* is rooted in the original dance from Kochi and is combined with the traditional Hokkaido fishermen's song "Soran Bushi."

<http://www.yosakoi-soran.jp/>

Chagu Chagu Umako Festival

June 8

Takizawa, Iwate

More than 100 decorated and bell-adorned horses are paraded and praised for their hard work in the fields. This event is well-known as one that exemplifies the bonds between horse and man, and in this Year of the Horse, this festival is sure to have an extra festive atmosphere.

<http://www.iwatetabi.jp/event/detail/03305/196.html>

BLOCK 2

Tohoku Rokkonsai

May 24—25

Yamagata, Yamagata

Experience six of summer's major festivals in one weekend, each representing a Tohoku prefecture: the Aomori Nebuta, Akita Kanto, Morioka Sansa Odori, Yamagata Hanagasa, Sendai Tanabata, and Fukushima Waraji matusris.

<http://www.rokkon.jp/>

Nebuta Matsuri

Aug. 1—7

Aomori, Aomori

There are quite a few Nebuta festivals in Aomori-ken, each of them unique and all worthy of the events calendar. The Aomori Nebuta Matsuri is one of Tohoku's grandest festivals, a week-long event with parades, dances, fireworks, and a whole lot more. *Rassera!*

http://www.atca.info/nebuta_en/

Sansa Odori

Aug. 1—4

Morioka, Iwate

The world's largest drum parade is held in remembrance of the Mitsuishi Legend, the tale that gave Iwate-ken its name. About 34,000 children, women, and men of all ages participate in this massive event. Travelers are welcomed to take short classes and participate, too!

http://www.sansaodori.jp/pdf/2011_pamphlet_english.pdf

Fuji Rock Festival

July 25—27

Yuzawa, Niigata

The legendary festival and largest music event in Japan is back for its 18th year. Headliners are Kanye West and Jack Johnson, but you know you want to go to see all the other acts. Check them out here:

<http://fujirock-eng.com/>

Earth Celebration

Aug. 22—24

Sado Island, Niigata

Sado's own *Kodo taiko* drum group hosts this annual global music celebration. There are three main concerts, smaller fringe performances, workshops, *taraibune* boat rides, and food and craft markets.

<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e7677.html>

Akita Kanto Festival

Aug. 3—6

Akita, Akita

In this festival, 230 *kanto*—long and heavy bamboo poles—each adorned with 46 paper lanterns fashioned like bales of rice, are paraded through town balanced on the shoulders of men as an appeal to Shinto and Buddhist gods for a healthy grain harvest.

<http://www.kantou.gr.jp/english/index.htm>

Soma Nomaoui

July 26—28

Minamisoma, Fukushima

Hither, equifiles! Jointly organized by three shrines in this famous horse-breeding region, this three-day event, an official intangible folk cultural asset, is an exercise in historic samurai and militaristic equine handling and performances.

<http://www6.ocn.ne.jp/~nomaoui/english.htm>

Sendai Tanabata Festival

Aug. 6—8

Sendai, Miyagi

While the rest of Japan celebrates *Tanabata* a month earlier, Sendai moved its local fest in 1927 to help rejuvenate its ailing economy, turning it into a competition among the villages. To this day, Sendai observes Tanabata with its own flair, showcasing many local goods and talents.

<http://www.sendaitanabata.com/en/index.html>



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*The block colours are coordinated to the map.

BLOCK 3

Keyaki Hiroba Spring Beer Festival

May 29—June 1
Saitama, Saitama

The Kanto area is saturated with beer fests, but this is one that Saitama can call its own, and it is fast turning into one of Japan's more popular beer events. Breweries from at least 25 prefectures will show, and the food will be sure to please.

<http://beerkeyaki.jp/>

Shimodate Gion Festival

July 24—27
Chikusei, Ibaraki

This is one of Ibaraki's biggest events, centered around a Meiji-era *mikoshi*, the largest portable shrine in Japan. The shrine was built to celebrate the end of the Sino-Japanese War and is paraded through city streets with 30 children's mikoshi.

<http://www.goldenjipangu.com/140725chikusei.html>

Kawagoe Million Lights Summer Festival

July 26—27

Kawagoe, Saitama

Also called the "Citizens' Festival," the town's picturesque Edo-era *kurazukuri* buildings are strung with tall lines of paper lanterns while people participate in parades, Samba dances, and local merchant fairs.

<http://www.koedo.or.jp/foreign/english/event/>

BLOCK 6

Aoi Matsuri

May 15

Kyoto, Kyoto

Regarded as one of Kyoto's three most important festivals, and one of the world's oldest. What started as a prayer to deities on horseback has become a week-long event of ceremonies, rituals, horse races and *yabusame*.

<http://www.kyotoguide.com/ver2/thismonth/aomatsuri.html>

Biwa Boat Cruise

May 17

Lake Biwa, Shiga

Take an evening cruise on Japan's largest lake with Shiga AJET. Wear your classiest, have some fine dining, and enjoy this meet-up with nearly 130 JETs. Bring enough yennies with you for a *nijikai*, *sanjikai*, or some karaoke and clubbing.

<http://on.fb.me/1mojfr>

Awaji Camping Extravaganza

May 31—June 1

Awaji, Hyogo

Spend a night with fellow JETs on this island in the Seto Inland Sea for some sightseeing, barbecuing, and revelry. Your night in a furnished cabin is 5400 yen, and a few extra yennies to contribute to food.

