

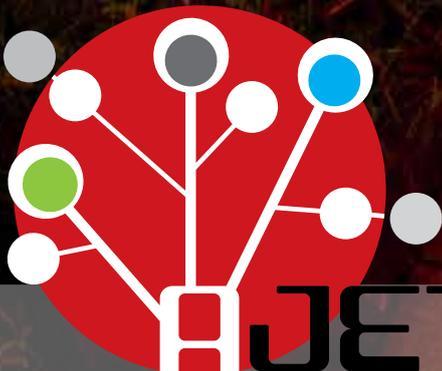
AJET

CONNECT

magazine

December Issue

2013



AJET

DISASTER IN THE PHILIPPINES:

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Connect magazine thanks Erika Ehren, who provided the information for this piece. Erika is a 3rd-year JET in Fukushima prefecture, and Block 2 representative for the AJET Special Interest Group, API AJET (<http://apiajet.blogspot.jp/>)

On Friday, November 8th, one of the most powerful storms on record to make landfall struck the coastal provinces of the Philippines. Haiyan—known as “Yolanda” in the Philippines—headed west, sweeping through six central Philippine islands. At least 10,000 people are feared to have been killed and hundreds of thousands more have been displaced after the high winds and floodwaters destroyed their homes. It’s estimated that over nine million people have been affected, and many are now struggling to survive without food, shelter, or clean drinking water.

As more and more reports of the full extent of the damage reach the rest of the world, it’s heartwarming to see the outpouring of donations and help from other countries. However, it’s sometimes difficult to decide which organization we should be donating to. Here is a brief list of some of the best organizations. This list doesn’t encompass every organization you can donate to, but it’s a list of the best organizations that are familiar with the local needs, have low overhead costs, and have experience with this kind of disaster.



Philippine Red Cross

The Philippine Red Cross is one of the best organizations where you can donate your money. The Philippine Red Cross has experience working in the southern regions of the Philippines (as these areas are often hit by typhoons and flooding), the workers are largely Filipino and are able to communicate without barriers, and much of the aid they will distribute comes from the Philippines—the metro Manila area where they are headquartered—meaning that it will help to strengthen the Philippine economy, instead of bringing in items from outside resources. The Philippine Red Cross also works with the Philippine government, which ensures that their response is in line with the national response. To donate directly to the Philippine Red Cross, go to < <http://ushare.redcross.org.ph/>>



UNICEF

The United Nations Children’s Fund is a United Nations Program that provides long-term humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries. UNICEF already had a large number of workers in the Philippines, who were immediately relocated to the disaster areas. UNICEF is focused on getting essential medicines, nutrition supplies, safe water, and hygiene supplies to children and families in the affected area. For more information or to donate to UNICEF, go to < <http://donate.unicef.ph/campaign/24/typhoon-yolanda>>



Doctors Without Borders

Doctors Without Borders is an international medical humanitarian organization that has experience both with natural disasters of this magnitude and within the Philippines. Doctors Without Borders is bringing in much needed medical assistance and supplies by sending 200 tons of medical and relief items. On the donation form, you have the option of designating

your donation to the Doctors Without Borders’s Emergency Response Fund, which will be used in the Philippines. If you would like more information or to donate to Doctors Without Borders, go to < <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/donate/onetime.cfm?>>

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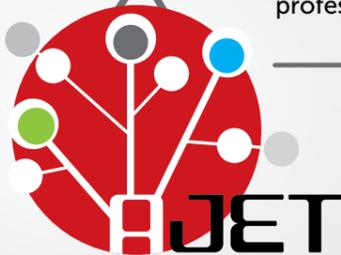
Elections are in February.



1. THE FUTURE

Thinking about recontracting next year? Want to get more involved and at the same time work on your professional development?

Contact your Block Representative or Executive Team to learn more about what it takes to be on Council and what we do! Find a link to the contact form here.



AJET CONNECT magazine



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR OF CONNECT MAGAZINE!

Welcome to the December issue of Connect, our last issue for the year! As always, our team has been hard at work seeking out engaging content and interesting stories from the community in Japan and abroad. This month we're talking about the holidays, which can range from a little odd to downright difficult when you're away from home. However you celebrate, and wherever you are, we hope that you have a wonderful time with wonderful people, friends and family alike. We also hope that you can spend some time with Connect! We've got events for you to check out, movies for you to watch, and lots holiday things for you to read about.

I'd like to thank all of you, our amazing readers, for your overwhelming support for Connect's online issues on issuu.com. We wanted to bring you an easier way to read and share Connect, and thousands (literally thousands!) of you have taken advantage of it. We're always seeking ways to improve our services to you, and we appreciate every bit of feedback, every random idea, every critical email you send to us. I know I personally spend a lot of time absorbed in Connectworld, so it can be difficult to see it from the outside (love makes you blind, after all).

With that in mind, we're rolling out *yet another* new Connect initiative this month, which we're calling CrossConnect.



Whenever you see the logo above on any article or story in Connect, it means it's been shared with us from another friendly publication. We're now working to 'connect' (I know, I know) the many great AJET publications (like @API), prefectural magazines (like *The Nagazasshi*), and reader blogs (like Laura Lou's *The Lazy Beggar's Guide to Cooking in Japan*) in Japan together, so that everyone can enjoy more quality content from more awesome

places. Just click the CrossConnect logo or visit the link at the end of the piece to see the original article and see more from that author. It's my pleasure to help spread good writing and interesting content any way I can.

None of this would be possible without the hard work of one of Connect's new team members, Josiah David, who will be working as Connect's Director of Public Relations. If you'd like to see your blog or website featured in Connect, you can reach him at connect.pr@ajet.net. I'd like to introduce and show my appreciation for not only Josiah, but also Sterling Diesel and Ola Weber, two more new members. Sterling has been working since last month as our assistant designer alongside the magnificent Melinda Lange, and Ola is keeping me honest (and sane) by assisting with the pages of and pages of copyediting each month. Join me in thanking them and giving a hearty 'hello!' You'll see a little more about them from the January issue on!

Lastly, we'd like to join the community in offering our heartfelt condolences and support to the people of the Philippines. We encourage everyone to consider donating any amount you can spare to relief efforts on the ground there. As a community, we can do a lot of good work with our resources. Find more information about how and where to donate at the very beginning of this issue.

All my best,

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

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KAY SAYS...



안녕하세요, JET family! It's that time again! Another scoop of what's happening behind the scenes of how AJET National Council is serving you. We just completed our second ever AJET Professional Development Conference Call with Clifton Strickler, who talked about his experience as a monbukagakusho (文部科学書Certificate of Education, Culture, Sports, Science) recipient after JET, and how it slam dunked him in a successful law career in Tokyo afterward. Doesn't sound like your cup of tea? Well, tell us what is! Maybe you'd like to hear from someone in education, restaurant management or even musical production. You name it and we'll try to find and connect you to our superstar sempai JETs. Let us know who you'd like to hear from and what you'd like to learn by dropping us a line at exec@ajet.net.

In other news, The JET Community Service Tracker and the Race to the Top Challenge is gaining momentum and it's exciting to see all the tangible results we as JETs are making in our communities! See where your prefecture stands in the national rankings on p 65. We can't wait to share the return on JET investment the Japanese government is making by selecting us to work in Japan. Don't miss out on being part of this nationwide initiative to spread GOOD things. Get your prefecture in the rankings by filling out this quick form [HERE](#).

Want to get more involved but not sure how? Check out the AJET Prefectural Leaders Facebook group to share ideas for projects and events. Meet and connect with other motivated JETs wanting to make a good difference in their communities.

On a personal note, I had a great time connecting with the Shimane and Tottori AJET family last month. Each prefecture

definitely has its own vibe, but a common thread I always find is the hospitality and camaraderie between JETs nationwide. During my time in the good ole' Chugoku region, I also had my first hitchhiking adventure in Japan! One of my drivers took me out of her original path, bought me lunch then dropped me off at Matsue Station. Her 8 month old baby was in the car, too. Open-mindedness, curiosity, gratefulness, generosity. I dream of a world with more of these qualities. As we enter our JET winter breaks, let's not forget how lucky we are as JETs to have all these opportunities around us!

Happy and safe holidays from your AJET National Council!

Kay
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>.

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meet the CONNECT team!



Steven Thompson Head Editor

Hello to all of you, my dearest readers. It's been a great month here in Fukushima, and the end of the year is looking better and better. Aside from Connect, I participated in a very successful Block 2 charity skills auction in Niigata (over 170,000 yen to build schools in Papua New Guinea!) and am planning my first blood donation drive here in Fukushima. At home, I've been catching up on *Mythbusters* and playing the Super Nintendo classic *Chrono Trigger*. How are you guys doing? What's going on in your area? Let us know about it, and drop me a line anytime at connect.editor@ajet.net.

Melinda Lange Layout and Design

It's the holiday season again~! Time to make your shopping lists and hit all the souvenir shops in the prefecture to buy gifts for everybody back home! Last year I think I had roughly 30 people to get gifts for, so most people ended up getting chopsticks, clothes, and postcards. This year, rather than buy out the local store and deprive other people of tableware, I'm making a picture card with the link for December Connect magazine! Who wouldn't want that! :P



Matthew Jones Culture Editor

IT'S CHRISTMAAAAAS!! Sorry, Christmas was always a big deal for my family, so I tend to get a little worked up this time of year. Novelty Christmas jumpers, cakes sent from home, boxes of presents.... If there's one time of year that I let my inner child out, it's Christmas.

Join me in the Christmas spirit and deck yourself out in the gaudiest, loudest, ugliest Christmas jumper you can find. Pictures are, of course, always welcome! connect.culture@ajet.net



Tom Morin-Robinson Entertainment Editor

December is about the time I realize that, for another year running, I have neglected to purchase a *kotatsu*, kerosene heater, or even one of those hot water bottle things. Clearly it is too late now, so I'm getting ready to strap on the usual two to four pairs of long underwear and huddle over my stove for three months. As usual, I've been working on my photography which you can check out at tommrphoto.tumblr.com. And as always, if you find yourself with a story in need of telling, get in touch at connect.entertainment@ajet.net!



Lineng Tee Fashion & Beauty Editor

November was intense for many of us; our days filled with mid-year conferences, speech contest practice, lesson observations, and autumn leaf-viewing road trips. The days are getting shorter and chillier, but December is my favourite month—for the *momiji* light-ups, the Christmas illuminations, the sinfully delicious treats, the general air of festivity, and the cheesy seasonal prints on scarves, hats, and sweaters. I'll be spending the holidays feasting with students, friends, and family, joining the throngs of tourists and locals shopping up a storm in Tokyo, and taking an *onsen* holiday to Kyushu. I wish you a wonderful end of 2013! connect.fashion@ajet.net



Ariane Bobiash Food Editor

Hey guys! I hope you're all as excited for the holiday season as I am. It's my favorite time of the year, and also a time to think about those in need. One such place is Heart Tokushima, a local NPO animal shelter where myself and other Tokushima JETs volunteer. Check out their Facebook page or their website at <http://www.heart-tokushima.com>. Located in one of the top prefectures for stray animals—with over 200 animals in their care—they need all the help they can get. If you're looking for a short-term volunteer opportunity over a long weekend or school holiday, Heart has a volunteer apartment where you can stay at no cost! As always, if you have a food story that needs telling, contact Xan and I at connect.food@ajet.net.

Xan Wetherall Food Editor

I'm sure we've all heard the line: "Japan has four unique seasons". Welcome to the wintery one! Or, if you're in Southern Japan, welcome to the less warm one. What's that, you say? Fall was here and gone in the blink of an eye, and summer lasted half the year? Seasons AREN'T unique, and other countries experience them, too?! Well, regardless of how legit Japan's claim to seasonal fame is, it DOES have some excellent and unique dishes that only emerge at the turn of the... "season". So get ready to fire up that nabe hotpot, and tell us all about what you put in it over at connect.food@ajet.net!



Hugo Dragonetti Sports Editor

Hello! Firstly, good luck to those of you taking the JLPT at the start of the month. The year's almost over and, like many of you, I'm looking forward to the winter break. I'll be visiting Vietnam and Cambodia for the first time, and hopefully trying a few sports while I'm there. Whether you'll be back home with family, on a beach in Thailand, or queuing up outside KFC to buy the Japanese take on the traditional Christmas dinner, I hope you have an enjoyable Christmas. Please get in touch if you've a sporting tale to tell! connect.sports@ajet.net



Caroline Bellinger Travel Editor

Baby, it's cold outside! Despite sometimes needing to warm my hands in the fridge when I return to my sub-zero apartment, winter is my favourite season in Japan. Aside from finally being free from the energy-sapping heat of summer, winter means it's time to strap a snowboard to my feet and hit the slopes. Whether you prefer adventure in the mountains, relaxing in an *onsen* or hitting up one of Japan's many winter festivals, there are so many options to keep you from withering away beneath your *kotatsu* over the coming months. If you are heading home or elsewhere these winter holidays—have fun and travel safe!



Michelle Castro Volunteering Editor

Hello, readers! This past month I have been going on adventures and eating copious amounts of Thanksgiving-related foods. I recently drove to Wakayama to see the fall colours and enjoy an overnight stay at a temple. While driving my car I had to pull over several times to enjoy the beauty and take pictures of the trees and their deep red color. After that, I meditated with monks on Mount Koya and enjoyed a vegetarian dinner that was by far the best meal I have ever eaten during the past two years in Japan. Seriously good food! As for Shimane Prefecture I spent an evening with friends to celebrate Thanksgiving and gobbled up Lisa King's Famous Baked Turkey. I am off to enjoy the holidays with my family in Los Angeles during Christmas break. See you next month. connect.volunteering@ajet.net



Kelly Merks Events Editor

Brrrr! This Texas girl's skin is still too thin for Japan's winters, even though this winter is my third here. On the upside, the same week I broke out the scarves and coats, the *nabe* made its seasonal debut in our home. Oh, *nabe*, what a magical meal. At the end of the month, my husband and I will fly to Seoul to visit old friends for the holidays. We're really looking forward to seeing them and consuming all the *galbi* and *soju* (though I am seriously dreading Seoul's winter weather)! Happy holidays, everyone!



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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/category/ajet-connect-magazine/. You can also submit your own idea for a poll topic at connect.editor@ajet.net!

This Month's Question

After the somewhat heavy controversial question we asked you all last month, we thought we'd go a bit lighter in light of the upcoming winter holidays. Let's see what everyone's plans are for winter vacation! You can read a bit in this issue about our editors and contributors plans, as well as pick up some ideas of your own.

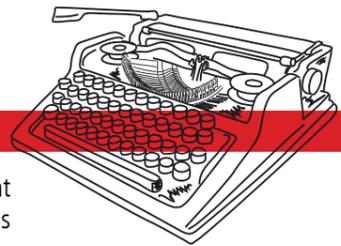
What are your plans for the winter holidays?

- I'm going home!
- I'm going to KFC!
- I'm traveling outside Japan
- I'm traveling inside Japan
- I'm traveling inside my prefecture
- I'm staying right under my kotatsu

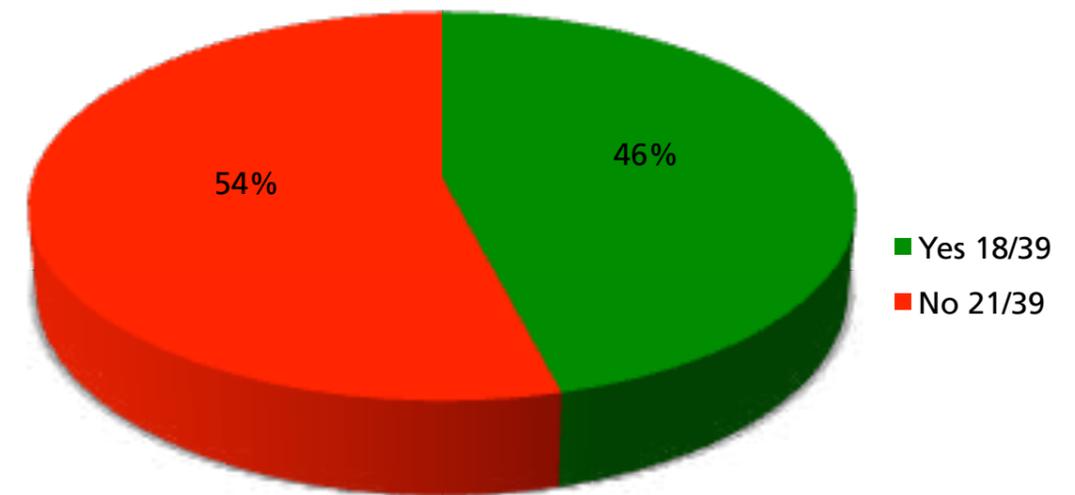
What are you getting up to at the end of 2013? Share you travel stories and experiences with us at connect.editor@ajet.net. You can submit your answers directly by clicking [HERE](#).



Last Month's Results



As befitting a rather complex issue, our readers were pretty split about how the Japanese government should handle the issue of visits to Yasukuni Shrine. A slight majority felt that government officials should **not** cease visits to the controversial war memorial. Thanks for adding your voices, guys!



THE MYSTERIOUS SEAS

*The last time many of us heard the term “SEA” in relation to the JET Program was likely when we were filling out our original application and checking the box for ALT or CIR, but there are currently 11 Sports Exchange Advisors hard at work in Japan at competitive schools throughout the country. Many JETs don’t know much about their champion-making colleagues on the Program, so we here at Connect sat down with **Ádám Steiner** and **Joseph Tengelei** to talk about their experiences and role on the JET Program.*

Who are you? Where are you from?

Joseph: My name is Joseph Tengelei, and I’m an SEA from Kenya.

Ádám: My name is Ádám Steiner. I am from Hungary, a small country right in the center of Europe.

Where do you live now? Where do you work?

Joseph: I live in Goto City, which is some kilometers from Nagasaki City. I work at Goto High School.

Ádám: I am working currently as a foil fencing coach in Wakayama City, where I also live. Fortunately where I live is pretty close to my work and for everything else. Primarily, my hosting institute is Kojo High School, but I also visit two other high schools on the weekends. In the evenings I train the senior team at the Wakayama Sport Center called “Big Wave”.

In your own words, what is a Sports Exchange Advisor?

Joseph: Being a Sports Exchange Advisor, I work with my fellow

colleagues, scheduling events and coordinating activities and training so that no overlap occurs [with the students’ normal school schedule].

Ádám: Well, for me an SEA is a person whose job is to teach and support the development of athletes and also (this is the harder part) try to develop and provide a different view for the local coaches at the same time. That part makes my job more interesting. Cooperation with the coaches and helping them—if they want, of course—is really important. We will be part of their life for only a short time, but they can have another view or an idea that can be built in their own, so they also improve and become able to achieve higher results, even after we go home.

What’s a normal week like for you? What do you do?

Joseph: During my normal week days, I take time to talk to teachers concerning track and field, and seek ways to improve Goto High’s track team. In fact, I’m looking forward to producing a national champion, if time allows.

Ádám: Normally on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, I work at Kojo High School from 13:00 to 18:30. Then I go to the Sport Center to do the senior training. On the weekends, I go to two other high schools—Kita and Higashi—in the morning, then after lunch we have what we call “joint training” at the sport center. This includes the senior team, and selected members (basically the more advanced ones) from different age groups and schools.

What’s your favorite part of your job?

Joseph: My very favorite part of the job is seeing each and

JET’s SPORTS EXCHANGE ADVISORS

every student in our track team make the best results they can as opposed to before. Students love to hear my English, though they don’t understand much, and I enjoy hearing their Japanese.

Ádám: My favourite part is—as it always has been—traveling to competitions. I love competitions, with all the excitement and the high tension feelings, the adrenaline and the tactical fights. Huh...it sounds a little violent [*laughs*]. Also, when you see that the students can successfully use what you’ve taught them before—that is a cool feeling.

What’s the hardest part of your job?

Joseph: The hard part on me is definitely the language barrier.

Ádám: First, I thought that the language barrier was, but surprisingly the most difficult is to get familiar with the completely different education and competition system that Japan has.

Do you meet many other JETs? Or do you mostly spend time with Japanese people?

Joseph: I have a JET teacher with me here, so there’s no problem if a need for help arises. Otherwise, I think three-quarters of my time is spent with Japanese teachers.

Ádám: Unfortunately, because of my strange schedule, I do not really have time to meet with the other JETs, but some of the other foreigners living in Wakayama have become really good friends of mine. Honestly, they are a huge help for me.

What could the JET Program do better for you to help? Is there anything you’d change?

Joseph: I think a crucial thing for the JET Program to allow would be for those JETs with families to come with them if the budget allows. It’s not easy for someone like me to stay one year without seeing my family. It’s a lot of heartache.

Ádám: Nothing special. Actually, the JET Programme’s language course books are really useful, so I’m grateful for that.

Anything you want people to know about SEAs?

Joseph: As an SEA, my advice is that teachers and parents should teach their children from the word go [how important sports are in life], so that when they reach high school they can know the benefit of sports and physical fitness in general. Also, I think being an SEA is important in a country like Japan, since new ideas [about athletics] are coming out all the time. Schools should make serious use of us while we’re here.

Ádám: Oh, it’s like I should advertise us... [*laughs*]. Well, obviously every SEA is related to a sport, so my advice is to try the sports that your SEA friend does, because sports are always a good way to connect.

If you could be any superhero, which one would you be and why?

Joseph: I would love to be any superhero, if it would improve my times in the 800m and 1500m races.

Ádám: I’d rather be Chuck Norris... No, just joking. Well, one of my good friends said for the same question that he would be Spiderman, because at least he gets beaten sometimes, and he has to solve problems using his mind. I like that.

Parting words

Joseph: I’m looking forward to coaching Japan’s national team, and setting our sights on the 2020 Olympics, if I’m given the time. Thanks a lot, and I hope that I have been able to answer to the best of my knowledge for the three months that I have been here. God bless as you all improve the JET Program.

Ádám: See you! Thanks for asking!



Thomas Wanebo, Block 5 Representative

Things have been happening in Block 5!

Gifu's welcome party, on the rockiest beach one could ever hope to find, on a river whose current carried several partiers much farther downstream than they anticipated, or were prepared to swim against, was a great way to kick off the new JET year. My region, Hida, held a welcome party a couple months later, because that's the pace at which we do things.

Now we're gearing up for winter, stockpiling kerosene and taking the kotatsu in for its final tune-up. Fall saw a tremendous number of festivals at schools: sports festivals, chorus festivals, culture festivals, vegetable festivals... you name it. It saw me purchasing 28 kilos of candy at Costco for a Halloween party for elementary school students, and having half of it melt in my car. But kids don't care: chocolate is chocolate.

On the AJET front, I'll be going to Tokyo in mid-December to deliver to CLAIR and the Three Ministries a report that a fantastic team of AJET members put together about how JETs interact with, and benefit, their local communities. Super cool stuff. This year we nearly doubled previous years' response rates for the AJET surveys, but we're aiming even higher next time!