<http://on.fb.me/1hS15oy>

BLOCK 4

Design Festa Vol. 39

May 17—18

Odaiba, Tokyo

Asia's largest art festival returns with the first of this year's two installations. More than 10,000 artists of many media and all ages will be present to sell and perform original artworks. Advance tickets are 800 yen, 1000 yen at the door.

<http://designfesta.com/en/>

Tomisato Suika Road Race

June 22

Tomisato, Chiba

Now in its 31st year, this race pays homage to its host city, the top producer of Japanese watermelons. The event is so popular the 13,000 participants are chosen by lottery. If you aren't participating but still want to stuff your face full of the tasty fruit, Tomisato holds its Suika Matsuri the day before the race.

<http://www.tomisato-suikaroad.jp/>

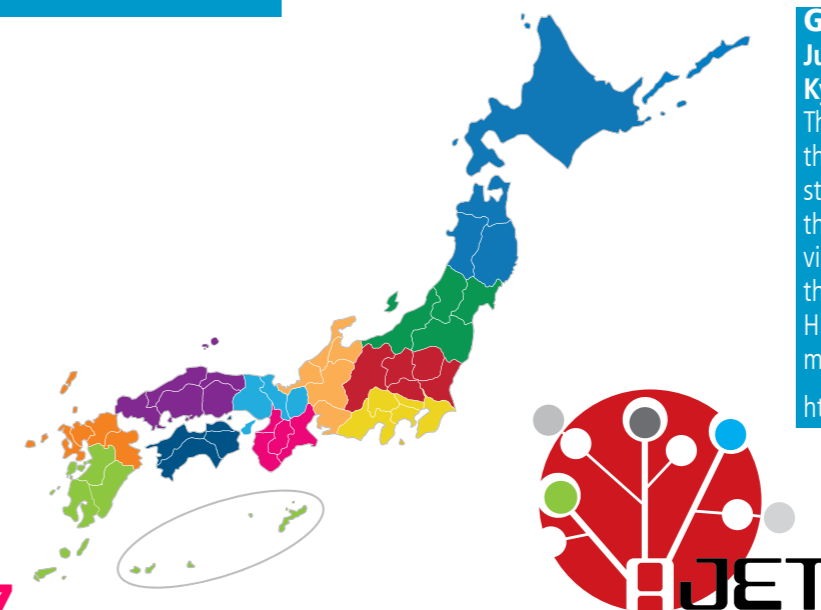
Yokohama Port Festival

May 31—June 2

Minato Mirai, Yokohama

"Thanks to the port!" Yokohama's port is one of the Kanto area's most thriving areas, with land and sea offering different events for this celebration. Enjoy concerts and performances, boat cruises, sea kayaking, a show of more than 7,000 fireworks on the final evening, and a lot more.

<http://www.kaikosai.com/>



Gion Matsuri

July 14—17

Kyoto, Kyoto

Though the Gion festival lasts the entire month of July, the two-storied *yamaboko* float procession is the major highlight, attracting throngs of visitors. The Yoiyama festival takes place the nights of July 14, 15, and 16, when the Higashiyama neighborhood fills with festive music and the floats are lit by lanterns.

<http://bit.ly/1qCFARD>

Tokyo Yamathon

June 21

Chiyoda, Tokyo

"The Ultimate Urban Challenge!" Get a gang together, break in your sneakers, and take a day-long hike between the 29 stations of Tokyo's circular and always bustling Yamanote line... all in the good name of charity. Learn more and register here: <http://www.tokyo-yamathon.com/>

Sumida River Hanabi Taikai

July 26

Asakusa, Tokyo

One of Tokyo's oldest neighborhoods swells with thousands of yukata-wearing spectators for the city's largest and most impressive fireworks show. Two nearby locations and a timetable for each (19:10 and 20:30, and 19:30 and 20:30) help ensure great views of one of Tokyo's signature summer events.

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/sumidagawanabi.html>



Dai-Chochin Matsuri

Aug. 26—27

Isshiki, Aichi

Japan's paper lanterns are something special, and the *chochin*, or "amazingly gigantic lanterns," at this festival are in a class of their own. Five meters in diameter and 10 meters tall, one-meter-long candles are lit in the ancient tradition of driving away demons that creep up to land from the sea.

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/daichochoin.html>

BLOCK 7

Nara JETNet's Annual International Arts Festival

May 25

Kawanishi, Nara

This is Nara JETs' biggest event of the year, offering a great atmosphere where the local community can interact with JETs. Learn about different cultures at special country booths, get into crafts and dances at experience corners, and enjoy various other activities and performances. The event is free, even parking!

<http://www.pref.nara.jp/22674.htm>

Tenjin Matsuri

July 24—25

Osaka, Osaka

Regarded as one of the best three festivals in Japan, it's also the world's greatest boat parade and boasts a 1,000-year history. 3,000 people march with *mikoshi* to the Dojima River, where they all board 100 lantern-lit floats and sail upstream to Tenman Shrine beneath the celebratory Tenjin Matsuri Hono fireworks.

http://www.osaka-info.jp/tenjin_matsuri/

Nachi-no-Hi Matsuri

July 14

Nachi, Wakayama

The Kumano Nachi Grand Shrine has lots of festivals, and this one, steeped in ancient Shinto practice, is unique. Twelve giant, blazing torches are purified at Nachi Waterfall to purify *mikoshi*, mimicking the legend of how Kumano's own gods purify and revive themselves before returning "home" to their own shrines.

<http://www.nachikan.jp/en/eventsfestivals/>

BLOCK 5

Tanabata Beer Festa Toyama

July 4—6

Toyama, Toyama

One of west coast Japan's biggest craft beer events is back! For optimal refreshment, buy a ticket, exchange it for a special event glass at the front desk, and enjoy the beer that lies before you!

<http://www.beerfesta-toyama.jp/>

The World Cosplay Summit

Aug. 2

Nagoya, Aichi

Cosplayers representing countries from around the world meet in mutual celebration and love of manga, anime, and Japanese youth culture. The representatives, chosen by their home countries, participate in costume and performance competitions.

<http://www.worldcosplaysummit.jp/en/>

BLOCK 8

MONSTER baSH 2014

Aug. 23—24

Nakatado, Kagawa

This outdoor music fest has been rocking Shikoku since 2000. The artist list has been kept super secret until the end of April, so check out the roster yourself: <http://www.monsterbash.jp/>. One-day tickets are 8,640 yen, and 15,120 yen for both days. Elementary-age kids are welcome, too, for 3,780 yen.

Awa Odori

Aug. 12—15

Tokushima, Tokushima

Towns and villages all over Tokushima celebrate *obon* by putting on their *geta* and *amigasa* to dance the "Fool's Dance" to music and jovial chanting. Over 1.3 million people come to the biggest *odori* in Tokushima, but if you can't make it to Shikoku, the Tokyo neighborhood of Koenji has its own Awa Odori put on by resident Tokushimans.

<http://www.topia.ne.jp/english/tourism/about.html>

Yosakoi Matsuri

Aug. 9—12

Kochi, Kochi

If the Awa Odori sounds too crowded for you but you still want to get some dance moves in, This Yosakoi was created after WWII as a response to the Awa Odori: Kochi can get down, too! Dance teams practice dancing not only to traditional Japanese music, but also hip-hop, rock, and Samba.

<http://www.yosakoi.com/en/>

BLOCK 9

Block 9 Shimanami Kaido

Charity Cycle

May 31—June 1

Onomichi, Hiroshima

Cyclists donate 3,500 yen to ride the Shimanami Kaido, a 77-km seaside and island-hopping route bridging the Seto Inland Sea between Honshu and Shikoku, ending in Imabari, Ehime. Check out the Google Doc for more: <http://bit.ly/1eBesZl>.

Kangen-sai

July 13

Miyajima, Hiroshima

A Heian-revival type of event, this festival is all about traditional court music, or *kangen*, floating among the various shrines in Hiroshima Bay. This event is the famous Itsukushima Shrine's most important festival, and is considered one of the best float festivals in Japan.

<http://bit.ly/1dumTFU>

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony

Aug. 6

Hiroshima, Hiroshima

Thousands of people come to Peace Memorial Park each year to pray for peace on earth and memorialize the souls of those who died after an American bomber dropped the world's first atomic bomb. At 8:15 AM, the crowd pauses for a minute of silence as the Peace Bell is rung and sirens alert the town.

<http://bit.ly/1kGHbwj>

Tottori Shan-Shan Festival

Aug. 9—15

Tottori, Tottori

The largest matsuri in Tottori celebrates the centuries-old tradition of praying for rain by dancing with umbrellas. The dance—4,000 people strong—is the pivotal part of the event, but there is plenty else to enjoy, such as local food stalls, dance instruction, and a fireworks show.

http://tottori-shanshan.jp/top_en.html



BLOCK 10

Nagasaki ALT Undokai

May 17

Nagasaki, Nagasaki

Nearly every ALT has witnessed a school *undokai*, or sports day. The Nagasaki ALTs are again hosting their own sports day, and it's guaranteed to be much sillier than the one your students do. Read up about the event on page 75.

Fukuoka Big Day Out

May 24

Fukuoka, Fukuoka

Join JETs from around Block 10 for a massive day of baseball, beerhall and clubbing. The baseball match should be one of the best of the season. Feel free to join any or all parts! Keep a lookout for the registration form to come soon.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1412053805715890/>

Kokura Gion Taiko Drum Festival

July 18—20

Kitakyushu, Fukuoka

July is the month of drumming in Kokura, and the main attraction is this three-day *taiko* tournament held at Kokura Castle. Drums are pulled through the streets on floats, kicking off the competition as teams put on percussive performances. Bonus: plenty of local JETs are members of these taiko bands, so show up to support them and this awesome Japanese tradition.

<http://www.kokuragiondaiko.jp/>

BLOCK 11

Yamaga Toro Matsuri

Aug. 15—16

Yamaga, Kumamoto

In Kumamoto, the Land of Fire, fire festivals are a big deal. And this matsuri is one of the best fire festivals there is. Over one night in obon, 1000 women wearing lanterns on their heads dance softly until sunrise.

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/yamagatoro.html>

Kirishima International Music Festival

July 18—Aug. 4

Kirishima, Kagoshima

A music festival unlike any other in Japan. Classically trained musicians come for orchestral concerts, promenades, and master classes.

<http://www.kirishima-imf.jp/english/about/index.html>



NOOO!!

WHYYY?!



THIS CAN'T BE IT FOR
CONNECT MAGAZINE!

No need to cry, Tsusu-chan!

We'll be back and better than ever after a short break this summer. Until then, take some time to fill out this survey and tell us what YOU would like to see in future Connect magazines!