Personally, I've visited my 45th prefecture, leaving only Okinawa (winter break) and Nagasaki (Golden Week) before I've hit them all. I can't recommend highly enough trying to visit every prefecture. Such a cool way to experience Japan!

Looking ahead, work has already begun on my team's theme and costumes for next year's Fukui Kar Rally, which benefits an orphanage in Fukui. It's far and away the best JET event I've ever participated in (I'm the horse on the left in the pic). If you're planning on making a trip to Block 5 (and, honestly, who isn't?) but you're not sure when to come, or what to do, come for the Rally next spring: keep an eye on the Block 5 Facebook page for details!



Kar Rally



Sandy Cheng, Block 6 Representative

In light of the Christmas spirit, Block 6 has dedicated the month of December to Charity. The mutual goal of the 3 prefectures is to raise money for orphanages. The method for raising money in each prefecture varies with style and we welcome any JETs in Japan to join us!

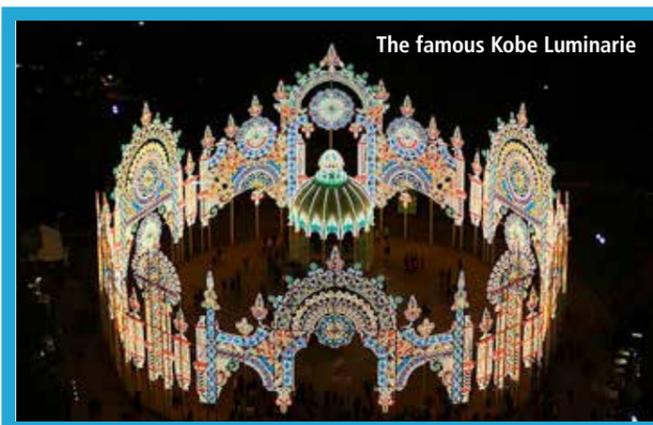
Kyoto was ahead of the game and held a charity potluck during November. Approximately 20 people attended the event, and lots of food and fun were had. Although the potluck is over, donations will continue throughout the month of December. All proceeds raised from Kyoto will be donated to its local orphanages.

Hyogo will be holding bake day sales on the 7th and 8th of December in Kobe. Organised in cooperation with the Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, over 70 JET and student volunteers will be present over the event weekend. Our "bake day sales" will of course involve the usual homemade cakes and cookies, but to make it more exciting we've also added in hot chocolate, hot tea, popcorn, and – believe it or not – a sausage sizzle! What's that you say? "Sausage sizzle" is a popular way to raise money in Australia and New Zealand. All it takes is a slice of white bread, a barbecued sausage, some barbecued onions, mustard and tomato sauce! Simple and delicious!

As part of our marketing strategy (but really just for fun) we'll also have a JET choir singing famous and popular Christmas carols throughout each day. Of course, everyone at the event



A big jump after a long day painting



The famous Kobe Luminarie

will be in their best Christmas costume. A fraction of the money raised over the weekend will be used to buy Christmas gifts for a selected orphanage in Kobe, and all remaining proceeds will be donated to the Kobe Federation of Orphanages. This charity event happens to coincide with the famed Kobe Luminarie, so if you're looking to spend the upcoming weekend in good company, fun, and lots of beautiful lights, come visit us!

Shiga will be doing their usual thing to "Go MAD" in every way possible! That is, they will "Go Make A Difference" for the orphanages – Baan Unrak and Baan Dada – in Thailand. Every year, Shiga JETs volunteer their time to do various activities with the children such as teaching, singing, doing yoga and meditation sessions, and most importantly, playing with them. They also work on developmental projects in the neighbourhood, and fundraise money to go towards essential items such as umbrellas, clothes, hangers and beds.

For this purpose, on the 13th December, Shiga is going to get classy with their semiformal event "The Date Auction"! Volunteers will donate their time, the auction starts, and the winning bidder will get to spend an awesome day hanging out with the awesome volunteer (romance not offered). The auction will be held over drink, a delicious course dinner, and of course, great company. It will be a fun and fantastic way to meet lots of new people, and for a worthy cause!

Block 6 is excited to be progressing in our goals this year of getting more involved with the local communities and working together for charitable causes. Our block events are always open to fellow JETs from across the country, so don't hesitate to join us for a great month in December! See you around!



Even cool girls like Christmas



CULTURE

EDITORIAL Keeping Christmas and Friends Close

14 Last year, at an international event, I dressed up as Santa and handed out prizes at the end of the evening. It wasn't a secret, since I was basically shouting to all my friends that I was going to be Santa. It didn't feel right though—it was a little too open. And if there is one great mystery of our youth, it is the identity of Santa.

With that being the case, I decided that this year I would still be Santa, but a secret one. That's right, I would organize a Secret Santa event! After some friendly discussion, it became clear that this idea should be shared with the whole city, and even the prefecture.

So, I and my fellow directors of the Nagasaki AJET chapter have set about organizing a prefecture-wide Secret Santa. A lot of work is going into it, but we're confident that we can make it into an awesome annual event. We've matched up men and women from different cities, gotten a little bit of personal info out of them, and sent our Santas off to shop!

The postage date is fast approaching, and we hope that all our Santas have added a note with their present, explaining who they are and a little about themselves. We hope that this will spark a bit more friendship between neighboring cities—and hey, Christmas is a date night in Japan, so maybe we'll see some relationships blossom.

It might be too late to organize a Secret Santa for your whole prefecture, but not for your city. A quick Facebook event, some

matching of names on a piece of paper, and boom! You've got yourself a citywide Secret Santa. All it takes is one person determined not to let the holiday season pass unmarked. Check with your local AJET chapter, as they may be organizing one, too.

But how will you distribute the gifts? Easy: a meal share! Many of you know that cooking an entire Christmas meal is a laborious affair, with hours of roasting, boiling, baking and candlestick making. So why not share the load? Ditch the Japanese KFC Christmas box, and get into that kitchen!

Meal shares are even easier to organize than a secret Santa. Just find some people who live nearby and tell them to come over to your place with some food. Boom! Instant good times.

For my meal share, I'll be bringing some sausage-stuffed chicken breasts with bread stuffing on the side. My friends will be bringing potatoes, pumpkin pies, mashed potatoes and gravy, roast potatoes, ham, *more* mashed potatoes... It's going to be a feast, as well as a way to make all the people who jetted off to Thailand or Korea jealous.

So join in on the Christmas spirit, even if you're only there for the food and prezzies.

THIS MONTH IN CULTURE...

Another year, another Christmas, right? Wrong!

Christmas in Japan is something special, and not only because it's the date night of the year. However, be warned: if you mention to your colleagues that you're going out with a friend for dinner on Christmas, you *will* get some elbow nudges and a few "Love-love?" questions.

But here at Connect, we don't judge your choice of holiday company... most of the time. If you want to know more about the strange holiday season that is fast approaching, or read about some jealousy-inducing plans from JETs, check out my piece and get stuffed with Christmas knowledge.

My editorial this month talks about what your local AJET chapter can do for you. Hint: it's a secret, but has something to do with Santa....

Finally, for those of you who will be travelling soon, you may encounter female-only areas, especially in the larger cities. Sophie Patterson has done some digging and can share the lowdown on the gender divide in Japan.

As we say in Ireland, *Nollaig Shona Duit!* Merry Christmas!



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

SPOTLIGHT

Santa-san

This mysterious figure has been spotted all over Japan in recent years. Interestingly, Santa-san does not seem to have a fixed height, weight, race, or even gender! The only things that remain the same are the clothes and beard. Investigators are also stumped at how this master of disguise can seemingly be in multiple prefectures at once.

Santa-san appears in a variety of locations, from elementary school lessons to senior high school English clubs and a variety of locations in between. This mysterious figure always appears and distributes Christmas-themed gifts. If you know of any clue to the true identity of Santa-san, please let us know.

But seriously, Christmas is a big part of an ALT's calendar. Last year, I donned the coat and beard, hefted a sack of presents and gave my heartiest HO-HO-HO to a group of mystified Japanese businessmen at the Japan-America-British foundation dinner.

So, to all the ALTs out there who take the time to make your lessons a little bit more entertaining, this Spotlight is for you. For all the JETs who get more involved in their local community, this Spotlight is for you. For everyone who just likes to dress up as a jolly, fat old man... I guess this Spotlight is for you, too!

If you dress up as Santa this year, send me an image and I'll include them in the January edition of my section!
connect.culture@ajet.net



CHRISTMAS BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT

Matthew Jones

Few western holidays transfer well to Japan, as we recently saw with Halloween and the sugarcoated explosion of cuteness that came with it. For December, we look at the delightful mess that is Christmas in Japan.

It's that time of year again. Back home, you may walk the streets hearing Christmas carols and finding the best shopping deals; whereas in Japan, you'll be doing something a little different... okay, something very different. Aside from the innumerable Christmas lessons you will be asked to teach, you'll find that Christmas here is celebrated a little oddly.

For starters, Christmas is a workday! Now, this may not be surprising to some people, but it still can feel jarring having to request leave on the 25th. However, with some clever application of *nenkyuu*, you can arrange to have a whole two weeks off to enjoy the holidays and even go travelling.

Speaking of travel, you may find your fellow teachers asking about your holiday plans, with the implication that you are expected to travel through Asia over winter break. Why is this? Simple: Christmas, travelling, and ALTs go together just like soy sauce and—well, pretty much any Japanese food. The lure of those two weeks off is just too tempting for many ALTs to ignore.

Winter vacation is one of the few times during the school year where an ALT can safely take an extended holiday and not even feel slightly guilty about it. Add that to the prospect of unforgettable experiences in nearby cities (New Year's in Bangkok or Seoul anyone?) and you have a sure-fire recipe for a mass exodus of ALTs.

Christmas day was already a big deal in my family, and if anything, it became even more elaborate with me being in Japan. With a bit of coordination (and the help of Skype), I was actually able to open my presents with the family. Some ALTs I know did similar things, while others went on crazy holidays to places barely featured on maps.

Now, as an Irishman with a pretty traditional family, my Christmas mornings were spent preparing the biggest meal of the year. My afternoons were consumed with consuming said meal. And consequently, my evenings revolved around attempts to roll my bloated self into bed before passing out.

Here in Japan, if your kitchen features a toaster oven, you can count yourself amongst the culinary elite. As such, it can be quite a daunting task to even think about roasting a chicken breast—never mind an entire banquet for you and a few friends.

Thankfully, Japan, or at least Colonel Sanders, has you covered. You may be familiar with the somewhat creepy looking statues of Colonel Sanders (known by some in Japan as "Kentucky *ojiisan*", Kentucky grampa) outside many Japanese KFCs, but for Christmas, he gets a festive makeover to celebrate the special food they have on offer. I still think he's creepy though.

Truly, nothing says "intimate gathering" like a big ol' bucket of

chicken—according to the Japanese. People here will start pre-ordering their holiday bucket in mid November, in order to have a truly 'western' experience.

As ridiculous as this may seem to many of you, the KFC roast chicken is probably the closest equivalent to a traditional holiday home-cooked meal you'll be able to find. That is, unless you hop on a plane and jet back to the warm, centrally-heated bosom of your homeland. Besides, you're here in Japan to experience new things, so don't knock it until you've tried it.

Finally, if you're going for a Japanese-style Christmas, you'll do well to remember that Christmas Eve is a date night here. So grab a special someone and go out on the town for some cutesy illuminations, couples meal-deals and completely over the top displays of public affection.

Last year, when asked about my plans, I answered that I was going to a Christmas Eve dinner with some friends, and that

yes, some of them were female.... Never have I gotten so many cheeky winks, elbow nudges, and suggestive questions.

So, please do bear in mind, anywhere you go this holiday season will be chock-full of sappy displays of love by cutesy couples, families stuffing themselves with copious amounts of chicken, and a veritable baggage train as people move to and from their holiday destinations.

But above all, have a merry Christmas!

Matthew is the culture editor here at Connect, and he is writing this little blurb in the third person, because he's cool like that. On relaxing evenings he likes nothing more than going for a run and then staying up really late proofreading articles and submissions to get the best possible magazine out every month. If you have something to say, let him know at connect.culture@ajet.net

To find out the different ways that ALTs celebrate the holiday season, I asked some of the writers here at Connect: "How are you going to celebrate Christmas in style?" Here's what they had to say:



"I will be relaxing on a beautiful beach in southern Cambodia with great people."

• Audrey Akcasu



"Going home for the holidays! I'll be celebrating in a well-insulated home while eating savory Kansas City-style BBQ."

• Dustin Henrich

"I will celebrate Christmas in style by spending time with my family back home, hopefully watching it snow, and definitely not eating KFC."

• Sarah Kniss



"I'm going back home to Halifax this winter. Looking forward to being in Canada after more than 2 years."

• Josiah David

"I'm going to make a turkey leg dinner for my boyfriend—who's never had turkey before, so hopefully everything goes well—and we're going to see the Christmas illuminations together."

• Melinda Lange



"My husband and I will make a big breakfast spread on Christmas morning, and in the afternoon we'll hop on a plane to Seoul to visit old friends."

• Kelly Merks

"Keeping in step with the romantic spirit of the Christmas holiday, I'll be heading to Osaka with my girlfriend to book the most ridiculous love hotel room possible. Fingers crossed for an alien spaceship."

• Tom Morin Robinson

"Straight after forgetting the past school year at my *bonenkai*, I'll be on a plane to New Zealand to drive around the islands, look at sheep, eat sheep, and meet my girlfriend's father. Wish me luck!"

• Steven Thompson



"Colonel Sanders" should not be the only Santa in your life during this Christmas season in Japan.

NO BOYS ALLOWED? THE GENDER DIVIDE IN JAPAN

Sophie Patterson, Miyazaki

Have you ever seen a special pink 'women-only' carriage on a subway and wondered what it was about? This month, Sophie Patterson digs into the background of this strange phenomenon and pokes into Japan's gender divide.

Last month, I left the fields and small-town gossip of my new home in Miyazaki and took a trip to Osaka. Making my way from the airport, the first thing in the big city that struck me was a train car plastered with pink signs reading 'Women Only.' I delightedly *Snapchatted* the new oddity to friends back home, but it wasn't until later that I began to consider the implications of the gender separation. Are these carriages a necessary evil in combating crime on the subway? Or are they simply an instance of an over-reaction to an issue?

Flower trains and wandering hands 女

Since the inception of widespread rail travel, Japanese policy has provisioned for the separation of men and women, whether for discouraging student lust in the 1910's or preventing children from being crushed during 1940's rush-hours. Gradually these *hansha densha* or 'flower trains' gave way to the use of priority seating, but in 2000, female-only carriages were introduced once again in Tokyo. They were launched in Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka in 2002 ¹, and by 2005, eight private Tokyo operators and two underground companies were using the carriages ².

But why, in this day and age, would the government reinstate a policy last implemented before women even had jobs to commute to? At first consideration, one is inclined to presume the policy revival is a measure taken against harassment of female passengers. The Metropolitan Police Department cited a rise in cases of groping or obscene conduct from 778 in 1996 to 2,201 in 2004 ³, while a survey in 2000 found that 17% of female passengers claimed to have been molested at least once by a *chikan* (痴漢, groper). ⁴

One explanation for the sharp increase of reported offenses is the widespread ownership of cellphones with camera and video capacities. Such devices allow women to easily report incidents and/or to take photos of their attacker. The ever-present shutter sound on Japanese smartphones is in fact a response to escalating unauthorized photography of women on the subway—particularly beneath their skirts. When measures like warning signs and plain-clothed police officers proved ineffective, female-only carriages were piloted.

There are people from both sides of the carriage doors who are in favor of the separation. Aside from enhanced feelings of security, some women attest to the joys of freedom from typically male smells. Men worried about being falsely accused of groping—and who could subsequently face imprisonment for up to seven years—are similarly supportive. However, the measure has not been without controversy. Many commuters object to being

crammed against fellow sweaty salary men while women ride in comfort, whereas mothers complain about being separated from their junior high-aged sons. Some women also worry that their presence in a mixed carriage will invite increased attention and the label of a 'willing victim'.

Separation and suspicion in society 女

One can argue that inter-gender tension is affecting other spheres of Japanese society. Indeed, the policy on trains has spread to other public spaces. The reasoning is more obvious in some instances than others: one can see why an all-girls sleeping-café might feel a little more wholesome than a mixed one. However, gender-separation in other venues has provoked accusations of discrimination.

In Taito City Library in Tokyo, 10 of 50 seats are reserved for women, while a co-ed university in Saitama Prefecture boasts a women-only café. Real estate agencies like Tokyo Girls Fudosan offer segregated apartments, and other companies provide services to 'transition' young women from the familial to the marital home in all-girls accommodation. One such business, *Lacine*, offers residents cooking classes, female-oriented workshops, and a beauty school. Discounts for women on *nomihodai* and cinema tickets are common, and exclusively female gyms, hotels, bars and even removal companies can also be found.

Is this, as lawyer Yukata Iwaki argues, running the "risk of breaching the laws of equality"? ⁵ It can be argued that maligning men as sex pests creates a somewhat hostile and unhealthy environment for modern gender relations. In Japan, 95% of people arrested sign confessions, and Japanese courts convict 99.9% of those who appear before them ⁶. Thus, when men stand accused of sexual crimes in an already suspicious climate, it threatens to ruin their lives regardless of veracity. There have even been incidences of suicide following false accusations of groping, such as the case of Shinsuke Harada in 2010.

In fact, Tokyo lawyer Takashi Nozawa advises against claiming innocence in court. He even suggests that the best way to avoid conviction is for accused men to flee the scene and not report the incident to police ⁷. Opponents of female-priority policy argue that it promotes a social atmosphere in which women are assumed to be unsafe around men, which could prove toxic to modern gender dynamics.

Gender relations in crisis? 女

Furthermore, it may be that special treatment of women in public spaces is a superficial band-aid for underlying structural gender inequality. The Global Gender Gap Report 2013 assessed gender equality across the world and ranked countries' performance in several categories, with 1 being 'most equal' and 4 being 'least equal'. Japan ranked 3 in education, and 4 in economic



A typical *hansha densha* sign



Women queueing for a Tokyo 'flower train'

participation, political empowerment, and 'overall gap' ⁸.

Ranked 105 out of 136 countries, it lagged behind China, India, most of South America, Russia, Uganda, and Kazakhstan. Indeed, despite the growing number of women attaining university degrees and beginning professional careers, 70% of women still quit their jobs after their first child ⁹.

Adding to this milieu of segregation and gender divides, is a very particular kind of dating world, in which 61% of unmarried men and 49% of women aged 18-34 are not in any kind of romantic relationship, with one study finding that one third of people under 30 have never dated at all ¹⁰. A 2010 survey found that 36% of Japanese males aged 16-19 had no interest in sex ¹¹. Foreign articles cover headline-grabbing phenomenon such as the rise of 'virtual girlfriends' on Nintendo Games like *Love Plus*, cuddle cafes where patrons can pay to stare lovingly into a stranger's eyes, or pay-by-the-hour girlfriends dressed as your favourite anime character. It seems that romantic relationships are increasingly being marketed into manageable chunks of intimacy, which can be purchased without the burden of a long-term commitment.

The way forward 女

Thus, rather than accusing men of suddenly increased sexual assault, or women of receiving preferential treatment, it may be more useful to view the issue in the context of evolving gender relations. Growing segregation in public spaces is taking place in an environment of persistent traditional gender roles, economic downturn and falling marriage rates. The most worrying problem arising from these factors is, of course, Japan's rapidly falling birth rate. Experts highlight the necessity of government programs to support families, improve employment conditions for young people, and help mothers to continue working while raising children.

The operation of the 'flower trains' ultimately relies on the cooperation and discretion of male passengers: it is not a legally enforceable rule. Female-only spaces are not the result of draconian governmental measures but of company request. If a man goes into one of these carriages, the most he will get are some angry stares, or a request to move to the cramped mixed carriage. That said, continuing to vilify men in this way will not improve dynamics between the genders, which are already rather strained.

Sophie Patterson is enjoying her first year as the youngest ALT in Miyakonojo shi, Miyazaki. She is deeply enthusiastic about taiko drumming, koi fish, whistling, and any bar in Japan where you actually have a good dance. You can follow her travels and mishaps at hansandpeter.blogspot.com

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Further Reading

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ENTERTAINMENT

EDITORIAL A Band Called Boris

It was over two decades ago in a Tokyo art school that students Takeshi (bass, guitar, vocals), Wata (guitar, vocals), and Atsuo (drums, vocals) shed their surnames and started their experimental rock band, *Boris*, "simply for the sake of having some fun."¹

Their journey began in 1992, in search of the wild lifestyle only a career in rock n' roll can provide. But as their collection of distortion pedals and absurdly large amplifiers grew, so too did their musical aspirations. "The exploration of pure sound"², as Boris loftily describes it, became the goal. While pure sound is a topic broached by sources as varied as introductory physics textbooks and the teachings of the Hindu goddess Parashakti, Boris' definition remains an elegant one: loud-ass guitar feedback. Nowhere is this philosophy more apparent than in their ear-splitting live shows. Ben Ratliff, reviewing one of their concerts for the New York Times, got it right: "In the end, well-handled, nearly unbearable volume was the show's ultimate meaning, its deep agenda."³

Indeed, loudness, feedback, and improvisation are ever-present at a Boris show, but when it comes to studio releases, each is a complete departure from the last. They've covered everything from doom metal to J-pop, and have been tagged by listeners with no less than 23 different genres (RYM). This incredible range is recorded on a wealth of EPs and 18 full-length albums, which were released across international labels like Southern Lord and Noble, as well as from their very own label, the humorously named Fangs Anal Satan. Depending on your tastes, the band has most certainly released several records you will love, and probably just as many you will hate. To make things a bit more bearable on anyone interested in checking out their daunting body of work, here is a brief overview of some of their more palatable albums:

Pink (2005) – One of the most well-regarded, accessible and just plain fun releases from Boris. Stripped down and amped up garage rock, it's been compared to old school Motörhead. Pink is a great introduction to the band, and a must for any rock n' roll fan that likes their music fast and loud.

Boris at Last – Feedback (2003) – Slow, lumbering, and monolithic are all adjectives frequently used to describe doom metal, and they fit this record to a T. The record is one very heavy



and deliberate jam, with, as you might guess from its title, a whole lot of feedback. Not to be taken lightly, it can be a difficult listen, but fans of doom and drone often consider it to be their best work.

Flood (2000) – A milder and more soothing record, Flood is one long piece broken into four parts. While not completely ready to shed their love affair with feedback and volume, the band takes a far more relaxed psychedelic turn. The record chronicles the birth, life, and death of a recurring guitar riff that gradually crescendos and fades away over the course of 70 minutes.