You can access the survey by clicking **HERE.**



With love, the

AJET

CONNECT

magazine

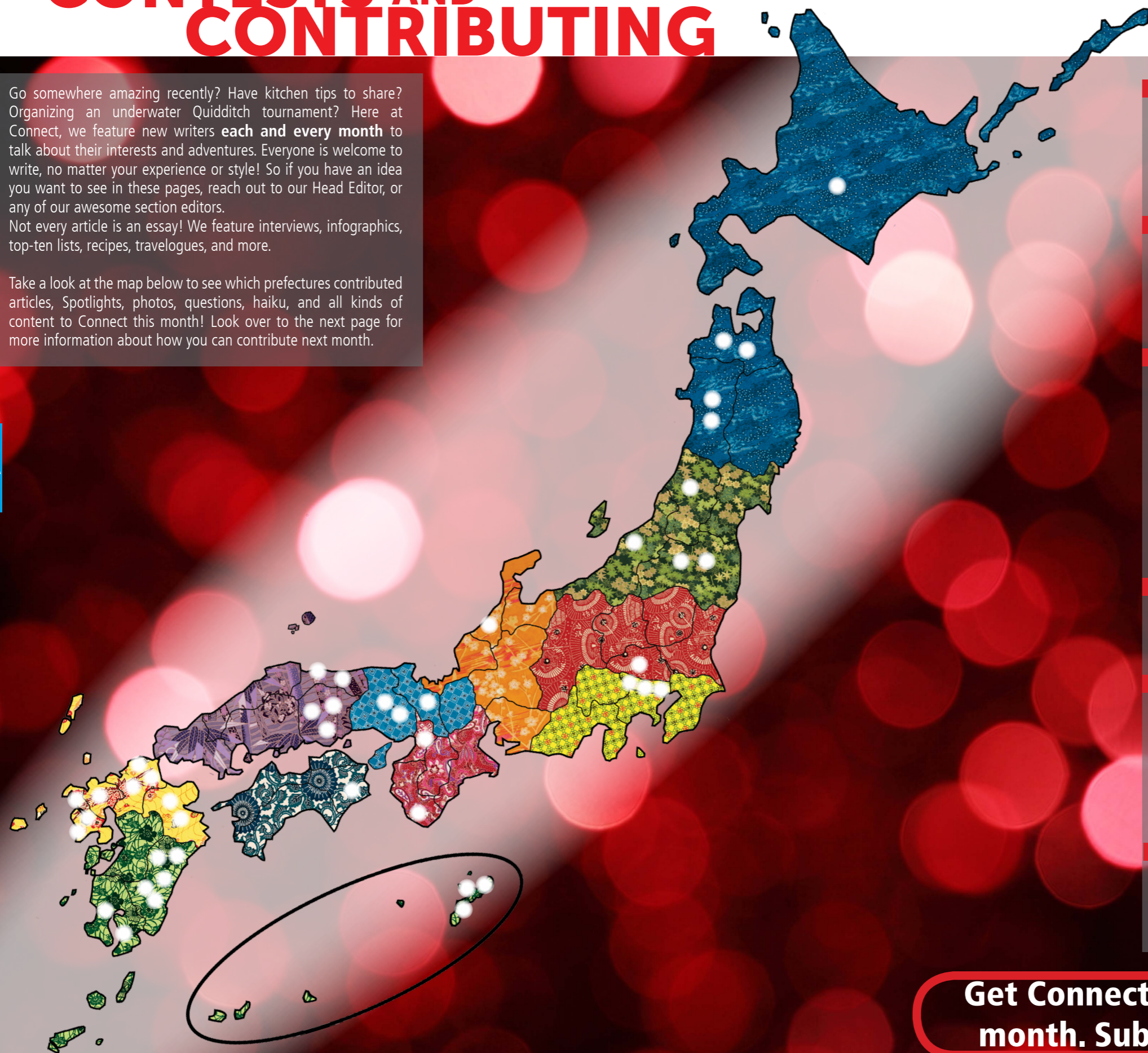
team

CONNECT

CONTESTS AND CONTRIBUTING

Go somewhere amazing recently? Have kitchen tips to share? Organizing an underwater Quidditch tournament? Here at Connect, we feature new writers **each and every month** to talk about their interests and adventures. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! So 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. Not every article is an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, travelogues, and more.

Take a look at the map below to see which prefectures contributed articles, Spotlights, photos, questions, haiku, and all kinds of content to Connect this month! Look over to the next page for more information about how you can contribute next month.



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SPOTLIGHT

Every month, we highlight a handful of our readers who are doing something interesting or praiseworthy, nominated by their community. From fashionistas to volunteering superheroes to master chefs, we want to talk about them and what they do! Can't pick just one person to Spotlight? Tell us about a group, a town, or an event! As long as our incredible readers are involved, we want to share it!

ASK/CONNECT

Make your voice heard! Do you have a question about workplace etiquette? Did you go to an event we highlighted? Want to comment on last month's articles or editorials? Just feeling the overwhelming need to tell our editors how much you love and appreciate them? Each month we'll print your questions, comments, and witty observations so you can get Connected with us!

COVER PHOTO CONTEST

Get the perfect shot of the perfect moment here in Japan? Your photo could be next month's cover of Connect magazine! Every month we'll collect your photos, select our favorite for the cover! Email all photo submissions with your **name and prefecture** to contest@ajet.net.

Photos should be a minimum of 1280 x 720 resolution, portrait-oriented, and belong to you. If they identifiably feature other people, you should have their permission to print the photo. Submit as many photos as you like! If your photo isn't featured, feel free to submit it again next month! Photos are used with permission, and all rights are retained by their owners.