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...

Now that December has hit and going outside is simply no longer an option, there's nothing better than snuggling up close to your heat-generating item of choice and taking in a good film. Not sure what to watch? This month's edition of Connect's Entertainment section has you covered. You've almost certainly heard of Akira Kurosawa, perhaps the most famous film director in Japanese history, but if you've never taken the time to sit down and enjoy one of his wonderful films, Kagoshima JET Adam Carter is certain to persuade you with his review of the 1952 classic, *Ikiru*.

If serious cinema is not your cup of tea, Oita JET Adam Douglas gives you a wealth of more pulpy choices by selecting no-fewer-than five Japanese teen flicks from the unremembered 80s. If you're expecting the Japanese version of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, you'd better turn your Betamax off right now, because when the school girl assassins of 1987's *Sukeban DeKa* take the stage, playing hooky will be the least of their disciplinary code infractions.

If all this movie watching has left you inspired, you're in luck. This month, Yamaguchi JET David White tells us about the film he directed for the lucky students of Osaka and shares his top tips for creating a successful feature on a shoestring budget.

Finally, if you're a looking for some new tunes, you'd do well to check out my feature on the Japanese experimental rock band *Boris*, or catch a show from my December concert list below!



SPOTLIGHT

Entertainment Events in December

Toe

What: Spotlited in the last issue of Connect, Toe is a Japanese math rock band

When: December 2nd, 6 PM

Where: O-East, Shibuya, Tokyo. Access from JR Shibuya station

How much: 3,300 yen

Boris

What: Boris is spotlighted in this very issue, so go read all about this awesome band!

When: December 4th, 7 PM

Where: Unit, Daikanyama, Tokyo (19th and 20th). Access from JR Dome Mae station

How much: 5,000 yen

Perfume

What: If you're into J-pop these girls are doing some of the more interesting stuff around

When: December 7th at 5 PM, and 8th at 4 PM

Where: Kyocera Dome, Osaka. Access from JR Namba station

How much: 6,500 yen

The Pillows

What: One of Japan's well-established alt-rock bands, most famous for doing the soundtrack to the anime *FLCL*.

When: December 14th 6 PM

Where: Zepp Tokyo, Aomi, Tokyo. Access from JR Aomi station.

How much: 4,700 yen

Road to ULTRA Tokyo

What: One of the world's wildest and most popular electronic music festivals will soon bring its mayhem to Japanese shores.

Tickets are on sale for a December 20th show in Tokyo featuring some of the world's top superstar DJs including Above & Beyond. This one-night show is a lead-up to the three-day extravaganza scheduled for Seoul next June. Stay tuned for more info in Connect. (*from Adam Carter*)

When: December 20th, 7 PM to 6 AM

Where: Club Ageha, Shinkiba, Toyko. Access from JR Shinkiba station

How much: 8,500 yen



SAILOR SUITS AND MACHINE GUNS: JAPANESE TEEN MOVIES FROM THE 1980s

Adam Douglas, Oita

(1980), as well as oddballs like *Hausu* (1977). Although made quickly and cheaply (*Crazy Thunder Road* was made when the director was still in film school), these films helped break up the studios' lowest-common denominator schedules of yakuza flicks and triple-bill softcore. This new approach injected a youthful freshness into the studio roster that had been missing since the New Wave of the 1960s. By the early 1980s, movies featuring young protagonists were steadily being released, and the films began to reflect and affect the lives of Japan's teenagers.

Below, I've listed five Japanese teen films from the 1980s that are worth seeking out. Some are available for streaming online; otherwise check your local Japanese DVD stores. Unfortunately, English subtitles might not be easily sourced. Please note that this list has been purposely confined to live-action films, as 1980s anime, like *Akira* (1988) and *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), are much more widely known.

Sailor Suit and Machine Gun

Japanese Title: セーラー服と機関銃
Year Released: 1981

The two top-grossing domestic films of 1982 in Japan were both teen movies. Sitting pretty at the top of the heap was *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun*, a satire of yakuza films with the improbable premise of a high school girl taking over a yakuza family after her *oyabun* father passes away. This seems like the set-up for a good-girl-gone-bad story, but is actually developed into the relatable and universal theme of maturation and coming-of-age. Izumi, played by Hiroko Yakushimaru, remains reluctant to take the reins as the head of the family, and we see a girl hesitating on the cusp of adulthood. In the gangsters, we see a failing world of incompetent and infantilized men with no recourse but to turn to a schoolgirl to save them. This would become a larger theme in Japanese media in the 1990s through the magical *shojo* genre of anime. This film's success indicates that it resonated with the Japanese public; which at the time, was reeling from a loss of cultural identity due to decades of accelerated post-war economic development.



Exchange Students

Japanese Title: 転校生
Year Released: 1982

Director Nobuhiko Obayashi is probably best known in the West for his fever dream horror film *Hausu* (1977)—but if you've only seen this one film, you're missing out. Obayashi stayed within the confines of the teen film genre through most of the 1980s but he always managed to find a way to include his trademark visual



flair and love of the fantastic. *Exchange Students*, a body-switch comedy à la *Freaky Friday*, is no different. Kazumi and Kazuo are students who—thanks to a director with a wild imagination—somehow manage to switch bodies during a magic tumble down steep temple stairs. The humor is predictably body-oriented—these are teenagers after all—but it never gets crude or lewd. It's actually quite touching. The two leads are great as well, but Satomi Kobayashi handles her dual role perfectly, playing both tentative female and swaggering male effortlessly. Well worth seeking out.

Typhoon Club

Japanese Title: 台風クラブ
Year released: 1985

Of the films on this list, *Typhoon Club* is the only one that could be considered 'realistic' in its portrayals of teens. Although it's often called the Japanese *Breakfast Club*, it feels more like an indie film than a winking John Hughes-style flick. A group of junior high school students are trapped in their school overnight with no supervision during a typhoon. The depiction of the teenagers is honest and unflinching, and those working with young people may recognize their own students among the group. The film is enigmatic and avoids easy answers, and although the hairstyles betray the time period in which the film was made, the themes are timeless. (Available on YouTube with English subtitles at the time of writing.)



Be-Bop High School

Japanese Title: ビー・バップ・ハイスクール 高校と太郎哀歌
Year Released: 1985

A giant "regent" pompadour with the hairline shaved back with a straight razor. Baggy *bontan* pants. A modified school uniform jacket that drapes almost to the ground, decorated with embroidered *kanji*. This was the classic *yanki* look and it was popularized by *Be-Bop High School*, a film series based on the manga of the same name. Every boy who went to see this film came home and immediately combed his hair into a pompadour and practiced swaggering around his bedroom. This style is now so codified as that of the juvenile delinquent, that it still shows up as a parody in films and TV shows for a quick laugh.



The *Be-Bop High School* series follows the exploits of Hiroshi and Toru, high school students who like nothing more than fighting, swaggering around town, and showing off to Kyoko, the class good girl played by idol Miho Nakayama (who also conveniently sings the catchy theme song). The movie succeeds by being fast-paced, kinetic, and a lot of fun. It helps if you like to watch thugs brawling because there's a lot of that, and the fight scenes only get more elaborate as the series goes on.

It's hard to over-emphasize the importance of this series to Japanese popular culture. If you're at all curious about Japan's recent past, this film is a must.

Sukeban Deka

Japanese Title: スケバン刑事
Year Released: 1987

Witness the Japanese entertainment industry in full throttle. *Sukeban Deka* was part of a full-on media blitz designed to separate teens and parents from their hard-earned Bubble-Era yen. Originally a manga series from the late 70s, the story—about Yoko, a *sukeban* (juvenile delinquent girl) recruited into a group of schoolgirl assassins—was first adapted into a TV show and then spun-off into two movies. These spin-offs bridged the first two of three seasons and introduced new lead girls, all idols with their own recording contracts. The promotional efficiency of this machine would be worthy of admiration if it weren't so damn scary.



The premise is, of course, ludicrous. But you don't watch a movie about assassin schoolgirls for an intricate storyline. You watch it because the girls kick ass. And in that, *Sukeban Deka* certainly delivers. Neither man nor machine is impervious to their schoolyard weapons. There really is nothing like seeing a girl in a sailor suit uniform take down a helicopter with a yo-yo.

Adam Douglas is a second-year JET in Taketa, Oita and he wishes that Toho would hurry up and make another *Godzilla* movie because the American one is sure to get it wrong.



FILM REVIEW: IKIRU

Adam Carter, Kagoshima

Upon embarking on exciting new lives as English teachers in Japan, it is common to hear JETs explain how they feel they've taken control of their lives and are finally doing something they're passionate about. We JETs are fortunate. For many people mired in a dull existence, life grinds on in a fog of boredom. Only sometimes, a spark jolts these dreary souls out of their quagmire of tedium.

This is the theme Akira Kurosawa—perhaps Japan's most critically acclaimed film director—tackled in his 1952 classic *Ikiru*. The film's protagonist is Watanabe-san, a government bureaucrat that stamps document after document, without accomplishing anything of real value. As the narrator describes this aging widower at the beginning of the film, "he just drifts through life. In fact, he's barely alive." He has worked 30 years in an office whose stated purpose is to deal with public complaints, though all they really do is deflect disgruntled citizens to other departments. Within this Kafka-esque landscape, most bureaucrats accept their fate and bide their time to receive their paycheck and eventual government pension.

Watanabe-san may have continued this cycle of monotony, but upon being diagnosed with stomach cancer, he has an epiphany, realizing the meaninglessness of his life. With a newfound sense of urgency, he sets out to recapture his *Will to Live*, as the film is called in English.

I'm sure many of us have thought, "What would I do if I found out I had six months to live?"

After an unrewarding night partying with women and liquor, Watanabe encounters a woman from his office seeking his stamp for a document she needs. This woman represents the first spark, almost like Tinkerbell, that awakens Watanabe from his sadness. In her child-like joviality he finds solace and sets out to achieve something tangible in his remaining days. At this point, in one of many ingeniously crafted scenes, Kurosawa places our protagonist next to a woman celebrating her birthday; as the crowd sings "Happy Birthday", we realize the metaphor of Watanabe's 'rebirth'.

Since I'm urging you to watch this film, I will not give away Watanabe's accomplishments. But I will say that this film is one of the most inspirational, non-schmaltzy films ever made. It is easy to document the amazing achievements of a politician or an athlete, but seeing a common man seek and achieve meaning within the context of his own banal life provides the viewer with a life-affirming feeling of satisfaction.

This simple film, devoid of samurais, sweeping vistas or hero worship, may surprise many Kurosawa fans. The acclaimed



director applies some of his trademark techniques (such as the 'wipe') and incorporates themes such as Japan's reaction to modernization. Aided by the amazing performance of Takashi Shimura, who appeared in eleven of Kurosawa's movies, the director skillfully focuses on his main character using his masterful *mise-en-scène*.

Ikiru provides an insightful study of life in post-war Japan, and also raises pertinent questions about man's role in a truly modern society. At the beginning of the film, Watanabe laments, "I just can't die—I don't know what I've been living for all these years." Hopefully, this film will inspire all of us to take control of our lives, before it is too late.

[The film can be viewed on a free stream at www.gooddrama.net.]

Adam Carter (1st year ALT, Kagoshima) has been traveling, studying, working and gallivanting around the world for the past 17 years. Besides writing for newspapers and magazines, he has written several guidebooks. He insists it's not as glamorous a lifestyle as it sounds. Adam started his own non-profit called Cause & Affect Foundation, but this month he shows that having a father as a film professor and film critic pays dividends.



THE ALT CHRISTMAS MOVIE

David White, Yamaguchi

It's 4 PM on a Saturday and I'm running around Osaka Castle in broad daylight wearing a ninja costume, chasing a wizard and a panda. At 1 AM, the evil robot we made of cardboard is kidnapping Santa, while a gang of teenagers watch from the side with their camera phones. By 11 AM, there are a dozen ALTs in clashing costumes dancing "Gangnam Style" in the courtyard of our apartment building, much to the bemusement of our neighbours.

If making an ALT movie proved one thing to me, it's that you can get away with just about anything if you have a video camera and a boom mike following in your wake. Back before I was a JET, I thought that making a film, even a short one, required cash, expensive equipment and original ideas. However, after getting involved with the annual Osaka city ALT Christmas Movie, I've learned that all you really need is some time, a hunger for attention and the willingness to embarrass yourself in public. If you're an ALT, odds are you have all of those things already.

The origins of the Osaka movie lie back beyond the memory of any JET currently in the city. Six years ago, so the story goes, a few ALTs drank some beers and filmed themselves recreating the Nativity. Possessing no shame whatsoever, they showed it to their students to fill some class time, and lo, the tradition was born. There's been one every year since then, with the movies varying wildly each year depending on who decides to take the project on. Sometimes it's tightly scripted and painstakingly edited, other times it's more of an exercise in improvisation and mild blasphemy.

Last year I realised that the most reliable way of getting a good part was to write myself in, so I put together a script with my

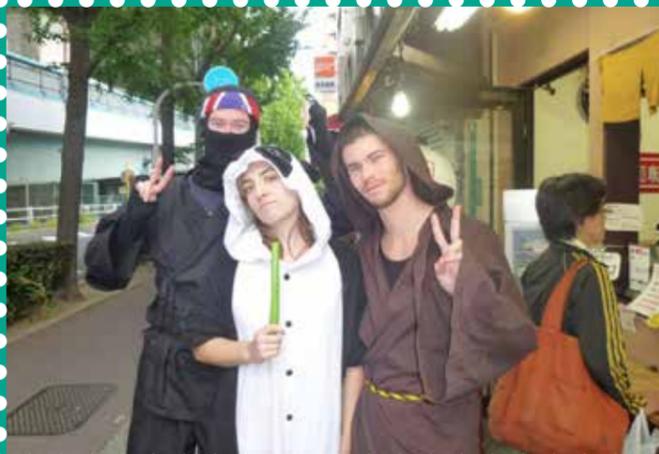
friends Whitney and Paul. It had been traditional in previous years to rip off some beloved Christmas tale, but we'd already done *The Grinch*, *A Christmas Carol* and the Nativity (twice). I thought we could remake *Die Hard*, but the schools had asked us to tone down the violence after last year's version of the Nativity, which had featured a lot more gunfire than I remembered as a child. We decided to do a vaguely original story, and settled on one about a robot kidnapping Santa and a Christmas wizard saving the day.

With the script done, we enlisted a dozen ALTs and settled on a weekend when everybody was fairly free. Thanks to an ambitious mix of day and night scenes and the many outdoor locations, the schedule stretched over a whole weekend in mid October, and was all shot around our neighbourhood in Osaka. Filming a 30 minute film in such a short space of time was stressful and exhilarating, with lots of headaches and little frustrations, as well as happy accidents and moments of inspiration. So, in the hopes of sparing any budding JET filmmakers out there from making the same mistakes we did, here are my seven simple rules for making a movie:

Think of the children

If you're making a movie to amuse your students, pitch it to their level and interests. Ours was for high-schoolers in Osaka, so we did our best to pack it with things we knew they liked. Namely, references to *takoyaki*, Osaka landmarks and robots, along with childish visual humour, exuberant dance numbers and, most importantly, ALTs speaking snatches of Japanese, wearing costumes and generally looking foolish, preferably in well populated areas.





Barry and his super friends Panda and Ninja



If we had a budget, this special effect would have blown it



Closing out the movie with Gangnam style



Setting up the takoyaki stall scene

Don't spend money

You don't have to splash out on fancy costumes and props. Ask around and you'll find that most people have a costume or two stashed away, though it may take some gentle persuasion for them to: a) admit they have it, and b) part with it for a few days. A quick trawl of our ALTs' futon cupboards turned up two Santa costumes, one ninja suit, a Jedi robe, a reindeer suit, a black body suit, as well as panda and *tanuki* onesies. For our villain, we borrowed some old cardboard boxes from our school and used spray paint and sticky tape to build a killer robot costume.

it's no harm to have someone who's good with cameras and computers. We were fortunate in Osaka to have Danny, who has a very expensive camera, a tripod and a microphone. He also had a suite of editing software that gave the finished product a sheen of professionalism and even some nifty special effects. We put in subtitles in English and Japanese, which was time-consuming, but meant we could show it to any ability level of students. Still, even if you don't have a Danny, you might be able to borrow some of your school's video equipment. It probably hardly gets used, and almost certainly not for something as worthy as an ALT movie.

together to pour our personalities into something that captures some of the fun we had back then.



"If making an ALT movie proved one thing to me, it's that you can get away with just about anything if you have a video camera and a boom mike following in your wake."



David White is a fourthyear ALT who transferred to Yamaguchi Prefecture from Osaka. He spends his spare time wondering where all the Starbucks went to, breathing the fresh air in confusion, and muttering darkly about 'the okonomiyaki being all different out here'. He keeps a blog at safariidave.blogspot.com



The fearsome cardboard robot who kidnapped Santa

Let cinema's rich history inspire you (meaning: don't be afraid to steal)

You needn't be particularly original with your plot or situations. Take bits from all the stories you love and mix them together. It's the sincerest form of flattery. If you're borrowing from Western films, chances are your students will be too young to remember them or won't have heard of them in the first place. Or you can play to the crowd. That's why we decided to make the star of our film a wizard named 'Barry' who has a kindly professor as a mentor, two super best friends to help him and a nemesis called 'Voltomort.'

Don't forget to dance

Everybody loves a coordinated dance routine, so in a shameless attempt to win over our students, we had the cast and crew learn the moves to "Gangnam Style" and dance at the end credits. Just make sure everybody involved knows the dance beforehand or you'll spend a lot of time on the day practising and sweating in your heavy costume. Also, try not to film it in front of your apartment block like we did. The neighbours never looked at us the same way after that.

Put pen to paper

We all love to improvise, but it's best to put together a script beforehand. It'll cut down on timewasting on filming day and give you a chance to polish your jokes. You can always change it on the fly when you're filming. It'll help you put together a shooting schedule too, so you can shoot all the scenes that happen in one location in the same go. It also allows you to group the scenes of minor characters together so people can shoot and leave. Even saintly ALTs can turn nasty when that last shot you want to get is holding them back from going to the pub.

Teach them a lesson

Build a class around your movie. We used it for our final Christmas lessons before the winter break. We made a worksheet with questions about the film, screened it, and then got them talking about it. A word of warning though: run the whole movie idea past your school first. It's no good finishing it and finding out that your school doesn't have time to show it, or it's too violent or difficult for the students.

Befriend a technical wizard

You could shoot the whole thing on any old video camera, but

I watched the film again before I wrote this. A year later, I groan a little at the continuity errors, plot holes and the costume that's clearly just curtains. Mostly, though, it brings back a lot of memories of friends who've left Japan now, of classes I don't teach anymore, and of a neighbourhood that was my home for three years. Bittersweet as that is, it makes me glad we all came

FASHION & BEAUTY

EDITORIAL The Love-Hate Relationship with Christmas Sweaters

Whether handknit by Grand-aunt Judy or purchased from a trendy Shibuya store, let's agree that sweaters look great and keep you warm as the year comes to a close. I spied some lovely patterns and colours at vintage stores in Harajuku as jazzy Christmas tunes tinkled in the background. Despite growing up in the tropics, I've always liked Christmas sweaters—first seen on TV and in the movies, and then when staying with relatives in Boston and London—and was a little disappointed to not find any with huge Santa faces and merry reindeer in Japanese department stores (there was plenty of stylish, cutesy and on-trend winter-wear though).

So I was delighted to know that Connect's Culture editor Matthew Jones is an ugly sweater connoisseur. He says: "In Ireland, at events, there will often be prizes given for the best (or worst) looking jumper. Last year, my family, reminding me of home, sent me a jumper with a 3-D Christmas tree on it. English lessons were put on hold as students stared in awe at my Christmas Jumper. Teachers were confused by the jingling of my socks as I walked by (they had bells on them). I think ugly Christmas jumpers are by no means a bad thing and excited that I've been promised an even uglier one this year. The misshapen reindeer represent its handmade qualities, the interesting colour combinations guarantee that you'll stand out in a crowd, and the extra-bagginess? Well, that just means there's more room for a gut-busting Christmas meal!"



Elizabeth Fortnum, an ALT living in Kushiro, Hokkaido is pictured here in a sweater her mother knitted with The Snowman as inspiration (from the 1982 film adaptation of the children's picture book). Elizabeth says the handmade variety is extra-special because it is a physical representation of time and love from the giver to the recipient. She wouldn't mind forest scenes, snowy mountains or lit-up shop windows going round her arms and torso since Christmas sweaters generally make people happy.



Indeed, taken in the right spirit, Christmas sweaters can provide hilarious photo opportunities and heart-warming shared memories, whether at massive family gatherings or joke office parties. They've gotten a bit of a makeover with modern designs and muted, tasteful colours now available, but for those interested in the real deal, Matt notes that there are online stores specializing in truly hideous jumpers. I plan to have a Christmas Day cookout with my loved ones right here in Japan. Hopefully I can convince them to don festive woolies, since I already have a garish one picked out...

Send us photos of your Christmas sweaters or glamorous cocktail party attire! connect.fashion@ajet.net

THIS MONTH IN FASHION AND BEAUTY...

I can't quite believe it's December!

In this month's editorial, we discuss Christmas sweaters (or jumpers to folks in the UK). Hands up if you (grudgingly? enthusiastically? secretly?) admit they're part of holiday cheer!

Sharp dresser and sneaker aficionado Geoff Wen is happy to share his style tips in JET Spotlight.

With what feels like an unprecedented coldfront sweeping our way, it's definitely time to organise your winter wardrobe, if you haven't already. Josiah David tells us his thoughts and tactics on keeping your closet in order.

Finally, a lovingly-researched beauty article by Erika Ehren promises to answer all the burning questions you have about BB and CC creams. I've been using them on-and-off since 2007...see if she can make you a convert!

We hope you enjoy reading these articles as much as we had fun working on them. Enjoy the winter holidays!



SPOTLIGHT



Geoff Wen, Eye-Opening Idol

This month, the Spotlight falls on Geoff Wen, a third-year ALT in Shiga. He recently picked up baking, and keeps busy lifting weights, showing off his moves on the dance floor, and perusing GQ for style inspiration.

Geoff loves...

- ♥ Sneakers and beautiful shoes
- ♥ The suits that Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Ryan Gosling, and Michael Fassbender are often seen wearing
- ♥ The flair that Macklemore and Kid Cudi bring to the game
- ♥ Experimenting with fashion—he's currently enjoying his on-and-off love affair with burgundy and maroon

According to Geoff, shopping in Japan is awesome because...

- ♣ Many stores offer free alterations when you purchase pants.
- ♣ Uniqlo may have become ubiquitous, but it's hard to beat their staples.
- ♣ High-street brand Topman makes affordable and trendy outerwear.
- ♣ Small thrift stores in Kyoto offer hidden gems for fashionistas wanting to express themselves.
- ♣ Shirts and suits fit like a dream, and look custom made!