HAIKU CONTEST

Each month Connect will feature haiku from our readers. Haiku are 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 contest@ajet.net.

COMICS

Easily our most-requested feature from last year, Connect now features comics and other art from the community. Comics should be relevant to life in Japan, and may not contain offensive material. Please email all submissions to connect.editor@ajet.net along with your name, prefecture, and 1-2 sentences about yourself or your work. Single-panel or multi-panel comics are totally fine, just ensure that they are legible and do not contain tons of tiny text. For a good example of size and content, check out our featured comic, "Life After the BOE" by David Namisato.

CONNECT CONTRIBUTORS GROUP

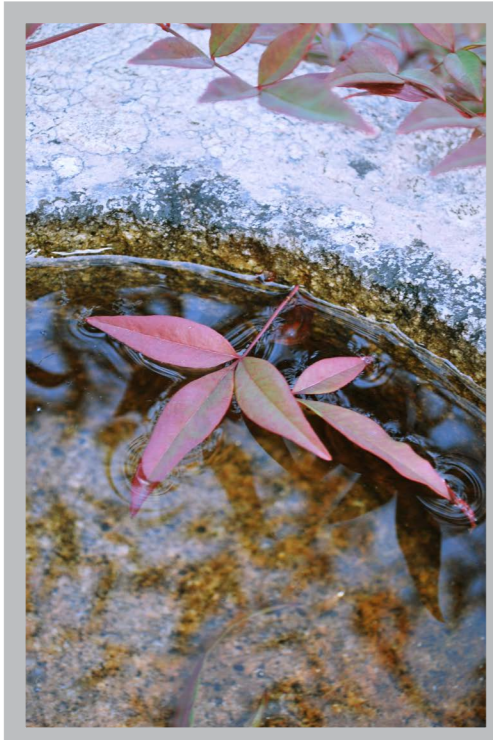
Interested in contributing to Connect? Want to stay up-to-date on interview opportunities, feature requests, and Connect announcements? Join the **Connect Contributors Circle** online to receive updates from us, pitch your ideas, and discuss with the Connect staff and community.

Get Connect magazine and AJET news every month. Subscribe to eConnect News here!

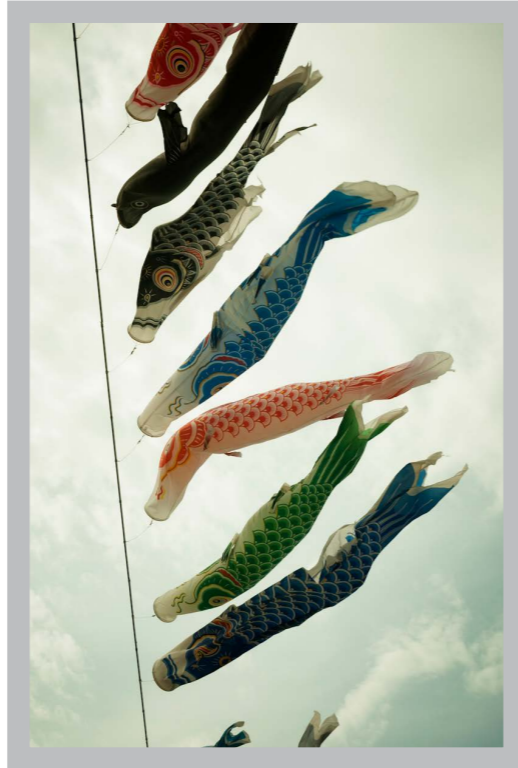
CONNECT HAIKU AND PHOTO CONTESTS

Our cover photo and haikus are all provided by current and former JETs from around the world. You can submit your entries any time to contest@ajet.net. One photo will be selected for the cover of Connect magazine! **All** photos and haikus received will be featured here each month, so give them all a little love!

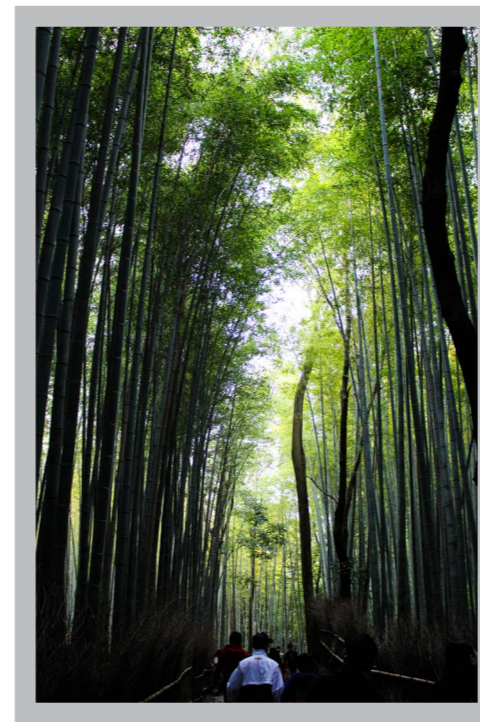
You've already seen Larissa Milo-Dale's winning photo this month. Here are all the fantastic submissions we received!