Style tips for fellow JETs...

1. Fit is important, regardless of the season. Look for well-cut attire and streamlined combinations.
2. Make outfits 'pop' by adding fun and personalized details—show off a little sock color, throw on a silk tie, look for shirts with subtle but interesting prints, or wear a stunning timepiece!
3. A simple but effective layering combination looks like this: heat tech layer, nice collared shirt, V-neck sweater, spiffy jacket. And of course, a suit and tie combo can never go wrong, whatever the occasion!



SPRING-CLEANING YOUR CLOSET (IN WINTER)

Josiah David, Yamanashi

An old friend of mine once said that a good restaurant boasts a menu composed of a concise list of signature dishes. If this analogy is applied to your wardrobe, it can be argued that excessive clothing options can result in a sloppy overall presentation. Think of an organized, carefully curated wardrobe as your visual resume. Like any good resume, seasonal updates will keep you prepared for sartorial success.

Springtime may be the proverbial season of new beginnings, but there's plenty to do wardrobe-wise before then. Whether this is your first or fifth year in Japan, the fall/winter season is when your calendar of professional, social, and extra-curricular engagements begins to fill up, and daily life takes on—or regains—a measure of predictability. It's also when you get an idea of your wardrobe's potential and limitations.

Making an effort to organize your closet between seasons—especially before the holidays' taxing schedule of events—is a game-changer. It sets the tone for the coming months and gives you a laundry list (pun intended) of the gaps in your professional and social dress options. As a bonus, getting in the habit of knowing what you own and rotating through the available pieces allows you to budget for staying on trend.

YouTube and Pinterest are great places to glean inspiration for DIY projects that maximize storage in accordance to your taste, budget, and available space. If you're like me and hate organizing, cleaning or overthinking, then the suggestion of taking time to pack and tidy your closet probably won't resonate much. Speaking from personal experience however, let me assure you that the initial effort—or pain, in some instances—of taking inventory of your wardrobe and planning individual outfits, can be a tremendously entertaining project which also provides immediate reward and catharsis.

Convinced that your closet requires an 'autumn'-clean? Read on for my own post-cleaning revelations, as well as my favorite tips from the web:

1. Love fashion but hate shopping? Knowing *exactly* what you need and having a ballpark budget makes every trip to the department store a success, even for in-and-out types.
2. If you enjoy browsing, taking reconnaissance trips will give you ideas about new threads—which can serve as that last nudge you need to say *sayonara* to dated or shabby pieces.
3. Rediscover the simple joy brought by new towels, socks, and intimates as you filter out the worn-and-torn.
4. Creative types will find excuses to see possibility in junk. Breaking news! There's a good chance it's just junk. If you find yourself trying to justify keeping something; that's a red flag that it needs to go.
5. No need for a closet overhaul, but everyone should develop a critical eye. Laundry hurricanes will diminish in frequency.
6. You'll gain a better understanding of the key pieces you already own, and will feel better about shopping for new threads.

Josiah David is a third-year JET living in downtown Kofu. Graduating with an honors degree in Art History, his area of specialization is Japanese contemporary art and fashion.



THE ABCs OF BB AND CC CREAMS

Erika Ehren, Fukushima

Seeing drugstore aisles filled with different kinds of BB creams might have led you to wonder: what exactly *is* BB cream? The short answer is that the BB cream family includes “blemish balm,” “blemish base” and in Western markets, “beauty balm”. Their names may be slightly different, but they serve the same function of being a sort of magic cream that is a primer, moisturizer, skin brightener, and sometimes anti-aging cream rolled into one. Over the course of cosmetic companies improving or tweaking formulas to meet the needs of consumers, BB creams have changed the way many ladies approach make-up.



The original BB cream was developed in 1967 by German dermatologist, Dr. Christine Schrammek. She used the cream to treat patients who had undergone cosmetic procedures such as skin peeling and laser surgery. Dr. Schrammek's BB cream soothed, protected and regenerated skin cells while also covering up the redness and imperfections left behind by cosmetic procedures. The original formula was part ointment, part treatment cream, and part makeup. It was a powerhouse of a product that concealed as it healed, all the while giving the wearer a natural radiant finish. The Schrammek Blemish Balm was only available under prescription and wasn't launched commercially until 1985, when Dr. Schrammek herself introduced it in Korea and Japan, along with a host of other cosmeceuticals she had developed. In

fact, the original formula that launched the BB cream craze is still available on Dr. Schrammek's site!

Although they have only gained popularity in Western markets in recent years, BB creams have been popular in Asia for a long time. When BB creams were first introduced in South Korea, television and movie actresses began using the creams for their healing and beautifying properties, especially after having cosmetic procedures. Still, it wasn't until ten or twelve years ago when popular South Korean stars started publicly attributing their flawless complexions to their diligent use of BB creams that this particular beauty craze was born. Widely-touted to have magical properties that guaranteed beautiful skin, Korean cosmetic companies cashed in on the trend with effective marketing campaigns

and a race to develop blemish balms that could address every skin woe. Today, skincare and cosmetic companies such as Skinfood, Dr. Jart, Skin79 and Missha can be found all over Korea and Taiwan. These multi-million dollar companies have expanded their range of products and diversified into overseas markets.

BB creams have since become full-fledged multi-purpose beauty products. The original formula was much thicker than the lightweight, fluid BB creams now being sold, because they contained ingredients that promoted skin healing, such as shea butter and licorice extract. As BB creams transitioned from dermatological to cosmetic products, the list of ingredients

changed, with the intense marketing competition prompting formulas to go from 4-in-1 to 10-in-1. In addition to controlling acne/redness while working as concealers, whitening ingredients and sun protection were added.

Another change to take note of is the trend towards organic BB creams. BB creams, with their long list of ingredients, often contain potential skin irritants such as silicones, fragrances, talc, and parabens and there's been a recent shift toward a "green" ingredient list. However, the silicones remain, since that's what makes color pigments spread evenly across your skin and keeps makeup long-lasting. Silicones also help to smoothen out imperfections such as acne scars or large pores. After all, dewy skin from a tube is the selling point of most BB creams.

Recently, CC creams ("Color Corrective" or "Complexion Corrector" creams) have hit the market, with the same benefits for your skin, in a more lightweight formula. This allows for a smoother application and a matt finish, but CC creams tend to work better when used as a primer, rather than as a replacement for foundation. Today, BB and CC creams represent a significant percentage of the cosmetic markets in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong, and are gradually winning over fans in North America and Europe. Even Chanel has its own CC cream!



So how do these creams purportedly help your skin? Many promise to protect, hydrate, repair, brighten, even out skin tone, smooth out wrinkles, reduce shine and are non-comedogenic (meaning that it doesn't clog pores), with a high sun protection factor (SPF 30 and above).

There is a plethora of BB and CC creams to choose from. Many offer sun protection, others are moisturizing, some offer skin whitening or mattifying formulations, some claim anti-aging properties while others tout the goodness of botanical extracts or cutting-edge research. With prices ranging from ¥1,000 to ¥8,000 and upwards, here're some tips to aid you when it comes to buying and applying your first BB or CC cream:

Do your research!

BB and CC creams come in fewer shades than conventional foundations, so be prepared to test out a few brands before you find the right one. Don't commit without first checking the shade and coverage! Read or watch online reviews from shoppers and beauty bloggers.

Less is more!

In the case of both BB and CC creams, bear in mind the old adage "less is more". Squeeze a coin-sized amount (that's all you need!) onto your fingertips and allow your body heat to warm the mixture. This will help the product be spread and absorbed more evenly onto your skin. Apply the cream primarily on five areas—forehead, both cheeks, nose, and chin—and then lightly dab over your eyelids. Gently massage the cream into each area, removing any excess balm by dabbing with a tissue afterwards. Tip: You can use CC cream to replace primer and BB cream in place of foundation.

Be patient!

When testing either BB or CC cream, wait for at least 15 minutes before assessing whether it matches your skin tone. Like perfume, the formula takes a bit of time to settle on your skin.

It's not just for the ladies!

If you think that BB and CC creams can only be used by the fairer sex, you stand (color) corrected! BB and CC creams are so lightweight that others can't tell you're wearing them. Many contain sunscreen and help even out your skin tone, so why not consider incorporating them into your daily grooming routine? P.S. There are BB creams made specifically for men now!

Erika's suggestions:

Note: Items can be purchased at drugstores, high-end department stores such as Isetan or online from sites like amazon.co.jp

If you have a tendency to break out, Dr. Jart+ Water Fuse Beauty Balm and Boscia BB Cream SPF 27 are the least likely to cause an outbreak. If products with silicone tend to break trigger acne, try Omorovicza Complexion Perfector BB Cream.

If you have especially sensitive skin, Boscia BB Cream SPF 27 reduces redness with willow herb extract and jojoba leaf. For those with rosacea, a cream with niacinamide (Vitamin B3), like Dr. Jart+ Renewalist BB Beauty Balm is a good choice.

If you have oily skin, Missha Perfect Cover BB Cream makes a great addition to your morning makeup routine. Missha BB products often have slower oxidation, more coverage, and higher SPF, making them great overall BB creams. Both Missha and Dr. Brandt also have products that help keep a shiny nose or forehead at bay, M Vita BB Cream (Matte) and Dr. Brandt BB Matte with Signature Shinerase respectively. In the muggy heat of Japanese summers, mattifying formulas soon become your best friend!

If you have a natural tan, Dr. Brandt Signature Flexitone BB Cream is a good choice, and works well with uneven skin tones too. Google Dr. Brandt and Embryolisse for more options.

If you're looking for sun protection, Some good ones to try are Dr. Jart+ Premium Beauty Balm SPF 45 or the popular Japanese brand for its Pore Putty BB Cream SPF 50. Unlike many Japanese and Korean brands, Sana Pore Putty isn't overly pale, but it has more of a yellow undertone, so I wouldn't recommend it for anyone with pink undertones.

If you're looking for a BB or CC cream that's vegan-friendly or cruelty-free, try derma e Evenly Radiant BB crème. Not only is the formula suitable for vegans and cruelty-free, it is paraben-free, phthalate-free, and contains no sodium lauryl sulfates, petrolatum, mineral oil or artificial colors. And if that isn't impressive enough, their entire line is also manufactured with wind energy!

If you're a guy looking for a good BB cream, The Face Shop Magic Cover BB Cream SPF 20 or Samurai Hearts Men's BB Cream SPF 20 are lightweight and moisturizing, especially helpful in winter when dry skin starts to flake.

Fash Ed's tip: Skinfood offers a massive range of products—derived from fruits and vegetables—that provide good coverage and keep your skin looking dewy at affordable prices.



When Erika Ehren isn't scavenger hunting around the castle grounds of Tsurugajo looking for hidden crosses in the dead of night (there was a Christian lord who carved 40+ crosses all over the castle grounds, but alas she's only been able to find 3!), you can find her with her nose in a book or plunking away on her school's grand piano. This 3rd-year ALT loves having visitors over and showing anyone and everyone the best of amazing Fukushima, so if you're ever out her way, be sure to get in touch!



FOOD

EDITORIAL A Glimpse at the History of Christmas Food in Japan

by Ariane

Why, hello there dear Connect readers, and season's greetings to you all! If you check out last year's December issue, you'll find Xan's illuminating article on *osechi ryori*, Japan's traditional New Year's cuisine. I figured that investigating the history of Japanese Christmas food traditions, though not as 'traditional', would also be worthwhile!

The wish for Japanese to celebrate Christmas came from "Japan's desire to be accepted in international society,"¹ according to German Japanologist Claus Kracht. Today, even more so than in other countries, Christmas in Japan is generally not celebrated as a religious affair, but rather has its roots in pure commercialism and marketing. Also different from the Western viewpoint of Christmas being a time to come together and celebrate as a family, Christmas Eve in Japan is regarded as more of a romantic holiday. For this reason, many couples will make reservations at nice restaurants for the special night. For the rest, eating a bucket of chicken with family on Christmas Eve is common. So how did the custom of eating fried chicken on Christmas come to be, anyway?

According to some sources, American military personnel found themselves at a Tokyo KFC outlet on Christmas day some 40-odd years ago, and after lamenting that turkey was not available, they explained to the clerks that chicken was the next best thing². Apparently, this was the catalyst for KFC launching their successful 'Christmas = Kentucky' campaign in the mid-70s, with the first Christmas set meal of chicken and wine released in 1974³. Colonel Sanders dressed as Santa greeting patrons at the storefront completed the effect. Never missing out on trends inspired by the West, Japanese people flocked to get their buckets of chicken on Christmas Eve. It became so popular, in fact, that today it's often necessary to order your meal months in advance⁴. For those of you wondering, KFC's online menu shows that this year's basic family set is priced at 3,980 yen for an 8-piece chicken bucket, a Christmas salad, a chocolate nut cake and a commemorative KFC Christmas plate.

So where does 'Christmas cake' come in? The tradition of eating strawberry shortcake topped with whipped cream and a sugary

Santa figurine can be traced back to 1910, when the confectionary chain Fujiya started selling their creamy Christmas cakes from a trendy Ginza department store⁵. Interestingly, production of these first cakes was intended for foreigners living in Yokohama rather than for Japanese⁶. This 'tradition' didn't reach beyond Tokyo's wealthiest inhabitants until post-war economic restoration, when it attained its current level of popularity⁷. Today, people can still buy Christmas cakes at grocers, department stores, and pastry shops across the country—again, provided they are ordered well in advance. In fact, Fujiya still sells the popular confections! Many are decorated with the adorable Peko-Chan character, which was also created by the confectionary chain decades ago. Leave it up to Japan to turn Christmas into a cutesy affair!

Tell us your food stories at connect.food@ajet.net

Sources

¹ [Web log message]. (2007, December 18). Retrieved from <http://educationinjapan.wordpress.com/homeschooling-afterschooling/christmas-traditions-in-japan/>

² Fujita, A. (2010, December 20). [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/World/move-santa-claus-kfcs-colonel-sanders-signals-christmas/story?id=12437818>

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⁴ Kahle, L., & Kim, C. (2006). *Creating images and the psychology of marketing*. (pp. 55-56). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

⁵ [Web log message]. (2010, September 09). Retrieved from <http://www.nic-nagoya.or.jp/en/e/archives/610>

THIS MONTH IN FOOD...

Hello food lovers! We have a smashing line up of hunger-inducing articles for you this issue. First off we have my editorial, where you will learn about Japanese Christmas food traditions and the brilliant marketing behind them. In Spotlight we have Nick Powers, mild-mannered super-baker, who also covers all our pastry-based bases with some holiday sweet treat recipes!

You can then get your vegan guilt-free grub on by checking out a plant-based holiday recipe collaboration put together by Saitama's Ari Fischer and myself. Worried about where to get certain ingredients? No need! We got you covered with detailed information on where to obtain the harder-to-find items.

You should then check out which Western foods with a Japanese twist make JETs all over the country exclaim 'UMAI!' and 'OISHII!' We're always looking for new writers and fresh food ideas! Don't hesitate to contact my partner-in-crime Xan and myself, Ariane, at connect.food@ajet.net to tell us what's good.



SPOTLIGHT

Nick Powers, Baking Pioneer, Toaster Oven Titan!

Nick Powers, a first-year ALT in Takamatsu City, Kagawa prefecture, never set out to be a baking aficionado. In fact, his introduction to the baking world is so recent, he can trace the exact moment to five years ago, when a teacher recommended him the book *Julie and Julia*. Intrigued at the idea of one person cooking their way through an entire cookbook in one year, Nick decided he'd take a shot at it, too. However, his path was a sweeter one: he decided to complete a book of 200 different baked dessert recipes. One year later, he had successfully completed his book, but not without a disaster or fifteen—in Nick's own words, "it was hell!" Post-challenge, and once again encouraged by his teacher, he created his blog "Bakefails", to learn from his mistakes—and document the successes! Here in Japan, Nick is still baking up a storm, making people birthday cakes, and exploring sweet new territory—like toaster oven baking! His self-adapted toaster oven cookies and cakes are the star of the show in this month's Connect magazine, and he's always ready to try out new recipes! Check out his blog at <http://bakefails.blogspot.jp/> to learn more about Nick's latest bakescapades!





A VEGAN HOLIDAY COOKING SPECIAL

Ari Fischer (Saitama) and Ariane Bobiash (Tokushima)



Ari's plate of holiday deliciousness

Japan. This collection includes three main dishes, several side dishes and a dessert. Enjoy, and Happy Holidays!

Pearl Couscous & Veggie Sauté – Ari

While not a traditional holiday meal, during the holidays you really need a main course that is flavorful and filling. For me, couscous with sautéed vegetables always does the job. All you need is an assortment of your favorite vegetables (I like mushrooms, spinach, and peppers, but some pre-steamed *kabocha* or sweet potato would also be a nice addition), olive oil, and pearl couscous (also called Israeli couscous). First, cook the couscous in a separate pot according to package instructions. Then, as the couscous is finishing cooking, begin sautéing the vegetables. Just before they are fully cooked, add the couscous to the pan and stir it around so that it gets coated in olive oil and the flavor of the vegetables. And if you want an extra kick of flavor, add some chili pepper or chili oil! You'll end up with a hearty, nutritious meal that will fill you up.

Ingredients to Order/Substitute:
Pearl couscous: iherb.com (Rice Select Tricolor Pearl Couscous)

Red Curry with Vegetables – Ari

This is another flavorful meal that's a perfect main course for any holiday season. This recipe incorporates traditional holiday veggies like sweet potatoes and green beans, but since these veggies are in a rich coconut curry, it will help add some unusual flavor to a holiday feast.

Recipe: CLICK HERE
Ingredients to Order/Substitute:
Light coconut milk: iherb.com (Edward & Sons Organic Light Coconut Milk)
Red curry paste: store.alishan.jp
Vegetable broth: iherb.com (make with vegetable bullion)

Vegan Gravy – Ari

Gravy is, to me, the ultimate maker of holiday feasts. Without

it, food can seem dry and just too plain for over-indulgent celebrations. Luckily, VegWeb's 'I Can't Believe It's Vegan Gravy!' recipe is exceptional. There are four ingredients which might be difficult for you to find in Japan, depending on where you live: vegetable bullion cubes, nutritional yeast, mustard, and vegan butter. Below, you can see where to find them!

Recipe: CLICK HERE

Ingredients to Order/Substitute:

Vegetable bullion: iherb.com
Mustard: import shops, iherb.com, yoyomarket.jp (be careful—many Japanese brands contain pork extracts)
Nutritional yeast: iherb.com
Vegan butter: the Japanese brand Soken makes a dairy-free margarine available at health food stores or at store.alishan.jp. You can also substitute with canola oil.
 (**Side note from Ariane: Gravy mix and cranberry sauce are both available on iherb.)

Vegan Mashed Potatoes – Ari and Ariane

Mashed potatoes are fairly self-explanatory and are an integral part of a holiday meal. For mashed potatoes, you can use olive oil as a butter substitute, the taste is different, but still serves to moisten mashed potatoes and fill them with rich flavor. Ariane likes to make mashed potatoes with Soken's non-dairy margarine mentioned earlier, unaltered soymilk (the ones with the cream-colored packaging in Japanese grocery stores) with dried garlic and parsley. Use sweet potato or a mix of the two if you wish to spice things up.

Recipe: CLICK HERE

Feeling lazy? Buy Edward & Son's Instant Mashed Potatoes on iherb.com, and add soymilk.

Vegan Cornbread – Ari

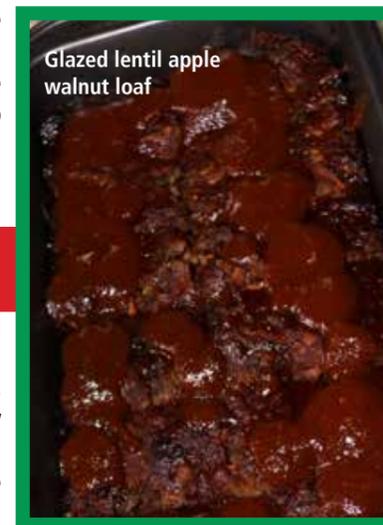
There are several types of vegan cornbread mixes available for purchase online. Yum!

Ingredients You'll Need to Find/Substitute:

Cornbread Mix: iherb.com (I personally recommend Bob's Red Mill Cornbread Mix)
Egg: Use Ener-G Egg Replacer, available on iherb.com
Topping: Instead of butter, use the vegan gravy recipe above to moisten up your corn bread.

Glazed Lentil Walnut Apple Loaf – Ariane

For most of my Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners celebrated in Canada over the past five years or so, *tofurkey* replaced the traditional turkey or ham holiday meal centerpiece. I know, I know, *tofurkey* just sounds like



Glazed lentil walnut loaf

a horrible vegan joke but I promise—vegans and omnivores alike love it! Alas, no matter how hard I searched the interweb, it seemed unlikely I would be able to procure it in Japan. But fear not! This lentil-walnut loaf makes for a great hearty main for any holiday meal and goes wonderfully with gravy and cranberry sauce.

Recipe: CLICK HERE

Ingredients You'll Need to Find/Substitute:

Lentils: iherb.com, store.alishan.jp, indojin.jp
Ground flax: iherb.com or use egg replacer ordered for previous recipe as a binder instead
Oat flour: grind oats into flour using a food processor, or use regular all-purpose flour



Pumpkin chocolate chip bread



Preparing the pumpkin chocolate chip bread

Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Bread – Ari

Pumpkin is one of my favorite fall vegetables. This sweet bread requires no eggs (since pumpkin works to add plenty of moisture), and is very simple. Just make sure that you cook it long enough! When I made it I noticed that much of the top and center—the places furthest from heat—still needed a bit more cooking (see photos for reference). So, cook it longer than the suggested time if you need!

Recipe (ignore the cook time, as this is for a bread, not muffins):
 CLICK HERE

Ingredients You'll Need to Find/Substitute:

Canned Pumpkin: iherb.com, yoyomarket.jp (Stokely's Canned Pumpkin), amazon.co.jp (Sokely's Pumpkin Paste)
Chocolate Chips: yoyomarket.jp (Kirkland Chocolate Chips), iherb.com (Enjoy Life mini-chips)

Ariane Fischer is a 1st-year ALT living and working in Saitama-ken, Japan. Her main interests are reading, travelling, fashion, and taking obnoxious photographs of everything she eats, much to the horror of all of her Facebook friends. She has been vegetarian for 11 years, and wants to experience the food cultures of other countries as much as possible (with some necessary substitutions), and share what she's learned along the way with others.



BAKING UNCONVENTIONALLY

Nick Powers, Kagawa

My apartment is the size of my toilet. And my toilet, coincidentally, is also the size of my toilet. Naturally, a western-sized convection oven wouldn't fit, so in September, I bought my first ever toaster oven. Previously, I'd only ever used toasters for burning toast, but for the past few months, I've also learned how to burn cookies, cakes, and even chocolate pudding.

I can fit one muffin in this oven, two if I'm crafty. It took me many attempts to find the correct batch size, which is minuscule compared to most standard recipes. When using a toaster oven, assume from the start that you'll need to cut the recipe, or bake in multiple batches. It's good practice to make a test batch to make sure it works out, and to avoid wasting ingredients. Generally, what works for the recipe author might not work for you and your toaster.

The first cake I baked rose until it touched the roof of the oven. I'm still not sure why this happened, but my best guess is that I must have used too much baking powder. In addition to my rising issues, the outside baked too quickly, so when I stuck a toothpick in to test it, the unbaked insides spilled out all over the heating element. Fortunately, my apartment doesn't have a smoke alarm. I've already broken my fair share of smoke alarms while attempting to make croissants.

However, when my cakes are misbehaving, I find salvation in cookies. Cookies are more forgiving in the toaster oven. They don't rise as much as cake or bread; they're smaller, so you can use a higher temperature/strength setting, resulting in a shorter bake time; and you can generally underbake them, as they'll firm up while they cool.

Finally, once whatever you're making goes into the oven, you need to figure out the right setting. My oven uses watts instead of degrees (strength versus temperature) and ranges from about 100 to 1,000 watts. For toast and small cookies (toasted for 2-3

minutes) I find that 1,000 watts works best, while I've discovered that 300-500 watts is the safest setting for cakes (erring on the lower side). However, every toaster oven is undoubtedly different, so it's up to you to choose a setting. Toast your creation a few minutes (5-10 should do), check the pastry, and adjust to find the right length of time.

Especially for this festive season, included below are some tried and true toaster oven recipes—but they'll work just fine in a conventional oven, too. Try them out, and tell me what you think. Maybe you'll be a toaster oven convert, too!

Powers Family Butter Crispies



Peanut butter crispies, the perfect moreish snack

This is a family recipe from my mother's side. We make these every December, and decorate them with our favorite frosting. They should be somewhat thin, golden brown (not too dark), and a little soft. Recipe makes about a dozen.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup (100 g) unsalted butter, softened
- ¾ cup (180 g) confectioner's sugar
- 1 egg
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 ½ cup (240 g) flour
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

Cream butter, and gradually add sugar, mixing constantly. Beat in egg until smooth. Add vanilla, and mix well. Combine flour, baking soda, and salt in a separate bowl, and then blend gradually into wet batter. Chill dough for a few hours, or overnight.



Spread one with peanut butter to double up on the pb flavor!

On a well-floured surface, roll dough flat (and very thin) and cut as desired. Toast for 5-7 minutes at 300 watts (about 200°C for 5-10 minutes in a convection oven), until the edges turn just a little brown. Allow to cool, and serve.

Cocoa Peppermint Cookies



These cocoa peppermint cookies guarantee a little Christmas in your mouth!

Adapted from Cocoa Marmalade Cookies, from *Mainichi Tabetai Gohan no you na Kukki to Bisuketto no Hon (Cookies and Biscuits I want to eat every day like a meal)*, by Mashiho Takashi. Yields 12-16 cookies.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup (80 g) flour
- 20 grams cocoa powder
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 20 grams brown sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon peppermint liqueur
- ½ cup chocolate chips

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Directions:

Combine flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, brown sugar and salt in a medium bowl. Beat in the vegetable oil and peppermint liqueur one at a time, until smooth. Fold in chocolate chips.



Try them with a cup of eggnog for double decadence!

Make small cookies (roughly 2-tablespoon-sized scoops of dough) on the pan, and toast at 300 watts for 7-10 minutes (170°C for 30 minutes in a convection oven), until dry and slightly firm. Allow to cool, and serve.

Vegan Ginger-Molasses Cookies



Ginger-mollasas cookies are prone to heated romances. Bakers beware.

Adapted from Honey Ginger Cookies, from *Mainichi Tabetai Gohan no you na Kukki to Bisuketto no Hon (Cookies and Biscuits I want to eat every day like a meal)*, by Mashiho Takashi. Yields 16-20 small cookies.

Ingredients:

- 80 grams flour
- 20 grams whole wheat flour
- 30 grams brown sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 2 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoon dark molasses
- 1 tablespoon grated ginger

Directions:

Combine flours, sugar, and salt, and mix thoroughly. Beat in the vegetable oil, molasses, and ginger until fully combined.

Roll the dough onto a lightly floured surface, until relatively thin. Cut cookies out and place on a baking pan covered in parchment paper. Toast at 300 watts for 5-7 minutes (170°C for 25 minutes in a convection oven), until lightly browned and dry. Allow to cool, and serve.

FOOD

JET AND JAPAN'S FOOD TWISTS!

With its signature buckets of KFC chicken and huge strawberry cream cakes, we all know Japan has a very different take on the Christmas dinner. But the fusion cuisine doesn't stop there! What other interesting takes on other country's dishes and food cultures does Japan do that our JET readers can't get enough of? This month, we reached out to the community to hear some answers! Personally, I love *umeboshi* (pickled plum) and *shiso* soda! It's a crazy sweet and sour taste combination that you can't find anywhere else! What's YOUR favorite?



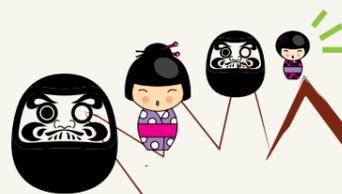
Starbucks winter season drinks—Around Christmas time, Starbucks releases the *Oshogatsu Matcha Frappucino*, and now the *Crushed Marron (chestnut) Frappucino*. I think while they give me a taste of home (at twice the price!), they really bring the winter flavors of Japan, and plus, who doesn't love *kinako* crumbs and *marron* cake in their drink?

— Lynne Francis, 1st-year Akita ALT



The poutine at Becker's in Tokyo (<http://www.jefb.co.jp/beckers/menu/2>) has a pretty unique taste—there is soy sauce in the gravy. I might not agree with the *mentaiko* sauce option, but I salute that they made this well-loved French Canadian dish more accessible to the Japanese public.

— Jacy Garant, 4th-year Wakayama ALT



Pizza gyoza! Tomato sauce, cheese and 'toppings' all wrapped up in a gyoza skin and fried. Delicious!

— Audrey Akcasu, 4th-year Nagasaki ALT



Usually, outside of big, expensive restaurants, I don't see much improved 'Western food.' But I do love Japanese Subway. There may be fewer options, but just about everything about it is better. Especially the 'cream soda.' I do like Japanified Chinese cuisine though—I love *Ohsho*.

— Seth Eggebeen, 1st-year Miyagi ALT



Pumpkin croquettes with cheese filling—a specialty at my town's *michi no eki*!

— Michelle Zhang, 1st-year Hokkaido ALT



Deep-fried pumpkin croquettes filled with cheese - another great Japanese food twist!



Two things come to mind: cheese-filled hamburg steaks, and deep-fried cheese served with honey or jam. However, one of my towns is famous for its deep-fried sandwiches. Potato salad and ham between two thick slices of bread, *panko*'d and deep fried, then cut into quarters and served fresh.

— Audrey Jones, 4th-year Nagasaki ALT

I love all of the weird bread products that show up in bread shops. Classic fried donuts with *adzuki* bean filling are probably my favorite. Though they're incredibly unhealthy!

— Phylcia Kimmel, 2nd-year Niigata ALT

All the crazy Kitkat flavours! Matcha is just the beginning! I've seen cherry blossom, sweet potato, wasabi, and the list goes on and on.

— Danielle Markewicz, 3rd-year Fukushima ALT

Cheese shrimp sushi!

— Joy P, 1st-year Ehime ALT



SPORTS

EDITORIAL The New Year Starts With The Hakone Ekiden

For roughly the last 25 years, the Hakone Ekiden, held every year on January 2nd and 3rd has been as much as symbol of the Japanese New Year as *hatsumode* and *mochi*, and in many ways just as culturally unique.

Coming from England, I'd never known relay races to have much of a following amongst the wider population. In Japan, long-distance road relays, and specifically the Hakone Ekiden, have a completely different status. The Hakone Ekiden, a university-level race, consists of ten teams each with ten runners and takes place over two days along a 219-kilometre course that runs from Otemachi, Tokyo to the resort town of Hakone, Kanagawa and back.

Beginning in 1920, but taking a brief break during the Second World War, the Hakone race has come to symbolise the start of the New Year. Over a million people line the course to watch the race first hand, but most watch the race on TV with their families.

It's difficult to know precisely why this university-level relay became so popular, but one reason could be the societal values that it reflects. The sight of individuals being encouraged to do their utmost for the benefit of a group is a familiar one in Japan, and *ekiden* (short for 駅伝競走, *ekidenkyousou*, long-distance relay race) is just another example. Individual performances are of huge importance in *ekiden* only because they affect the overall performance of the team. If one runner retires, the whole team's race is over. The position of a runner at the start of each stage is only a reflection of the efforts of his team mates up to that point. In short, a team only has the potential to win when everyone works hard.

Perhaps another reason for the race's popularity is the unpredictability of it all.

With so many people running on behalf of so many teams, the potential for mistakes that drastically alter the outcome of the race is great. The excitement surrounding the Hakone Ekiden leads to stars of the Japanese collegiate running scene going out too fast in an event where there's absolutely no margin for error. By contrast, less well-known runners often rise to the occasion and perform better than expected to give their team a much-needed boost.

There's also great potential for changes in the fortune of a team when runners are covering such long distances. The distance of each stage at the Hakone Ekiden varies, but all are either close to exceeding that of a half-marathon.

It might be difficult to imagine a two-day long-distance road relay as an exciting spectator sport, but give it a chance and you might be surprised. As with other high-profile university-level sporting events in Japan, participation in the Hakone Ekiden represents the fulfilment of a life-long dream for the competitors. Their passion and extreme dedication to the sport are partly why I find the event so interesting to watch. If you're in Japan at the start of next month, be sure to tune in.

THIS MONTH IN SPORTS...

Japan seems to have skipped autumn altogether and gone straight to winter. With that in mind, this month's Sports section is staying inside and focusing on two very different grappling sports. First up is a great article by Jess Bertubin on Brazilian jiu jitsu. Jess recently won the Women's Featherweight division at the Ryuku Free Fight tournament in Okinawa, and her article has a great account of her final bout. She describes some of her thought processes before, during, and after the fight and also mentions some of the strategies that she used to win.

This month's second Sports article will really help if, like me, you've seen posters for Japanese pro wrestling events plastered around your town, but haven't known what to make of them. Leslie Lee's article on the Japanese art of pro wrestling, or *puroresu*, is a fantastic resource for the uninitiated. He gives a great rundown of some of the different pro wrestling companies and the kind of events that they stage. Whether you're an existing fan, a disillusioned WWE fan looking for an alternative, or somebody who's just considering checking out a *puroresu* event in Japan, this is the article for you.



SPOTLIGHT

Adele Jackson-Gibson, Global Soccer Starlet

When she was ten years old, Adele fell in love with *the beautiful game* as a gawky little keeper, but it wasn't the appeal of making show-stopping saves that kept her in the net. As she grew into the frame, she discovered the universal language of the ball. She went on to play soccer at Yale University and although her career there held great importance, she found playing pick-up soccer on her travels incredibly moving. She has made many meaningful friendships around the world by the simple pass of a soccer ball, overcoming many of the frustrations associated with language barriers and cultural differences.

And so, Adele finds herself in Japan combining her three passions: traveling, languages, and soccer. She coaches the keepers on the boys' team at Asagiri Middle School and practices Japanese with her players. She looks forward to playing futsal with a local team during the coming cold winter. While in Japan, she has watched Roasso Kumamoto matches as well as her friends playing for INAC Kobe. Like her friends, Adele had aspirations to play professionally abroad but tore her ACL in her final collegiate season. She is still recovering, but excited to return to the pitch. Just recently, she joined a women's team in Ozu, Kumamoto and happily makes the long trip on weekends to play with girls who share her passion with good humor. Through playing soccer, Adele hopes to build lasting bonds in Japan.



COMPETING IN BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU IN OKINAWA

Jess Bertubin, Okinawa



James and the members of MY team



My team BJJ's training room and its neon-green mats



The crowds watch two competitors grapple it out

I added my yells to those of my teammates from MY Team Okinawa BJJ seated in front of me. I was watching my teammate's match, but my brain had already started shifting into competition mode. Every second of Rie's match meant one second closer to my own and by the look of things, Rie wasn't going to last the full five minutes. She didn't, and the match ended early, with a submission by armbar.

I felt the weight of expectation upon my shoulders. None of them said anything outright but I could feel the unspoken, "it's up to you now," in their eyes. Of the eight competitors that MY Team Okinawa BJJ had entered into the island-wide Ryukyu Free Fight tournament, only three had made it to the final rounds, and one of those three had just been eliminated. I was touched by the fact that even though I'd only been with the team for two months, they already considered me one of their own. Led by Brazilian jiu jitsu brown belt and former JET James Cherrie, this ragtag group of Americans and local Okinawans had accepted my nightly squeaks and questions, had encouraged me, challenged me, and pushed me to where I was now. But comforting thoughts like these were being overshadowed by the darkness spreading through my mind.

The moment when you shift completely into competition mode is a highly personal experience. My experience is marked by silence. Before the fight began, I shut off all the lights in every room in my mind so that I could fully focus on the next five minutes.

The moment I became aware of the pattern of the tatami underneath the soles of my feet as I stepped onto the mats, was the same moment that I tossed that thought out of my brain, refocusing on the match that was about to begin. Everything filtered out of my brain, including the heaviness of my gi, already soaked with sweat from having waited in the hot and stuffy room for eight hours watching nearly 100 grappling, shooto and BJJ matches. The memories of mistakes made in my first tournament earlier this year in New York no longer mattered, and neither did the lingering pain in my chest and back, which had suddenly and sharply appeared just the day before. I blocked everything out and let my mind fall dark and quiet. I focused on just one thing, breaking my opponent with my will.

No explanation of the rules preceded our match. As soon as we had both reached the referee, he dropped his hand and barked out, "Combate!" which was followed by a ring of the bell. Automatically, I reached out to slap hands with my opponent, a moment of acknowledgment I had always shared with my teammates before every sparring session. She met my hand with a quick tap and instantly retreated. If we were at the MY Team gym, I'd have waited a little, maybe even let her keep the grip

she then latched on to my gi, but this wasn't practice. This was a tournament, a battle in which every second matters.

I ripped her hand instantly off of my gi and threw out my own hands to grab hers, and managed to secure a tight grip on her lapel. Adam, one of our blue belts, who was also a judo practitioner, had coached me on the importance of grips and a proper stance. I recalled his lessons and straightened my arm, shoving the knuckles of my fist deep into her collarbone. The message was clear—you will fail. I will succeed.

She retreated again, deciding not to fight standing up and moved the fight to the ground. She had every intention of pulling her legs around me to take the guard position. Little did she know that, not only had I visualized this happening, I had faced this exact situation with teammates larger than her. I had practiced this scenario over and over again in training until I could perform the pass without thinking.

I moved before she even had a chance to secure her position, slid one knee through and transitioned into mount, one of the most dominant positions in BJJ. I switched my grips and laid in a choke, using her gi against her like Greg, one of our purple belts, had taught me. You failed again—was my message this time, drilling my weight and my will into her with silent precision.

At that moment, I noticed a change in my opponent, a widening of her eyes and paleness in the color of her face that I recognized from training. She momentarily stiffened her body before she began bucking wildly. When my opponent had attempted to pull guard, I knew that the match had tipped in my favor. But when she started to panic, I knew that I had won. There are many mistakes you can make in BJJ, but the one mistake that will guarantee a lost match is allowing yourself to panic.

She reacted with sudden, panic-driven strength, but it was like riding the waves back home in Hawaii. I rocked with the surge on my instructor James's cue, his voice cutting through the quiet stillness in my mind. Then I settled my weight back and wrapped my arms and legs around my opponent's exposed back like a snake, easily establishing control in the most dominant position—back mount. After that, it became a hunting game. I baited and prodded my opponent while waiting for her neck or one of her limbs to be left unprotected so that I could go in for a joint lock or a choke.

At this point, suggestions were being shouted at me from all around the mat, not only from my teammates but also from people whose voices I didn't recognize. The cacophony of voices called out the score, yelled various pieces of advice, marked

the time in minutes and then in 30 second intervals. I let it all register in my brain but filtered the noise to focus only on James' New-Zealand-accented commands, calmly coaching me as the match progressed.

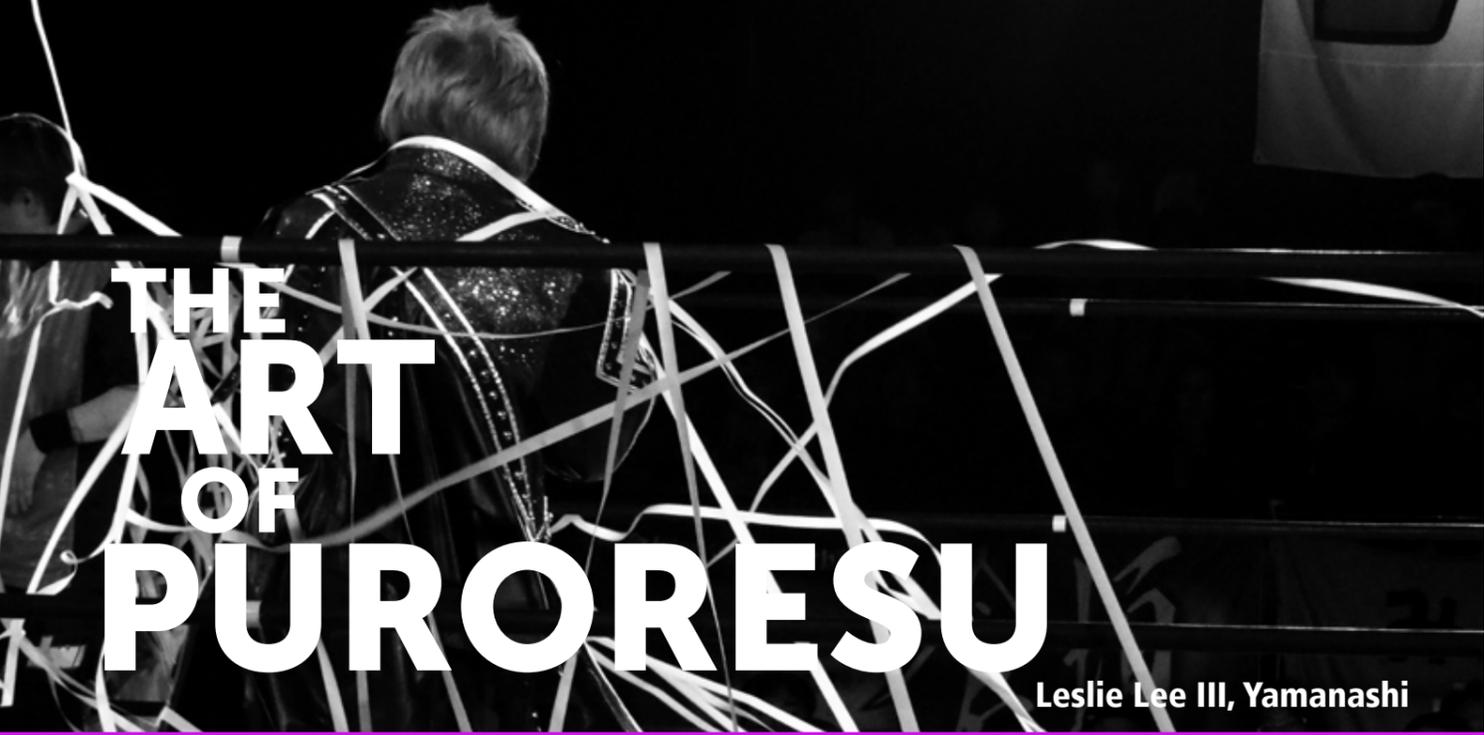
My opponent fought the whole five minutes, squirming and flailing with all of her might and tossing me quite a bit. But her panic-induced, survival mode scrambling allowed me to rack up an incredible 30 point lead by the final bell. This time, I didn't have to say anything. The referee raising my hand had enough meaning.

My certificate reads, "Women's Featherweight Champion, strongest in Okinawa". But if one of the spectators of that match were to visit a MY Team practice held after the tournament, they probably wouldn't recognize that person as me. As soon as the final bell had sounded, all of the lights had turned back on in my mind, and the darkness disappeared. It was with genuine gratitude that I shook my opponent's hand. "Otsukaresamadeshita," I said with a smile. She nodded breathlessly, and we turned away from each other.

I paused there at the center of the mat, just to take it all in. I began to notice all the things that I had forced myself to dismiss during the fight: the firmness of the smooth tatami underneath my feet, the faded green that reminded me of how neon the green mats of the MY Team gym were in comparison, the sudden lightness of my gi and my entire body, the applause and whistles of the crowd, the loudest from the corner staked out by the MY Team—my team, indeed.

All at once, my mind became full of every practice shared together, every relentless hour that had built up to that evening. In that moment the meaning was perfectly clear, and I uttered it straight from my heart as I clasped each of my teammates' hands, "Thank you. I couldn't have done this without you."

A brand-new JET, Jess Bertubin is an ALT at Nishihara High School, home to the world-renowned marching band. She lives nearby on the east side of mainland Okinawa, not far from where she was born. Jess can often be found busing around the island, wandering into various restaurants and eating things she's never seen before. She loves long walks for the sake of long walks, which is one of the reasons why she doesn't have a car. Jess currently trains in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu with MY Team Okinawa BJJ, located near Ryukyu University.



THE ART OF PURORESU

Leslie Lee III, Yamanashi

I came to Japan to watch pro wrestling. I'd been a fan of the American version of the sport all my life, but I'd lost interest by the time I'd reached college. The World Wrestling Federation (WWF) had become as obnoxious, sexist, racist, boring, and unintelligent as its detractors claimed. However, through the still-developing magic of the internet I discovered *puroresu*, the Japanese art of pro wrestling. The contrast between *puroresu* and its American equivalent was stark.

Mainstream US pro wrestling companies had long dropped any pretense of athletic competition, and the events often had more talking than wrestling. *Puroresu* is all about the wrestling, and featured more innovative, more athletic, and all around more interesting competitors. Gone were the immobile body builders and untrained models that clogged up American TV. *Puroresu* competitors are former kick-boxers, amateur wrestlers, and judo practitioners. Wrestlers like Kenta Kobashi, Mitsuharu Misawa, and Shinya Hashimoto told their stories inside the ring.

Whereas American wrestling wallows in the lowbrow aspect of sports, such as tribalism and jingoism, *puroresu* highlights transcendent elements. In *puroresu*, men and women push their bodies and minds to do the impossible, just to prove they're the best at doing the impossible. Yes, women. The likes of Manami Toyota and Ayako Hamada are presented as legitimate competitors in *puroresu*, not the inferior eye candy that the top US companies relegate women to.