"Iwakuni Mekata Residence" by Allison Morris, Wakayama



"Kitakami Carp" by Jordan Oxborough, Akita



"Bamboo" by Kayla Whitney



"Bridge in Takachiho" by Ellen Freeman, Miyazaki



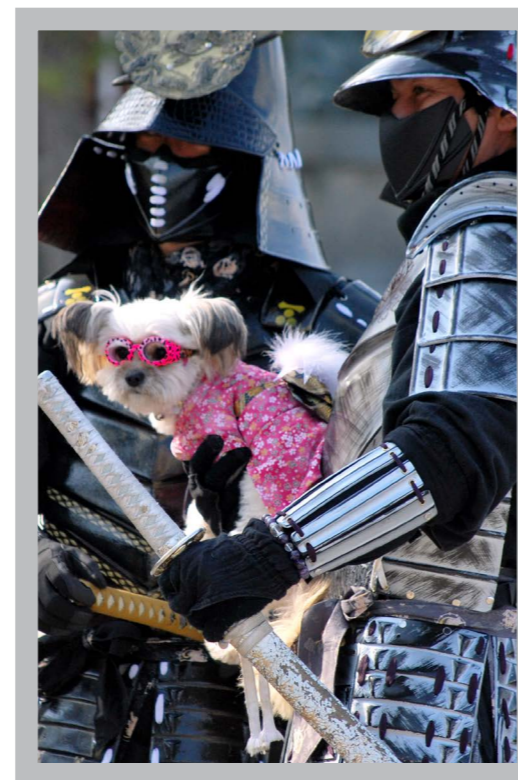
"Koi in Takachiho" by Ellen Freeman



"Omura Bay in Spring" by Audrey Akcasu, Nagasaki



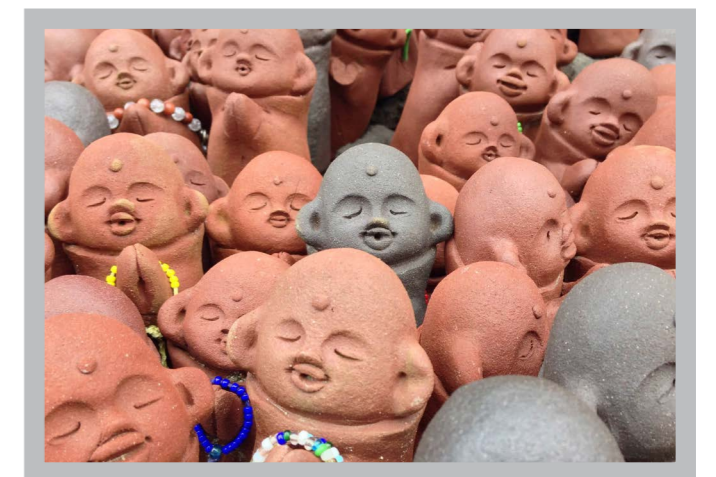
"Aoshima" by Kayla Whitney, Miyazaki



"Miyajima Noh" by Allison Morris



"Let's Plant Some Rice" by Larissa Milo-Dale, Miyazaki



"Kissy Kissy" by Larissa Milo-Dale

Symbols in excess
 Too many brushes bleeding
 Swollen sunrises
 Giuseppe di Martino, Yamagata

This is the space for all the artists in our community. If you have a comic or other art you've created about Japan you want to share with our readers, check out the contributors' information page, and send an email to connect.editor@ajet.net!

Here are the ones for this month!