Grainy pre-YouTube videos of *puroresu* were a revelation to me, but wrestling is meant to be seen live, so I made my way to Tokyo to see it with my own eyes. The experience of going to my first *puroresu* show is difficult to put into words, and I've been to so many shows since that it's hard to recall specifics. However, I can't forget the excitement I felt as I walked into the venue, and was greeted by wrestling legend Shinjiro Otani. I remember the shared camaraderie and the occasional animosity towards other fans as we cheered. I recall the ease with which we could suspend disbelief, and think that our passionate cries could actually affect the predetermined outcomes. I remember

feeling that the costumes, the characters, and the combat were all as good as those in an action film. The difference was that it was all taking place just a few feet away from me.

It was obviously an amazing experience for me, but you don't have to be a lapsed Hulk Hogan fan to appreciate a Japanese pro wrestling show. I've actually brought more than a few friends to their first *puroresu* show, and they've all had a great time. Pro wrestling is art, and it's an art form Japan has led the world in for decades. Anyone interested in Japan owes it to themselves to see the result first-hand.

You shouldn't have trouble finding *puroresu* events here. No one actually knows how many pro wrestling companies or pro wrestlers there are in Japan because there's far too many to count. The Mecca is, of course, Tokyo. Venues like Shinjuku FACE, Shin-Kiba 1st Ring, and Korakuen Hall put on half a dozen shows each and every week. If you're not near the megalopolis, the major Japanese companies tour the whole of Japan regularly, and there are numerous upstart prefectural promotions across the country.

If you're spoiled for choice when choosing your first event, go to New Japan, NOAH, or WRESTLE-1 to experience classic, hard-hitting, sports-like *puroresu*. Go to Dragon Gate for more athletic—and slightly more implausible—bouts featuring high flying, muscled up *ikemen*. If you're perfectly happy with American wrestling as it is, Wrestling New Classic, run by TAJIRI, will give you more of the same. If you're looking to get weird, Dramatic Dream Team (DDT) offers a bizarre mix of truly great pro wrestling, with over the top sexual humor and inanimate objects. An inflatable doll named YOSHIHIKO, which is treated like a living wrestler, is one of DDT's most entertaining stars.

If you want something truly extreme, visit Big Japan Pro Wrestling (BJW), which stages death-match style events. Increasing awareness surrounding the dangers of blood-borne diseases has made death matches a dying art. For the time being though, there are still Japanese pro wrestlers spilling their blood in the



The female wrestler Kana graciously accepting the title belt

name of entertainment, as men like Jun Kasai continue to throw themselves into light tubes, nail boards, barbed wire, and glass sheets. BJW also features lots of fantastic traditional wrestling as well.

There's also the comedic stylings of Osaka Pro; scored bouts from MMA precursor U-STYLE, college students putting on free events, sketchy cat fight shows, even sketchier indy sleaze promotions where you're not allowed to take photos, Power Rangers-inspired wrestling operas, and so much more.

Out of all the available pro wrestling companies in Japan, my personal favorites are the women's wrestling companies like JWP, WAVE, LLPW, Oz Academy, STARDOM, and ICE Ribbon. Female wrestlers, referred to simply as *joshi*, can't just rely on brute strength, so they've had to be innovative. *Joshi* are often responsible for creating new wrestling moves. Their unique style, striking pageantry, skill, and passion are the highlight of *puroresu* for me.

Puroresu offers a bit of something for everyone, you owe it to yourself to see what it can offer you. Show listings can be found in the widely distributed *Weekly Puroresu* magazine or courtesy of Puwota (<http://puwota.appare-kikaku.com/>). Have fun.

Leslie is a 2nd year JET in Tsuru City, Yamanashi prefecture. He is originally from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but has lived in Japan since 2012. He has written extensively about pro wrestling and is the founder and editor-in-chief Dirty Dirty Sheets (<http://www.dirtydirtysheets.com>) and Pro Wrestling Is Art (<http://www.prowrestlingsart.com>). His greatest journalistic achievements so far have been being followed on Twitter by Billy Corgan of The Smashing Pumpkins, and a series of articles he wrote where he proved definitively that Manami Toyota is the greatest pro wrestler of all time. Even if you don't go to a show, Leslie thinks you should at least watch some of Kana's matches on YouTube, because she is the truth.



If you like cheesy action movies, you should check out a match or three



Leslie and the amazing Kana



Matches can draw a wide variety of audience



Some joshi preen and jeer for the crowd



TRAVEL

EDITORIAL Disaster Tourism

Typhoon Haiyan—the strongest typhoon to make landfall in recorded history—pummeled the Philippines on November 8th. The super storm sustained winds of up to 295 kph (183 mph) and left widespread damage in its wake. With houses and buildings levelled, survivors have been without food, water or shelter for weeks. At the time of print, bbc.co.uk were reporting that more than 5,000 people have lost their lives, with the death toll rising daily. Another 4 million have been displaced.

However, just days after the disaster, the Philippines' Department of Tourism encouraged travellers to continue with their plans to visit the country this coming holiday season, despite the devastation. "The Philippines remains a safe and fun destination for all tourists, notwithstanding this unfortunate incident," said Tourism Secretary Ramon Jimenez Jr. "The great majority of touristic products are available, whether one is looking for a beach vacation, historical trip, gastronomic tour, or one of the many other possible travel opportunities."

Despite most of their neighbouring towns being destroyed, top destinations—such as Boracay, Cebu, Bohol, Iloilo and Puerto Princesa, Palawan—are still accessible. However, mass cancellations at resorts are being reported, even though the typhoon struck only six of the country's 7,107 islands.

Tourism is big business for the Philippines. The number of visitors climbed to 4.3 million last year from 3.9 million the year before, and tourism is responsible for about 5.9 per cent of the country's economy, according to telegraph.co.uk. The Department of Tourism says that in terms of the recovery effort, its priority is to restore the lucrative tourism income as soon as possible in order to help with the rebuilding efforts. The Telegraph online reports

that reconstruction could cost the Philippines as much as US \$20 billion.

Historically, the return of tourists to areas affected by disaster brings a boost to both the economy and to morale. It can also serve to educate people and encourage them to make donations or participate in volunteer work. However, disaster tourism can be a double-edged sword, with critics suggesting some people might just come to gawk and in doing so can inhibit the efforts of recovery workers.

The World Trade Center site in New York, for example, now draws 9 million visitors a year, according to its website, and there are three times the number of hotels in the surrounding area than before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2011. Likewise, there are companies in New Orleans offering 'Post-Katrina Tours' to the main sites affected by the 2005 hurricane.

"There is a whole sub-genre of travel that is really sort of a sticky wicket of disaster and poverty tourism," said David Lytle, editorial director of travel guidebook series, Frommer's. "But approached in the right way, it is the idea of trying to understand the world, and it can be cathartic for people who only get a three-minute segment on TV."

What do you think? Should tourism to disaster-ravaged areas be encouraged or should travellers stay away until locals have had a chance to rebuild and recover? Also, did you have plans to visit the Philippines this winter vacation? Will you still go? Let us know at connect.travel@ajet.net

THIS MONTH IN TRAVEL...

The big chill has finally descended on Japan. Whether you are excited about the many snow-related activities on offer, or are dreaming of white sands and palm trees in warmer climes, this month's Travel section is jam-packed with winter vacation ideas. A very talented bunch of readers have given us their expert advice for trips to 5 nearby countries (plus Japan's own Okinawa) for those seeking fun in the sun, as well as a range of adventures to be had right here in Japan. The six-page winter special will surely inspire you to crawl out from beneath your kotatsu and make the most of your Christmas and New Year holidays. What else? Well, Yamagata's John McKiernan was strangely reminded of his days as a schoolboy in Dublin when he visited Jigokudani Monkey Park in Nagano, and in my editorial, I ponder the morality of disaster tourism, following the devastating typhoon that hit the Philippines last month.

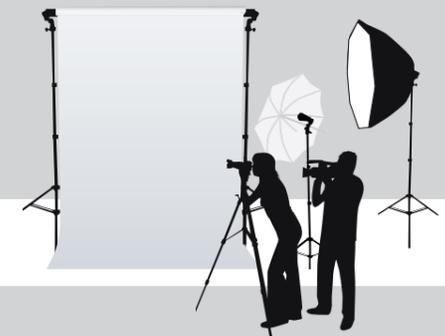


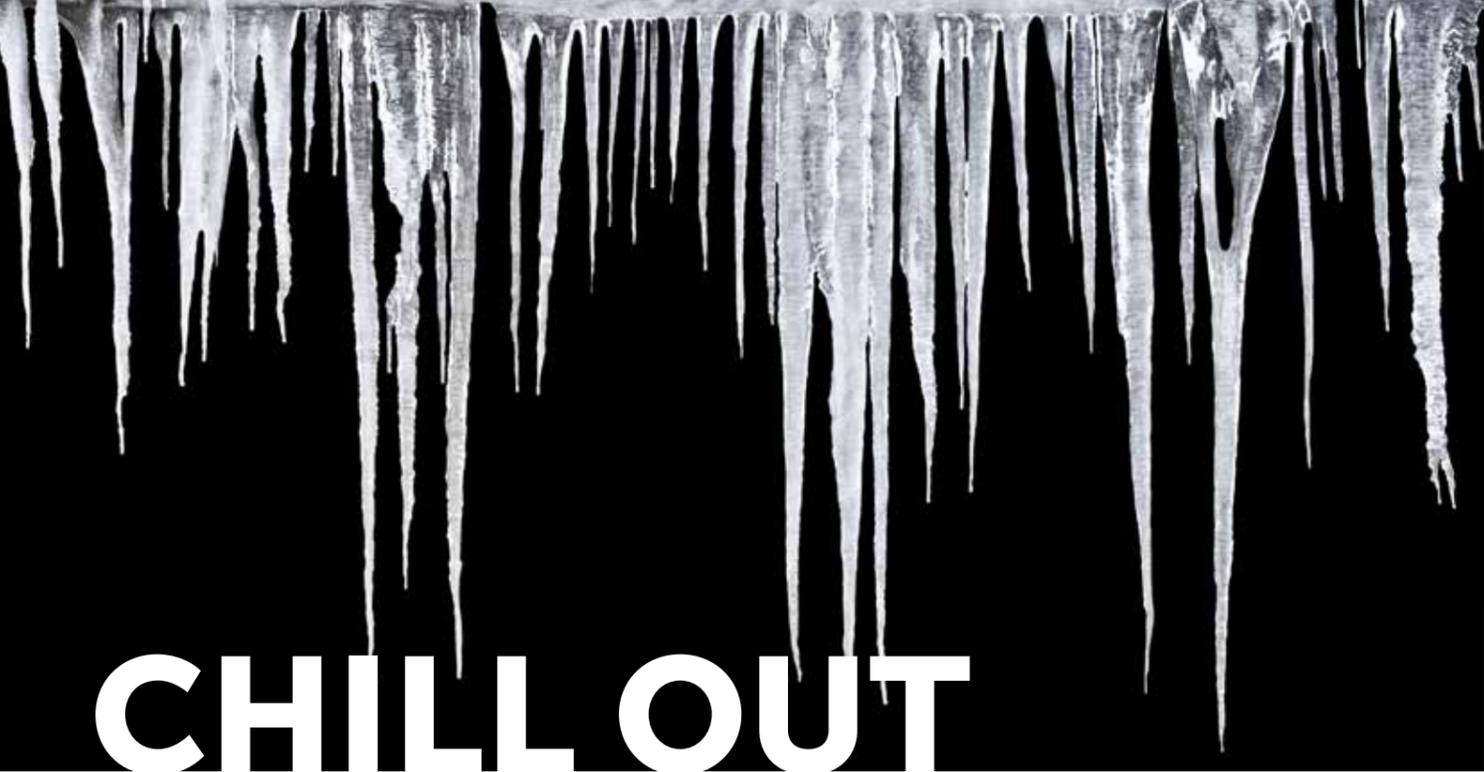
SPOTLIGHT

John McKiernan, Monkey Magic Maker

It began, not with a Pokémon, but with a forlorn-looking Japanese macaque, neck-deep in scalding water, a crown of blizzard snow perched above his crumpled face. Staring from a yellowing plaque on my classroom wall from which he hung, Monkey's role was (with a beatific sense of Christian grace contrary to his simian nature) to remind my half-feral, inner-city Dublin schoolboy friends and I, that whatever burdens we suffer: "We're All in This Together".

Fast forward 15 years to Nagano-ken, Japan, where I confronted the truth of this mythic ape solidarity at Jigokudani Monkey Park. Despite its name, Hell Valley did not present hardships comparable to those known by the average Irish Catholic schoolboy. The infernal waters proved lukewarm, the white stuff wafted gently, and seeking the tourist yen, the human attendants regularly fed the macaques for fear they'd abandon the onsen where they spent their time soaking so soporifically and photogenically. Feeling somewhat cheated, I recalled our schoolboy reaction to their ancient 2D ancestor: "use the little creep as target practice!" And yet, observing the pink-faced critters energetically play-copulate, and with neither tennis ball, nor duster, nor half-eaten sandwich to hand, the urge to pelt the hairy beggars quickly subsided. Instead, a plan quickly formed involving a photo, an unmarked Dublin-addressed envelope and a borrowed tennis ball covered in Yamagata dirt. The message: "They're All in This for the Yuks". Maybe.





CHILLOUT

Just because you're staying in Japan these winter holidays, it doesn't mean you have to hibernate under your kotatsu—there's plenty of fun to be had outdoors. From visiting the serene snow monkeys in Nagano, to zipping down one of Tohoku's plethora of ski slopes, to taking in the breathtaking ice sculptures in Hokkaido—there's something for everyone. Here's just a sample of the snowy adventures to be had.



HOKKAIDO

Snowy peaks, wide-open plains and untamed wilderness—the wild north of Japan is unlike any other part of the country. In winter, Hokkaido is a playground for powderhounds from around the globe who come to frolic in heavenly powder at world-class resorts. More than just a ski destination, however, Japan's second-largest island is also home to a multitude of onsen, national parks and the famous Sapporo Snow Festival, held in February each year.

Sapporo Snow Festival



Sapporo Snow Festival, Hokkaido

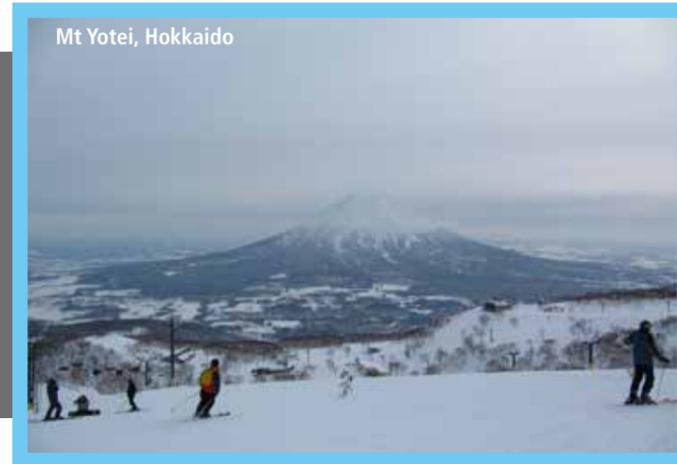
From its humble beginning in 1950 as just six sculptures made by high school students, Sapporo's *yuki matsuri* is now world-famous. Attracting more than 2 million visitors each year, it features giant ice sculptures of manga characters and famous buildings. Next year, the festival runs from February 5-11. The main site is at Odori Park in downtown Sapporo, where the sculptures are illuminated until 10pm. Allow a couple of hours to get around the park loop as the crowds make for slow going. The Tsudome site features snow slides, snow rafting and mazes and is open until 5pm, while the sculptures at the Susukino site are illuminated until midnight.

Many airlines fly into Sapporo's New Chitose Airport from around Japan, including Skymark, Japan Airlines and Jetstar. If you have time to spare, you can also take a train to Sapporo. Tokyo to Aomori is about 4 hours, then Aomori to Sapporo is another 5-7 hours. Some of the overnight trains have sleeper options.

Niseko

If snow sports are the activity of choice in heaven, then Niseko is surely God's private playground. That pure powder Japan is famed for can be found here in great quantities, which makes it a top winter destination from people all over the world (though predominantly Australia). It has been voted into the world's top 10 resorts. Niseko has six ski areas, boasting a combined 69 runs totaling more than 47 km. The main four (An'nupuri, Higashiyama, Grand Hirafu, and Hanazono) are interconnected and may be skied on one pass (one day pass is 6,000 yen). Back country skiing is also popular. You'll be able to glide down the mountain, through birch forest tracks that open up into wide-open runs—all while taking in the breathtaking view of Mt Yotei, referred to as the 'Mt Fuji of Hokkaido'. There's cosy wood-fire heated cafes and larger restaurants scattered all over the mountain that allow for easy ski-in ski-out. *Sansai* soba is a speciality. Down in Niseko town you'll find an abundance of

restaurants and bars catered at foreigners as well as piping hot onsens to soothe your aching muscles.



It's about a 2-3 hour drive or bus trip from Sapporo. You can also get a train from JR Sapporo Station. Get off at Niseko Station and continue by local bus and taxi.

Other resorts:

Rusutsu

Just 90 minutes from New Chitose Airport, Rusutsu has 37 courses covering a total 42km in length. Spread over three mountains—East, West and Mt Isola—it's famous for its untracked powder snow and superb tree runs, as well as great half pipes and back country.

Buses run directly from both Sapporo and New Chitose Airport to Rusutsu (reservation required).

Tomamu

Located 150km east of Sapporo, not far from the Hidaka National Park. Spread out over two mountains, there's a wide range of courses plus off-piste options for those seeking a bit more excitement. While here, check out the nearby ice dome village, open from December 23-mid March. Winter events include BBQs, bonfires and performances, and there's also an ice bar—where even the glasses are made from ice—and an ice chapel, where you will be excused for getting cold feet just before you tie the knot.

Take a train from JR Sapporo Station to Tomamu Station (90 minutes). A free shuttle bus connects Tomamu Station to the resort. You can also take a bus directly from the New Chitose Airport to Tomamu (reservation required).

Kiroro

Only an hour by car from Sapporo, this resort is popular among foreign visitors. As well as the ski slopes, there are an array of

spas, onsen, hotels and shops. You can also try sledding, snow tubing and snow rafting, where you get pulled along behind a snow mobile in a rafting boat!

You can take a train from the JR Sapporo Station to Otaru Station, then continue to the resort by bus. From New Chitose Airport: Board the airport express bound for Otaru Station, continue by bus to the resort.

Onsen

Noboribetsu Onsen

It is reported the Ainu often used the hot spring water here for its healing powers in ancient times. This world-famous onsen offers nine different kinds of water; from sulfur spring water to iron spring water—each purporting to cure a variety of ailments.

From JR Sapporo Station, take express train to Noboribetsu Station (1 hour 20 mins).

Alternatively, take a bus from either from Sapporo or New Chitose Airport.

Yunokawa

One of Hokkaido's most famous hot springs, Yunokawa is nestled in an idyllic setting between mountains and ocean and its waters supposedly have healing properties.

Fly to Hakodate Airport or take a train JR Hakodate Station.

Shiretoko National Park

This UNESCO World Heritage Site spans most of the Shiretoko Peninsula and is one the most remote locations in Japan (its name comes from an Ainu word meaning "end of the Earth"). Here you can find Utoro, a town with hot springs that also offers boat rides up and down the coast.

Flying to Kushiro Airport is the closest, then drive or take a bus. A train from Sapporo to Kushiro will take about four hours.

NAGANO

Charlotte Griffiths is a second-year ALT in Hyogo. Having given up on finding good cheese in Japan she has fully accepted the likelihood of mercury poisoning from excessive sashimi indulgence.

If you've never been skiing in Japan before, you won't understand why the white stuff here has earned the hallowed title 'champagne powder'. Whether you are already a snow fan, or a nervous novice, you *need* to know. Book yourself a trip to Nagano, now! Be it a day, a week or a month, the home of the 1998 Winter Olympics will not disappoint.





Hakuba, Nagano

With more than 30 resorts, you are spoilt for choice for snowy adventures in Nagano. However, with an average of 11m of snow a year and having hosted several of the Olympic events, the extensive Hakuba ski area is a good place to start. Base yourself in Echoland Village for easy access to restaurants, onsen and as much nightlife as you'll get in the Japanese Alps (bring your own party). From here you can catch free shuttle buses to the king of the valley, Happoone (host of the Olympic downhill), and seasonaire-favourite Hakuba 47/Goryu which is sublime on one of their many powder days and boasts the area's best snow park. Off-piste and tree skiing is tightly policed in Hakuba, so after a storm, powderhounds in the know go to Cortina, a huge bowl devoted to off-piste. Get there as early as possible to make your own tracks, and relax those post-mogul muscles at the Hotel Green Plaza's onsen which has 11 tubs and breathtaking panoramic mountain views.

Of course, no wintry Nagano would be complete without a visit to the world-famous snow-monkeys; the Macaque monkeys of Jigokudani Yaen-Koen have really got onsen après-ski down pat.



Snow monkeys, Nagano

Finally, if you are heading to Nagano these winter holidays, try and stick around for the Nozawa Fire Festival on January 15, a flaming fighting spectacle which deserves its place in Japan's top three fire festivals and puts Guy Fawkes night to shame.

<http://www.go-nagano.net/>

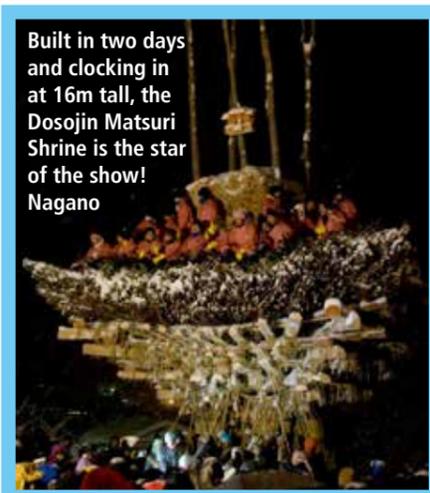
Nozawa Onsen

Katherine Vos is an Alternate riding on the coattails of her husband, who is a first-year ALT in Yamanashi Prefecture. Hailing from just east of Canada's Rocky Mountains, she loves the white stuff, and is no stranger to making the most of a long winter season -- whether it be through skiing, skating, onsen, or using it as an excuse to have a ridiculously large toque (woolly hat) collection.

Nozawa Onsen is located an hour away from Nagano, and is a mountainside winter paradise. Its ski resort was host to the biathlon portion of the 1998 Olympics. What it's most famous for is its Dosojin Festival, held every year on January 15 and considered one of the best fire festivals in Japan.

During the festival, any villagers who are 25 or 42 years old (considered 'unlucky' ages) construct a massive shrine out of sacred trees from the area. They must defend it from the rest of the villagers who try to light it on fire via torches and a bonfire that is slowly moved closer. Volunteers weave through the crowds handing out free sake to everyone, and eventually you get to watch the whole thing burn. You have to see it to believe it!

When you're not skiing or hitting up the festival, make sure you check out one of the 13 free onsen located throughout the village. Each has its own separate source, temperature, and style...and did I mention they were free?



Built in two days and clocking in at 16m tall, the Dosojin Matsuri Shrine is the star of the show! Nagano



Local villagers lighting torches which they will use to try to burn the shrine down, Nagano

The selection of good places to eat in this tourist village is plentiful, and virtually everything will be within walking distance of wherever you choose to stay. My recommendation? Akebitei Okonomiyaki, located at the bottom of the town site.

You can get to Nozawa Onsen via the JR Iiyama Line at Nagano Station. Once you arrive at the Togari Nozawa Onsen station, there is a bus that takes you up to the village.

TOHOKU

With *gaijin* overtaking Hakuba and Niseko to the extent that one can find Vegemite on sale in conbinis there, let's turn our attention to a lesser-explored land of glorious powder—Tohoku. This region is a playground for skiers and snowboarders, with near-empty resorts all to yourself. It also offers a chance to experience local Japanese festivals in an untouched, rural atmosphere. If the idea of hurling yourself down a snow-covered slope or checking out beautiful, illuminated snow caves doesn't appeal (and I can't imagine why not!), then there's always Tohoku's many onsens to warm you from the inside out.

Resorts

Zao Onsen Ski Resort (Yamagata)

A huge resort with a variety of terrain suitable from beginners to advanced, and natural onsen. What really makes this resort unique is the snow monsters, otherworldly natural statues crafted from wind and snow and very hardy trees.



Zao snow monsters, Yamagata

First timers may find Zao, with its 30 plus lifts, overwhelming. If you who don't have long there, it's best to focus on the southern runs (Kurohime, Oomori); they have the best chairs and easy access to the knee-knocking 39 degree face of 'Yokokura no Kabe' if you're game. Next, jump on a gondola to see the snow monsters and give the 10km run from top to bottom a go. This is a run that will surely awaken that 'talon's grip' in your thighs. Once the sun sets, cruise over to Ua no Dai for an evening riding beneath the lights, or gondola back up to see the mystical and eerie snow

monsters at night. They are illuminated over Christmas and New Year's, all weekends in December and January then nightly throughout February.

For fuel, pop into one of the many restaurants dotted on the slope itself for a lunch or perhaps a spot of apres-ski on your last run down. Sangoro Cafe has delicious pizzas and a lovely woodfire stove to eat by. Finally, after an epic day's riding, soak away those aches and pains in one of Zao's many natural onsens.

Buses run frequently to Zao from Yamagata Station. There is also plenty of accommodation on resort.

Alts Bandai (Fukushima)

Any decent rider in Japan will be well acquainted with the painfully slow, two-man (and sometimes terrifying one-man!) lifts. Alts Bandai is a dream to ride, filled with quick quads and plenty of challenging runs for the more advanced. You'll also find cool features in the park, and a bowl to try your hand at.

Appi Kogen (Iwate)

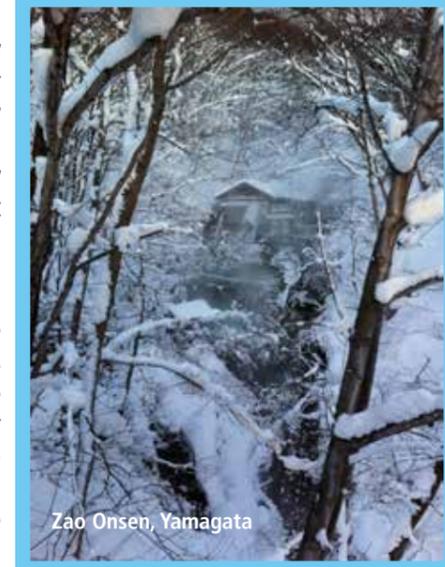
This resort boasts an average 8m of powder per season...after grooming! The long and well-groomed runs are an absolute delight and you'll very likely come away singing, 'Don't worry! be Appi!'

Hakkoda Ropeway Company (Aomori)

Whether or not this can be called a resort it beside the point, this holy grail of off-piste backcountry delights can't be overlooked. One ropeway takes you up more than 600m and leaves you for at least 2km of uninterrupted, downhill to explore however you please. Guides are available too, so make sure to stay safe, especially if you don't have backcountry training.

Asahi Shizenkan (Yamagata)

Another bane of many riders in Japan are those dreaded ropes. Japan's resorts are renowned for banning off-piste terrain to the extent that even poaching a wee duck betwixt the trees could cost you your day pass. This is where little-known resorts like Shizenkan are a breath of fresh air. Anywhere accessible by lift is fair game. Be warned though—after the frequent, fresh dumpings, all the local powderhounds come out to play. Shred quick folks, there's no friends on powder day! It's also one of the few in the region to boast a decent halfpipe.



Zao Onsen, Yamagata



Onsen towns

Rose Murphy is a second-year ALT in Yamagata. After snowboarding for more than six months straight last season, she still didn't manage to visit every ski resort in the prefecture. She can be found in summer up mountains pining for the snow.

Ginzan Onsen (Yamagata)

A stunning collection of snow-covered ryokan, one of which is supposedly the inspiration for the bathhouse in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*. This village has a real old-school feel to it, and you can even rent traditional Meiji-style outfits to complete the experience. Stop in for lunch and then it's onsen time! After your soak, with the glow of onsen warming you from the inside, step outside to watch the hamlet light up as the sun goes down. Old street lamps twinkle in the snow, golden yellow light shines from the bath house windows, and the magic of this place truly comes alive.



Although it may seem inaccessible without a snowmobile, it is, in fact, a relatively easy drive. Alternatively, take a train to Obanazawa then a 40 minute bus to the Onsen.

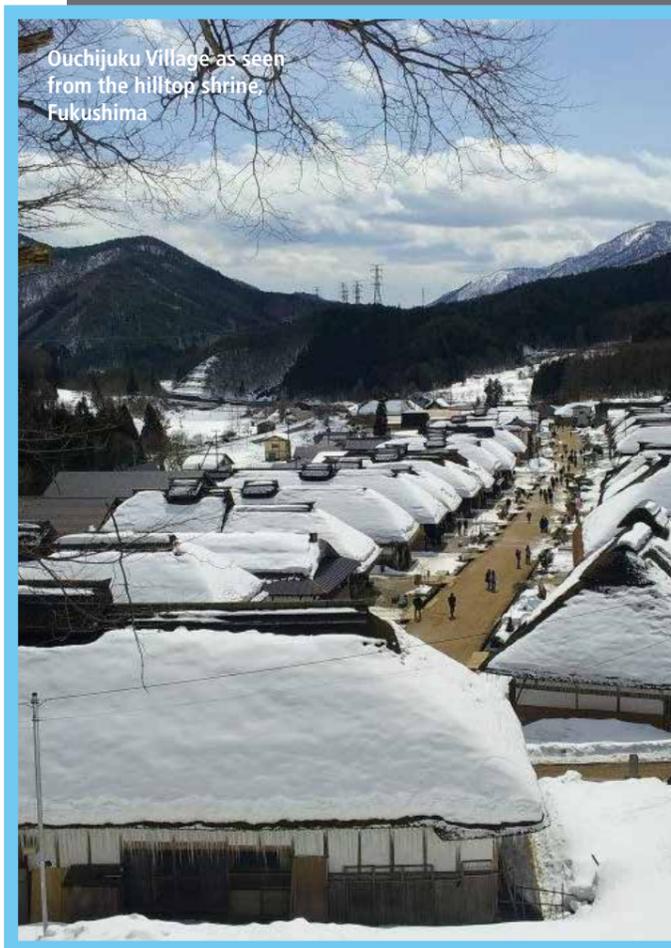
Ouchijuku Village (Fukushima)

A hidden gem in Tohoku, this is an old post station with Edo period thatched roof houses lining the main street. Many buildings have been preserved as they were before the Meiji restoration. This village is wonderful to check out—beautiful in any season, but particularly striking in the winter.

The traditional houses along the main street contain a variety of shops, traditional Japanese accommodations and restaurants. Soba or locally caught char-grilled fish are popular choices. Walk the streets and pop your head into each of them. At the end of the street, up a steep set of stairs, you'll find Ouchijuku's temple. Mind your step and you'll be rewarded with a panoramic view of the village. You'll also find a quiet shrine to gain some rest and respite and is worth a visit. It's a five minute walk off the main street and set in a patch of cedar trees. Head back to Yunokami

Onsen station after you've had your fill of the shops and views. You'll be craving the hot water to warm your bones.

For those using public transport, it is best to use Aizu-Wakamatsu as your base. From there, the private Aizu line will take you to Shimogo, and from there you can take a 10 minute taxi to the village.



SUN-SEEKING

Dreaming of white-sand beaches, palm trees and cocktails in the sun? Japan's long, cold winter can be downright miserable if you aren't into snow sports. Never fear! We have compiled 5 of the best countries in Asia (plus Japan's own Okinawa) for you to have fun in the sun and stock up on some much-needed Vitamin D. From high-speed rails in Taiwan and spa treatments in Indonesia, to the jungles of Laos and the foodie paradise that is Vietnam, there is something here for every sun-seeking traveller.

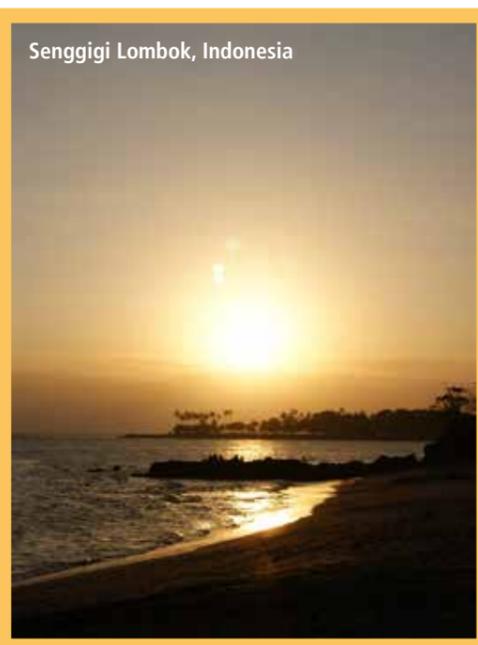
INDONESIA

Charlotte Griffiths is a second-year ALT in Hyogo. Having given up on finding good cheese in Japan, she has fully accepted the likelihood of mercury poisoning from excessive sashimi indulgence.

Indonesia's 17,508 islands make for a fascinating archipelago; one you certainly can't do justice to in one visit. This winter, why not explore the delights of cultural Bali, savagely beautiful Lombok and the world-famous Gili islands for a holiday to spark a lifelong fascination.

GETTING THERE AND AROUND: This area of Indonesia is best accessed from Denpasar Airport, but if you arrive via Jakarta, use your layover to visit the sublime Green Canyon or Taman Mini Park—just beware of the infamous traffic when you have a connection to catch!

SEE AND DO: In a mainly Muslim country, Hindu island Bali makes for a scintillating atmosphere and experience. Head first



to cultural capital Ubud, via the spectacular Tanah Lot temple to which daily pilgrimages are made for the beautiful sunset silhouettes. In Ubud, indulge in spa treatments after a sunrise rice-terrace walk, and peruse the plethora of arts galleries lining every road. If you like your parties wild, get your fix with a night on the tiles in Kuta, and do not leave Bali before catching a sunset and a cliff-top Kecak fire dance, and admiring the equally prodigious surfing talent in Uluwatu. Just off Bali's beaten track lies volcanic Lombok. An island for adventurers, a four-day Mount Rinjani trek is the ultimate challenge, but the national park has also has spectacular waterfall walks. Experienced surfers should go south for excellent reef surfing; and whilst beach lovers will



Fresh seafood - Jimbarang Bali

SEE AND DO: Luang Prabang is a UNESCO heritage city, and its easy to see why. With lovingly restored French colonial architecture as well as sparkling golden *wats*, the town oozes charm. The stunningly blue Kuang Si Falls make a rewarding day trip from Luang Prabang. Further inland is the surprising party town of Van Vieng. A backpacker hub surrounded by limestone cliffs, many travellers flock here to go tubing. Though not the wild experience it once was after crackdown in August last year, this consists of renting an inflatable tube and sailing down the river, frequenting the remaining bars perched on the waterside. Vientiane is one of the most chilled out capital cities around, with tree-lined boulevards and a plethora of tempting cafes. The beautiful Buddhist stupa of Pha That Luang is a must see for visitors. Adventure seekers should consider embarking upon the gibbon experience. Located deep in the jungle of northern Laos, participants seek the illusive black gibbon whilst gliding on zip lines.

be content in Senggigi, for true decadence hop over to the incomparable Gili Islands. A hedonist's paradise, the islands offer white sands, cool vibes and the best diving around. With lows of 24°C in December, where better to spend your Christmas than lazing by turquoise waters, cocktail in hand?

EAT: Bali offers Indonesia's liveliest cuisine. Boating flavours from southern India, Malaysia and China, we see glimpses of a long migrating and trading history. Be sure to try *babi guling* (roast suckling pig, marinated in spices for hours), as much *nasi goreng* (fried rice) as you can stomach from the street-side *warung* stalls and a seafood feast in Jimbaran. Wash it all down with the ubiquitous Bintang beer, and follow up with the [in] famous Luwak 'cat poo' coffee.

LAOS

Dan Ayres is a second-year ALT living in Omura, Nagasaki Prefecture. He is a travel enthusiast with a penchant for over-eating and lying in hammocks.



Kuang Si Falls

Landlocked Laos is an oasis of calm in the midst of South-East Asia. Far less developed than its burgeoning neighbours, Laos is a land of saffron clad monks, jungles teeming with wildlife and meandering rivers.

GETTING THERE AND AROUND: If travelling from Thailand, a unique and scenic alternative to flying or long-haul buses is to catch the slow boat from near Chiang Mai to Luang Prabang. Voyagers can enjoy a slow pace whilst observing young Laotians leaping in an out of the mighty Mekong river. Buses connect the main towns.



Luang Prabang, Laos

EAT: A pleasant holdover from French colonial rule is the ubiquity of freshly baked baguettes, sold by street vendors with a smile. The mouthwatering national dish is *larb*; minced meat cooked with chilli and mint and served with sticky rice.

OKINAWA

Michelle Lees is a second-year ALT living in Oita City. She loves trying street food, being hooked on a good book and kicking back on a beach in Okinawa with her girlfriend.

Looking for a slice of paradise a little closer to home? Okinawa has beautiful beaches, friendly locals, delicious local and international cuisine and of course islands packed with things to do! Better yet, Okinawa's winter temps rarely drop below 10 degrees, with the daytime average around 18. Shorts in winter in Japan? You bet!

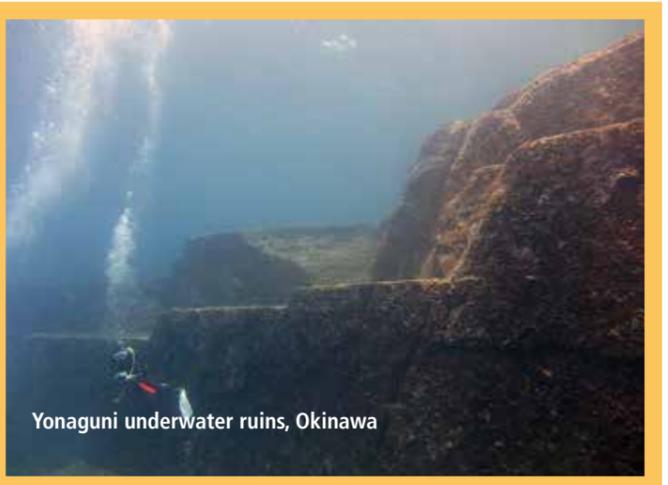
GETTING THERE AND AROUND: For the main island, fly into Naha with either Skymark or Peach, which usually has the best deals. To get to the main Miyako island, it's a 45 minute flight from Naha. Alternatively, fly from Osaka or Tokyo directly. To get to any of the Kerama islands get a ferry from the Tomari Port in

Naha (25 minutes from Naha airport or 600 yen taxi from Kokusai dori). Check out Ferry Zamami and Marine Liner Tokashiki for times and prices. A flight from Naha, Tokyo or Osaka will get you to Ishigaki island, from where you can catch ferries to the other islands in the Yaeyamas. Yonaguni can be accessed via a flight from Naha. The easiest way to get around the bigger islands is by car although it is possible to see the sites by public transport. Smaller islands can often be explored by scooter or bicycle. On Naha there is also the monorail.



One of the many beaches in Onnason, Okinawa

SEE AND DO: Want to hit the beach? Pick an island and go! On the main island you have a wealth of beaches in addition to a number of can't-miss-attractions (Churaumi Aquarium, Pineapple Park, Shuri Castle, Peace Park, The American Village or Cape Zampa to name a few). Or, if you fancy seeing more of the Ryukyu islands why not try one of the Kerama islands (about an hour by ferry) which are famous for their incredible diving and snorkeling spots, in addition to offering whale watching in the winter months (January-March). If you want to venture further afield, why not visit one of the Miyako islands, which are said to have some of the most beautiful beaches in the whole of Okinawa. Here you can drive across some incredible bridges which connect the islands, giving you some gorgeous views of the ocean and its reefs in addition to some unexpected attractions (German Culture Village anyone?). Further still is the



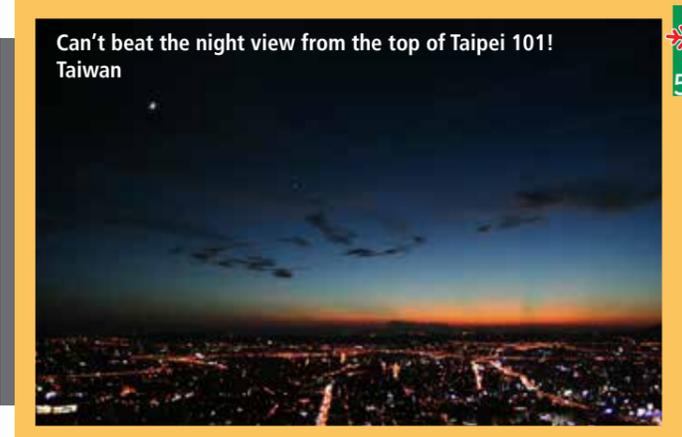
Yonaguni underwater ruins, Okinawa

southernmost island group, the Yaeyamas. Here you can dive the coral reefs of Ishigaki island, hire a scooter and explore the jungles, waterfalls and isolated beaches of Iriomote island and step back in time in the living museum that is Taketomi island. Check out last month's issue of Connect for our diving recommendations!

EAT: With such a big American presence in Okinawa, you'll notice that you are spoiled for choice when it comes to international cuisine and so no doubt you'll want to head straight for those treats from home you have been missing, like buffalo wings, pizza, fish and chips and jerk chicken, but hold up! Don't forget to try the local cuisine: Okinawan *soki* soba, *chanpuru*, taco rice, sea grapes, *sata andagi*, *chinsuko*, *benimo* and of course fresh local pineapple is not to be missed!

TAIWAN

Rebecca Mesch is a second-year ALT in Gunma Prefecture, home of onsen, hiking, cabbage and konnyaku. When she's not bringing down the house at karaoke or dancing embarrassingly in a nightclub, she manages to tear herself away from Gunma every once in a while to visit other prefectures in Japan (so far 32 out of 47!) and other countries in Asia.



Can't beat the night view from the top of Taipei 101! Taiwan

Taiwan is a small but fiercely vibrant island nation, closely and cheaply accessible visa-free from Japan. Just a stone's throw away from the Okinawan islands, Taiwan's unique culture weaves together aspects of both mainland Chinese and native Taiwanese traditions. Jaw-dropping natural beauty, energy-pulsing cities, and a winter average of balmy 12° Celsius make Taiwan an ideal escape from Japan's frigid winter.

GETTING THERE AND AROUND: Fly into Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport near Taipei. Ride the Taipei metro at just 10-50 yen per ride (plastic tokens are used instead of paper tickets!) Outside of Taipei, ride the high-speed rail (HSR) or express trains. A two-hour ride costs just 700 yen!

SEE AND DO: In the bustling capital, Taipei, check out Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, Shilin night market and Longshan

Taipei 101 - one hundred and one stories tall! Taiwan



Temple. A day trip to the old town, Jiufen, guarantees rows of traditional street food and stunning misty ocean cliffs. On the east coast, the Taroko gorge will take your (non-visible) breath away. Bathe in Beitou Hot Springs just north of Taipei. Go clubbing at club Luxy in Taipei's Zhongxiao-Dunhua district. Ring in the New Year with fireworks at the sky-high marvel Taipei 101, where you can mail a postcard home from the top. Hop on the HSR, Taiwan's cheaper answer to the shinkansen, to visit cities all along the island's west coast.

EAT: Gorge at the impeccable Din Tai Fung dim sum restaurant or, if you dare, the restroom-themed Modern Toilet restaurant. Fresh fruit and fried snacks are sold from street vendors everywhere and be sure to have all the delicious boba/tapioca pearl milk tea your heart desires!

VIETNAM

Liz Ekers is a former Fukushima ALT. When she's not reminiscing over the amount of kanchos she avoided in Japan, she's saving money to come back to see the onsen monkeys in Nagano.

With average December temperatures of 20+° Celsius, Vietnam is an amazing country full of 20 yen beer, silk lanterns and barter-friendly markets. And it's only 6 hours on a direct flight from Japan!



Temple in the Marble Mountains, Vietnam

GETTING THERE AND AROUND: From Japan, Vietnam Airlines flies direct to the northern capital of Hanoi, and to the southern metropolis, Ho Chi Minh. I recommend flying into one and out of the other, to save on travel time. Between major cities, you can catch cheap internal flights, or opt for cheaper and longer bus rides or train journeys. Opt for an overnight train from Hanoi to Danang, save on a night's accommodation.