THE ADVENTURES OF

MIKE

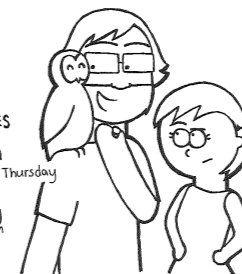
AN ORIGINAL COMIC SERIES

mikeandowly.com

Updates every Monday & Thursday

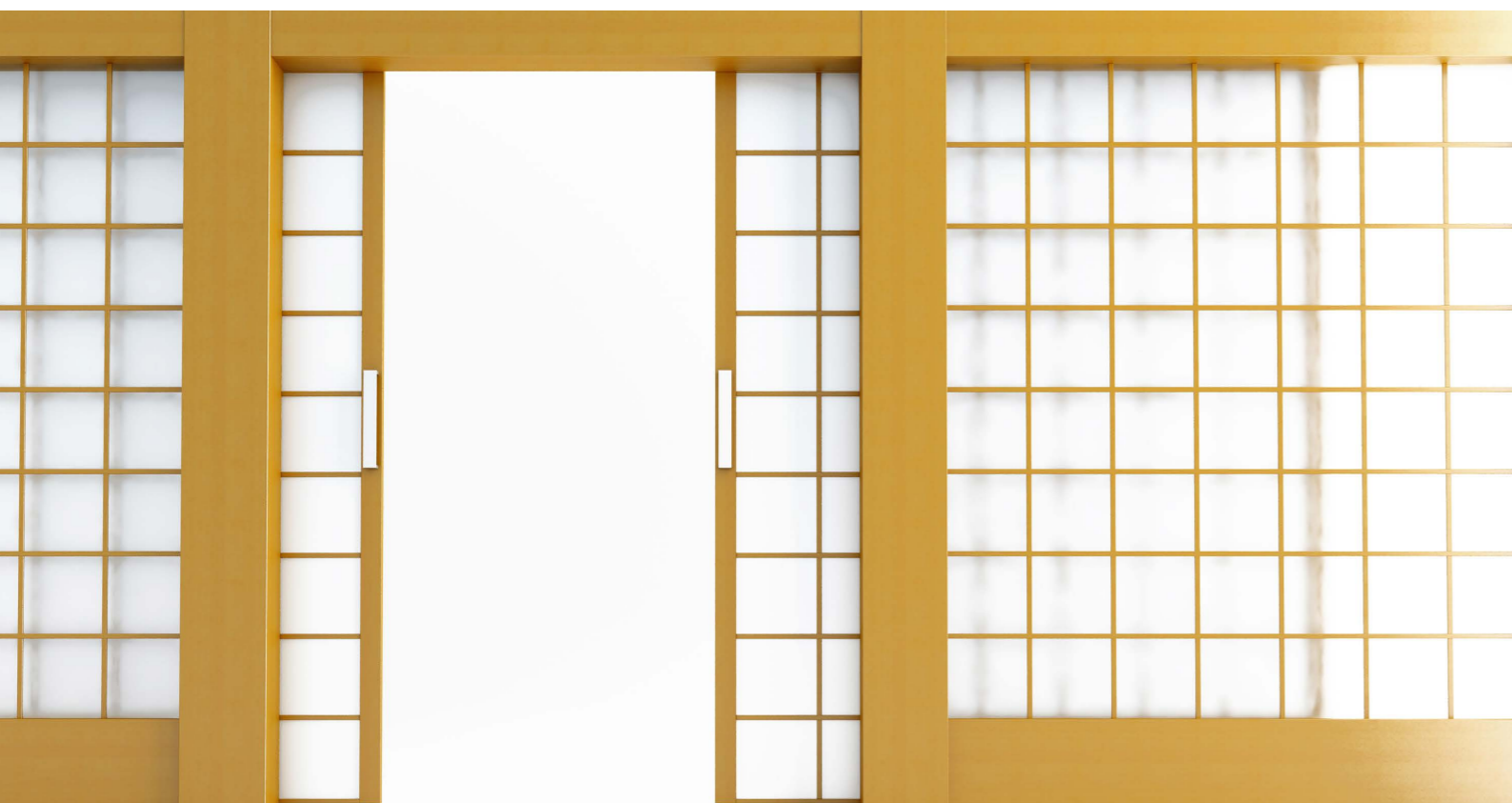
TWITTER: @MikeAndOwly

EMAIL: rika@mikeandowly.com



"The Adventures of Mike"
 by Marika Jackson, Akita

Join best friends Mike and Owly on their quirky, everyday adventures, much to the dismay of Mike's overly-stern partner, Rika. Follow us on Twitter @MikeAndOwly and see up-to-date comics at mikeandowly.com! Created and illustrated by Marika Jackson.



"Cultural Equivalencies: Words from Home" by Larissa Milo-Dale, Miyazaki

Between English activities both in and out of school, hosting movie nights, and travelling around Kyushu at least once a month, life is never short of incredibly busy for Larissa. You can read about her interests and antics on Twitter @larashk



Polkaroo

Pokkaru
 ポッカル



FLASHBACK: TRAVELING TOGETHER OR FLYING SOLO

With Golden Week wrapped up, it's time to start planning your next travel adventure. One of the biggest decisions to make is with whom to travel, or even to travel alone. Connect has you covered with these two contrasting Flashback articles. These two articles appeared in the September 2011 and September 2012 issues of Connect, and have been slightly edited. To see the original articles, visit ajet.net/ajet-connect.

Picking Your Perfect Travel Buddy

Amelia Hagen, Fukuoka (2008-2013)

Before you hop on a flight, catch the train, or score a seat on an overnight bus, you've got to figure out if you're going solo or if you're going to have some cohorts. Want to travel with your BFFs? You may want to go over a few things first. Below are some helpful tips and tricks for finding your ideal travel companion!

Budget buddies!

First of all, there's the money issue. Make sure your friend(s) have the same budget and taste as you. Amongst my group of friends, there are those who prefer to stay at luxury hotels when traveling abroad and those who live on a shoestring. I tend to stick to the middle, booking good value accommodation where I can get a lot of bang for my buck. You need to know upfront whether you're going to spend a fortune or stay in a shack somewhere in the Malaysian jungle.

Spontaneous Susan or Rigid Rick? Match your travel styles!

Next, consider your travel style. Do you like to go with the flow or schedule activities throughout the day? If you enjoy spontaneity, you probably won't be a fan of someone who likes to plan out three to four cultural activities every day. But a

difference in opinion here doesn't have to be a deal-breaker: a good compromise might involve breaking the day up into three sections—morning, afternoon, and evening—and choosing two things to do together while leaving one time period open for whatever!

Daily routines

If you travel with a morning person and you're a night owl, you may need to balance out the early nights and big nights out. And what about eating preferences? A friend of mine recently insisted that I go to Snake Alley in Taipei, home to a host of snake-related delicacies. Luckily, the two of us weren't travelling together.

Have similar interests you want to explore during your trip

A friend who wants to stay out of the sun is not going to jump up and down when you suggest five days spent on a white sand beach. Likewise, an adrenaline junkie might be antsy wandering through museums all day. Check and see what friends might be interested in seeing and doing on your trip. And never underestimate the importance of finding someone you can have healthy conversations with during your journey, either!

Solo Traveling

Justin Endo, Fukuoka (2010-2012)

"Isn't it dangerous?"

"Don't you get lonely?"

"What if something goes wrong?"

The list goes on and on against solo traveling. The funny thing is, though, many of the people who are against solo traveling have never tried it. Most have never taken a trip alone for longer than a day. Even fewer have done it in a foreign country. And some never will their entire life. I had never done a solo trip longer than a few days before my time here in Vietnam. After two weeks on the road, I am reflecting on my experiences and whether or not it has been worth traveling by myself.

So is it dangerous? Well, yeah, if you're stupid. However, the same can be said of any activity. I would argue that it is more dangerous to travel in a small group—you stand out more as tourists and become more likely to be the target of a scam or bag snatching. If you're by yourself, as long as you hide your guide book, learn a few phrases, and respect normal customs, locals may mistake you for one of them. After I got a Vietnamese haircut to blend in better, I paid local prices at attractions when I asked for a ticket, "*Cho toi mot ve.*" Even if you don't blend in as well (apparently I look Vietnamese), you may at least be mistaken for an expat.

Do I get lonely? Sure, at times. This was my first Christmas away from my family. Instead of moping around and feeling lonely, I went out and met new people. I had to. When you travel by yourself, you instantly become more outgoing. You have to talk to people in everyday situations—there's no one else to do it for you. And if you make the extra effort to get to know them beyond that, you'll realize just how quickly strangers can become friends.

On Christmas Day, I took a walking tour in Hanoi. My tour guides mentioned that they were university students, and since our tour

ended next to their campus, they asked if I wanted to see it. If I wasn't by myself, I probably would not have gone (or even have been invited). I agreed, and after showing me off to their roommates (a cozy dorm room of 10 girls!), we went for dinner in their school cafeteria. When I returned to my hostel, it was still early so I went to the lounge. The great thing about hostels is that it's so easy to meet people. You have a guaranteed common interest—traveling. Grab a beer (or in my case on Christmas, there were free bottles of wine in the hostel) and just start talking. Ask where they're from, where they visited, and where's next. Chances are, your fellow travelers will have a good story or two. Travel enough and it may be you who has the interesting story. This leads to our last question: "What if something goes wrong?"

Well, sometimes the best stories are when something goes wrong—or, at least, when things don't go according to plan. When you travel in a group, unplanned hiccups can be disastrous. More often than not, you already planned where you're staying and where you're going since it's harder to book as a group. When it's just you, though, you decide where and when to go. If you want to do something, your vote is the only one that matters. When I travel, I have a checklist for things I want to do in places I want to visit. However, the more I talk to people and hear their stories, the longer my list becomes. Even then, some of the best experiences have still deviated from said list. I ate the heart, blood, and venom of a cobra in Hanoi; turned a day-trip to the DMV into a three day motorcycle tour of Ho Chi Minh Trail; and decided to go scuba diving in Nha Trang. I didn't plan on any of these activities, but because I wasn't in a group, I was much more open to random opportunities. In a group, you lose that flexibility to do something on a whim.

Of course there are benefits to traveling with other people. I'll save those arguments for someone else. For my time in Vietnam, I would not have spent it any other way.



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JAPANESE POP-CULTURE

コーナー

Jaclyn Thompson, Miyazaki

Japanese pop-culture is an endless world of strange and wonderful things, with something for everyone. It can also be a great conversation starter with students, colleagues and friends alike. The only problem with the everlasting is keeping up, so here are my recommendations to help you stay afloat.



Music Chris Hart

Chris Hart is a new American J-Pop artist. All the way from San Francisco, Chris made his Japan debut on the TV program *Nodo Jiman Za! World* after his YouTube video was noticed by the

executives. Since then, he has appeared on several TV shows, released cover songs, and this year released his first original song "I Love You" and first original album "Song for You" in February and March respectively. He takes *nihongo ga jouzu desu ne* to the next level, writing his own songs in Japanese.



TV Amachan

Amachan is a drama set in the Tohoku region before and after the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake. It was broadcast last year from April to September on NHK. The main character, Aki Amano (Rena Nonen), becomes a local idol and moves to Tokyo to pursue her career, but then decides to return to Tohoku to help revitalize the

area after the earthquake. The catchphrase "je je je" (indicates surprise) was selected as one of the top four **most popular words of 2013**. The sound track also became popular, featuring in the New Year's Eve *Kohaku* program 2013.



Celebrity Sanma Akashiya

Known for his laugh, protruding front teeth, and ability to talk under wet cement, Sanma is a well-known Japanese TV comedian and actor, whose real name is Takafumi Sugimoto. At the age of 58 he is still going strong hosting regular TV shows including *Sanma No Manma* and *Odoru, Sanmagoten*, both of which are celebrity interview shows. One of his most famous props is

a small toy hammer that is actually his face in a dinosaur costume which he smacks on the desk while he's laughing.



Anime & Manga Attack on Titan (Shingeki no Kyojin)

Attack on Titan began as a manga, first published in 2009. Since then it has grown with two spin-off manga series, a light novel, an anime series, several video games, and due to be released next year, **a live action film**. In the story large creatures called Titans almost wipe-out humanity. The surviving humans live in

peace for 100 years protected by three walls until one day Titans attack again. The hero, Eren, his adoptive sister Mikasa, and their friend Armin join the "Survey Corps" to fight back and discover the mystery behind the titans.



Word Omotenashi

おもてなし
(meaning: hospitality, service)

The word *omotenashi* became popular last year after Christel Takigawa used it during her speech to the International Olympic Committee in the bid for the 2020 Olympic Games. The speech referred to the *nihon no omotenashi no kokoro* (lit. the hospitable heart of Japan), and was a huge hit across Japan especially after the announcement of victory. The special pronunciation used in the speech, one syllable at a time with a slight pause in between each, is often mimicked.

Jaclyn Thompson is a third-year ALT in Miyazaki Prefecture. Driven to Japan by her passion for Japanese study, she is slowly saying goodbye to her university level English, and hello to Japanese fluency... Is what she would like to say, but in reality she is saying hello to junior high school textbook English and talking at the pace of a snail. I'm fine thanks, and you?