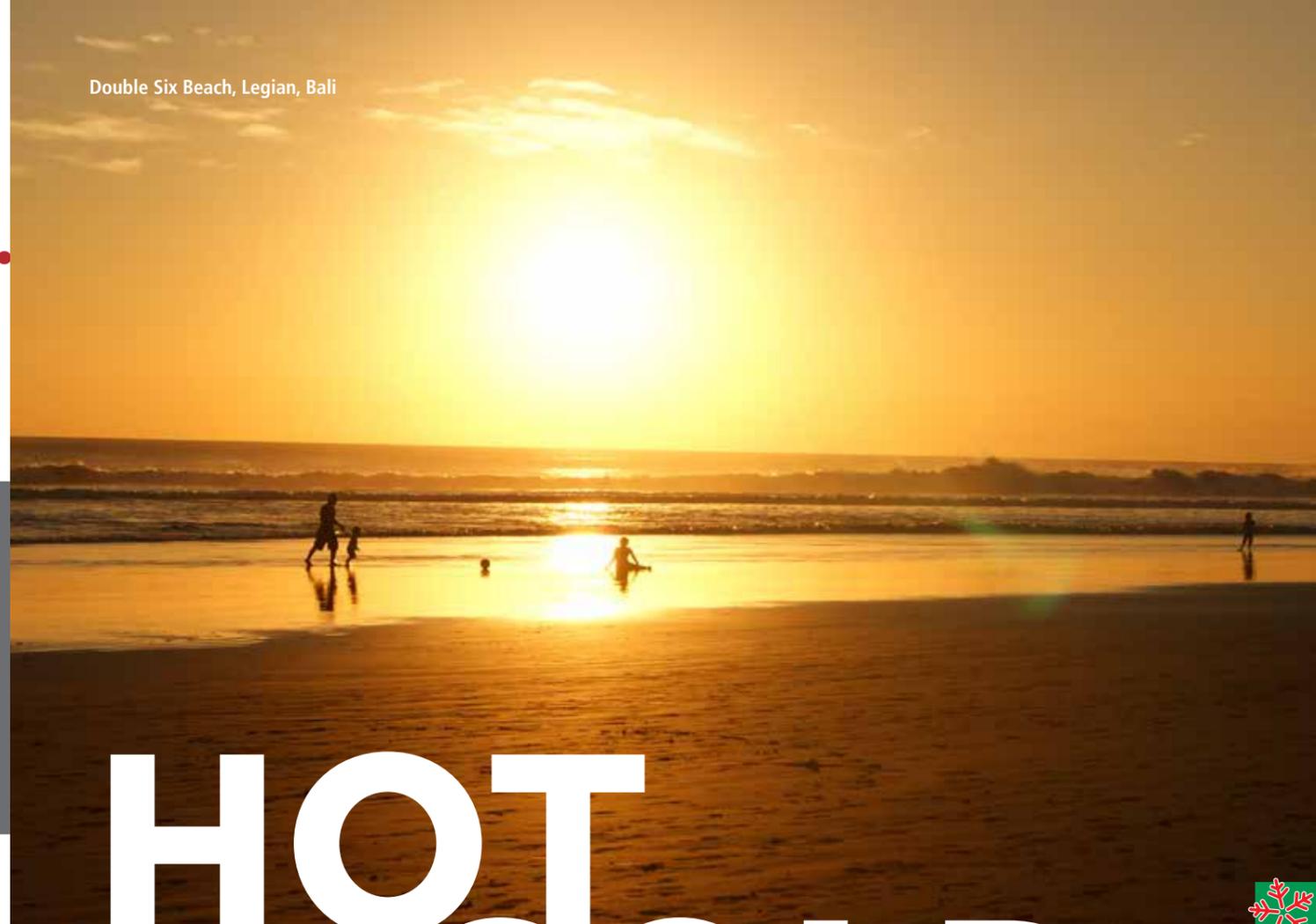
SEE AND DO: Being a long, thin country, most travellers opt to do a tour along the coast. Start either in Hanoi in the north, the capital and most French-influenced area of the country or, in the south, Ho Chi Minh (formerly Saigon), Vietnam's largest city. A must-see is the touristy, but nonetheless beautiful, Halong Bay, which can be done as a day trip from Hanoi, or as part of an overnight stay on a boat in the bay itself. Phu Quoc is an amazing island off the southern coast, made even more beautiful by the fact it is still relatively unknown. Enjoy it's gloriously empty beaches. One note on danger: Ho Chi Minh is known for its pickpockets. Just be on your guard—a drunken tourist is an open invite for thieves.

EAT: Vietnam definitely ticks all the boxes on the delicious food front. Hoi An is the foodie capital of the country and offers banana-leaf wrapped fish, lemon-infused delights and the all-famous pho. Food differs throughout the various regions, due to the country's history (read: more baguettes in the north).



Halong Bay, Vietnam

Double Six Beach, Legian, Bali



HOT OR COLD:

WHICH DO YOU PREFER?

Read more about the best places to go for the winter holidays in next month's issue!



Hakuba, Nagano



VOLUNTEERING

EDITORIAL Kayaking to a World Heritage Site



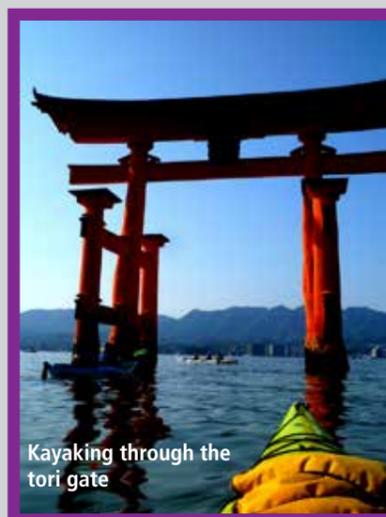
It's 8:15am and I was starting to sweat. I was supposed to be at my destination fifteen minutes ago and I was still on a road in Hiroshima driving towards the Miyajima port. Did I take a wrong turn? Was I struggling to get my car out of the paid parking lot from the night before because I did not have exact change? You betcha!

I am finally at Paddle Park, a kayak rental shop, and parking my car when I can see several neon kayaks are being prepared for the morning outing to Miyajima Island. Keep in mind that I have only kayaked once before in my life for about an hour in an area that resembled a small inflatable kiddie pool, and now I am staring down at what can potentially be an upper body disaster by day's end. I did my research before committing to kayaking for the day and found Paddle Park's one day sea kayaking course at paddlepark.com. They offer full and half-day excursions to Miyajima Island where you can kayak through the Itsukushima shrine during high tide. I choose to challenge myself to a full day of kayaking which cost 10,000 yen vs. the half day option priced at 6,000 yen. Signing up for it was easy since there is a phone number to call to make a reservation. The staff spoke English and were able to answer my questions about getting to and from Miyajima. The alternative for signing up on the phone was filling out a form online.

I do not speak Japanese (or at least not well), so when Shingo Uyama, the kayaking instructor for the day, was able to use gestures and a little English to explain how to use the kayak's rudders, I felt way more at ease. The group finally geared up in life jackets and headed down to the water. By 9 AM, we all climbed in our kayaks and headed out to Miyajima. I was in a one-person kayak, but they also have two and three-person kayaks. I looked at the women in the two and three-person kayaks and began to wonder if I should be sharing the workload of rowing with a friend, but it was too late for regrets.

About an hour passes and our group has kayaked 2 km to the famous torii gate at low tide and snapped a few photos before continuing on to our lunch spot. For lunch, the Paddle Park instructor cooked for us on the beach. I had pasta and a vegetable omelet before getting back out on the water to get to Itsukushima Shrine during high tide. I was tired and sunburned, but not defeated. Our group of three kayakers made it back to the torii gate and kayaked through the shrine opening. It was exhilarating and something I had wanted to do for three years since the first time I went to Hiroshima's Miyajima Island and saw kayakers go through the Torii gate during high tide. A few photos later we head back to the mainland and ended our adventure by 4 pm.

What adventures have you been on lately and in what ways do you go sightseeing in Japan? Email me at connect.volunteering@ajet.net



THIS MONTH IN VOLUNTEERING...

For this month's Volunteering section we have another lineup of great articles for you. Do you like animals? Do you like reading? Care to go dancing? First we have Stephanie Creel in the Spotlight, giving us a glimpse of the Kagawa Charity Ball that helped raise money for the Tohoku region with an evening of fancy dancing.

With any program you might think of doing you will face some challenges. Shane Allen, a Saga's recent JET Programme alumni, how-to guide for implementing a reading and cultural enrichment program at your local library addresses the challenges and success of the circle time program in Saga.

Following that, we have Susan Roberts, a full volunteer for the Japan Cat Network, writing about the various ways in which the JCN continues to help the animals from Tohoku and the ways in which you can volunteer with them.

Lastly is my editorial about Kayaking to Miyajima Island in Hiroshima and I give a user review of the company PaddlePark.

As always, you can share your volunteering experiences by emailing me at connect.volunteering@ajet.net



SPOTLIGHT

Stephanie Creel, Charity Dancing Queen

In 2012 Kagawa AJET hosted a Charity Ball to benefit the Tohoku region through a local charity called *Second Hand Takamatsu*. I was fortunate enough to lead the team that planned and executed the event. As you can imagine, the process had its fair share of obstacles and rewards.

The first hurdle was the language barrier. The second hurdle was finding a venue. All I needed was a large space with wooden floors, close to public transportation, where loud music wouldn't be a problem, where we could eat and serve alcohol... and where people wouldn't have to take their shoes off upon entry. Planning a large event not only improved my flexibility, but it taught me leadership. I learned how to deal with my weaknesses and how to appreciate the great strengths of both my team and myself. I feel honored to have worked with everyone who made this event possible and to have made such good friends along the way.

But most importantly of all, everyone involved—whether organizers or attendees—were able to help the restoration of Tohoku. I hope that we'll all continue to give back to the wonderful country we have made our home.



CIRCLE TIME IN SAGA

Shane Anderson, Saga



Handing out bookmarks for circle time



Live sing-along with iPad and mandolin



Reading to an audience of two-hundred

Even before departing to Japan, I knew I wanted to get involved in a variety of activities to spend my time fruitfully and integrate myself into the community I was about to be thrust into. As for Circle Time itself, it really was a case of being in the right place at the right time. During the month leading up to my departure to Japan, I was in contact with my predecessor, showering her with questions as most incoming JETs probably do. During our exchanges she proposed I take over her baby—Circle Time—and run with it; building upon what she and her colleagues had done up to that point.

Hervision, as I understood it to be, was a regular internationalization event to not only foster interest in English itself, but to help children develop a positive attitude towards intercultural communication at the earliest stages of development. Circle Time achieves this through English reading circles, singing and dancing, as well as other activities and crafts such as origami and colouring. Even though the participants may not understand all of the contents of each song or book, we can present it in a fun way to engage and keep interested everyone participating. It is my hope that the result of these positive intercultural experiences will manifest as a more proactive and positive attitude towards foreign language and culture education as well as interacting with people on the international stage.

The first Circle Time was held at a local library in Saga City. Many libraries in Japan have rooms that may be rented for free with the simple submission of a form. This makes the process of initiating the activity much easier; particularly for those of us with rather strict budgets and no funding. However, even with facilities to host an event, you cannot start to make an impact until people start participating in earnest. To get participants in Japan you will most likely be relying on print media and word of mouth with some radio and TV thrown in the mix if possible. It is worth it to advertise on social media such as Facebook and Mixi, but the effectiveness of such routes depends on your target audience. The current middle-aged, and older, generation in Japan is a world apart in terms of social media take-up. As for print media, you can often find yourself published in a rather well-read newspaper or city flier if you genuinely have something unique and beneficial to offer the community. Again, targeting is critical. Circle Time is intended for younger children—elementary and under—so we have tried, and succeeded, to have articles printed in the section of the local newspaper regarding events targeted at parenting or early development. The general community life

section is another great area to inquire about having something published or advertised.

Currently, Circle Time regularly holds events at the Saga City Library and at a child care support centre in a city in central Saga. However, we have had a couple events organized in conjunction with the library itself with one event drawing over 200 participants. We achieved this cooperation after simply approaching the staff at the library and having them sit in at an event and see what we are doing. We called the child care support centre and simply told them who we were, what we do, and if they would be interested in having us come out for an event. After the first event at the child care support centre we talked about making it a longer-lasting affair and thus our relationship with them was born. Of course this does not always work. One time I was given the typical “we will discuss it and let you know later” response, which all too often signifies a no in Japan, after sitting down and trying to build a new relationship with a child care support centre in a different city. However, you simply cannot let that deter you from your goals as an organization and must accept that sometimes your goals do not align with those of the organizations you may find it necessary to work with.

After you do get your foot in the door, the most important thing is to show them what a great job your organization can and will do, and how much the community will appreciate it. If you can accomplish that and maintain good relationships, you should have no problem in securing facilities at the same location in the future. Maintain good relationships—never back out except for extraordinary circumstances, do not promise more than you can give, under-promise slightly if possible, and always keep lines of communication open, even if you have no events planned at a given facility for the foreseeable future.

When practical, Circle Time is held the fourth Saturday of each month on an alternating schedule between the library and child care support centre mentioned above. Alternating between the capitol, Saga City, and the child care support centre located in a city in central Saga closer to a wealth of other smaller towns, allows Circle Time to work for the benefit of the prefectural community rather than restricting it to the local community of only Saga City.

Perhaps the most difficult thing in putting Circle Time into practice

is amassing the required number of volunteers for each event. Most of the volunteers in the Circle Time group officially work within the JET Programme. In Saga, the JET calendar is constantly overflowing with events other than Circle Time which means that many volunteers must often make the decision of volunteering for Circle Time or participating in something which may only be a yearly occurrence. Of course I tried my best to schedule Circle Time on days which no major events were being held, but there will be times when that simply becomes unavoidable. If you can find a core of committed volunteers, including people outside the JET Programme, you will find yourself in a much better position when it comes around to schedule the next event. Circle Time has had private ALTs, Japanese friends, high school students, exchange or international students from the University, and mothers of children participating in the events help out as volunteers. Diversity is a blessing when it comes to volunteers, particularly a group of people with diverse and different schedules and priorities. For organizations spanning multiple cities, it is also best to have people from those cities involved on the ground floor such that they can assist with securing facilities and assisting with organizing when it is simply not practical for the primary organizer or director to do it. Prior to leaving, Circle Time consistently had about a dozen or so volunteers helping at any given event from a pool of about 60 volunteers including the extra support of non-native English speakers that came to assist us.

Circle Time has been running for around 4 years now, and has proved to be a fun and engaging activity for both participants and volunteers alike. If you're interested in getting something similar off the ground in your local area and want some more information or ideas, feel free to get in touch with Saga's current Circle Time coordinator Jane Curtis jane-curtis@pref.saga.lg.jp

Shane grew up in rural Alberta, Canada before moving to Calgary, Alberta to study electrical engineering—spending one year abroad in Ehime working in the R&D department of a Japanese engineering company. Before coming to JET, Shane spent two years after graduation working at an engineering firm in Canada. After spending two wonderful years on JET in Saga, Shane is now in his first year of law school at Harvard Law School but often thinks back fondly on his time on JET and the wonderful people he shared that once-of-a-lifetime experience with.





JET Gloria Tang fostering Shi-chan, a cat of an evacuee who cannot keep her now

THE JAPAN CAT NETWORK

Susan Roberts, Fukushima

All photos are courtesy of Draycat.com

Have you ever seen a stray cat or kitten in a park, in front of a convenience store, or on a street corner in Japan, and wondered if it was going to be OK? Have you wondered what might be done to help? After having an encounter with a stray animal that is in distress, visitors to Japan are often surprised to find a severe shortage of available resources and humane sheltering options. Japan Cat Network was founded with a mission of assisting people who want to help stray and abandoned animals in their own communities. The registered nonprofit organization has allowed people to help thousands of animals throughout the country, by supporting Trap, Neuter, Return projects, as well as rescue and re-homing efforts. Founded in 2000, Japan Cat Network has been featured in a variety of media outlets, including Animal Planet's *Must Love Cats*, *Cat Fancy* magazine, as well as a cat documentary with Joanna Lumley for ITV.

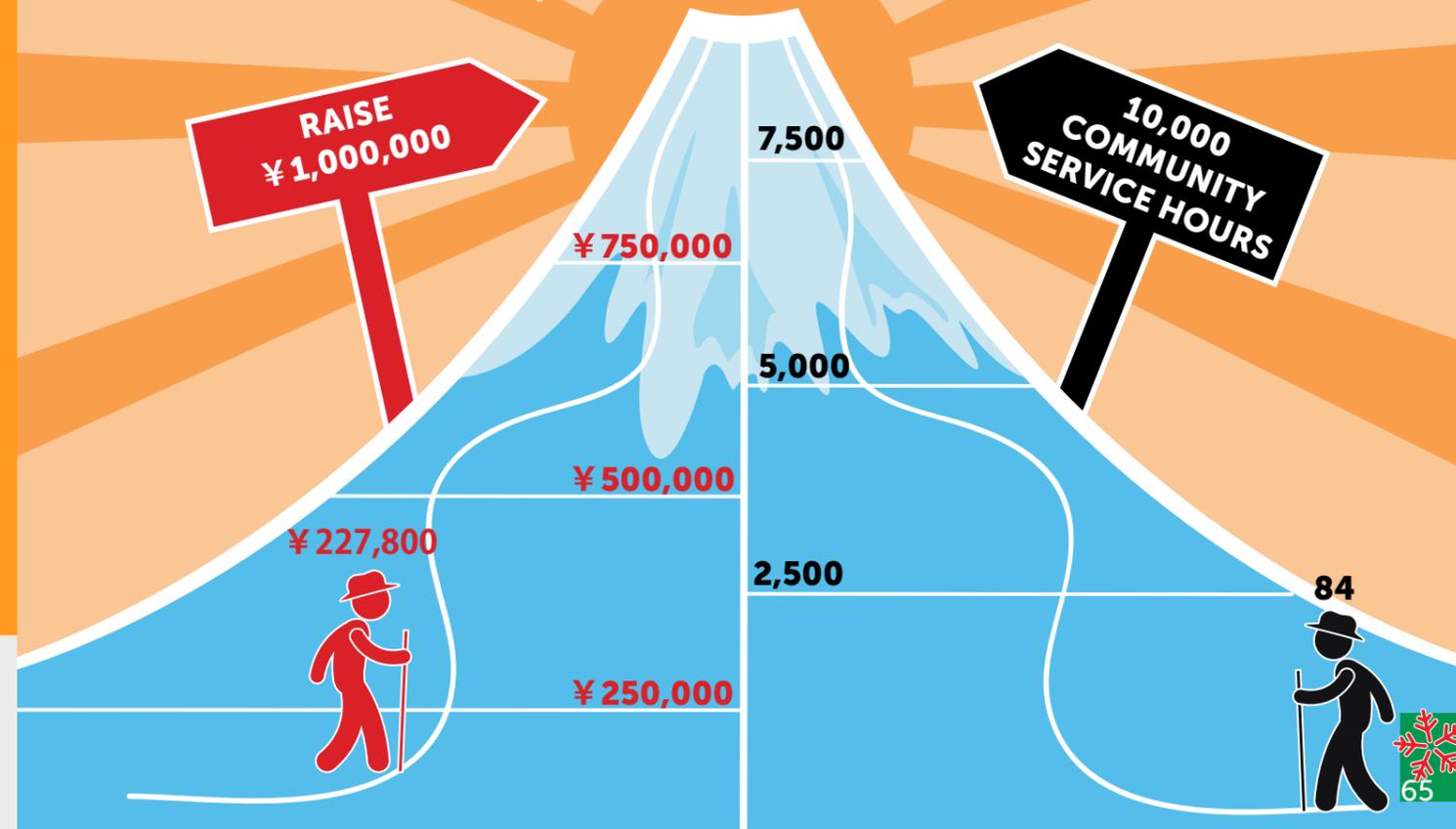
After the disaster in northern Japan, JCN responded by creating an animal rescue base in Fukushima in order to assist evacuees with animal-related issues. The volunteer-run organization continues to operate a small animal shelter in Inawashiro, Fukushima, which supports regular feeding and rescue efforts in evacuated areas. Hundreds of volunteers from all over the world have visited the JCN Inawashiro facility. Cats roam freely in three separate cat rooms, with a quarantine area for new arrivals. The shelter houses a small number of rescued dogs, as well. There is a general living area for volunteers, including a shared kitchen, bath, and sleeping area, with extra sleeping space in a loft and the cat rooms. Volunteers at the shelter care for animals, do general shelter maintenance, and sometimes go along on feeding/rescue missions. Some volunteers also work remotely by contributing to the website, fundraising events, adoption coordination, and other organizational issues.

Along with volunteer duties, visitors coming to the Inawashiro shelter will have some free time to enjoy local activities and scenery. With one of largest fresh water lakes in Japan, and popular ski areas, there's a lot to see and do year round! Check out the Japan Cat Network Facebook page and join the group for more pictures and information. Transportation options from the Kanto area include a direct bus from Shinjuku station to Inawashiro station, costing around 7,000 yen round trip. There are also overnight buses to nearby Koriyama station, from various cities throughout the country. Those interested in volunteering at the Inawashiro shelter should contact volunteer@japancatnet.com for scheduling and more information. JCN is also looking for fosters and adopters who can provide loving homes for rescued pets. Foster caregivers do not need to make a permanent commitment in order to help save lives—even a matter of weeks can make all the difference in the world. Contact adopt@japancatnet.com for more information about fostering or adopting. Finally, if you can't volunteer, foster, or adopt, you can still be part of every life saved by contributing financially. Please contact donations@japancatnet.com or see <https://donate.japancatnet.com>

Susan Roberts has lived in Japan for twenty years, doing a variety of jobs, including English teaching, educational consulting and writing. She is currently working as a full-time volunteer for Japan Cat Network. Her mornings are spent happily walking dogs through the meadow at the base of Mount Bandai. Find out more about life as a volunteer on her public Facebook page, [susan.roberts.397](https://www.facebook.com/susan.roberts.397)

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. Niigata - ¥ 227,800 (102 JETs)
2. (none yet!)
3. (none yet!)

Top 3 Prefectures: Community Service Hours*

1. Nara - 25 hours (56 JETs)
2. Chiba - 22 hours (55 JETs)
3. Fukui - 24 hours (91 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!

EVENTS

EDITORIAL Ringing in the New Year...Literally

If you check out this month's events calendar on pages 72-75, you'll likely notice a good chunk of the events are on December 31, New Year's Eve. The conclusion of a spent year and arrival of a new one has had spiritual meaning in Japan for centuries, long before Western societies decided to count down the last few seconds of the year, drink champagne, and sing "Auld Lang Syne" (which, oddly, is played in Japan to inform us that stores and parks, not whole quantities of time, are closing).

Japan's myriad traditions and ways of observing the New Year vary by latitude and culture. There is one tradition, however, that exists all over Japan, and any place Buddhism has taken root: *Joya no Kane*, or the tolling of temple bells at midnight. Some temples in Japan keep a very large iron bell that is rung 108 times, counting from the stroke of midnight, to expel evil passions and purify souls for the next year.

But why 108 times? There are multiple theories, but this one is the most plausible:

"...the number corresponds to the number of bonno, or worldly desires. There are 6 kinds of bonno and they are further subdivided into 3 sections, becoming 18. Also, each of these 18 kinds consists of 2 categories, making 36. Finally, there are another 3 categories into which the 36 bonno fall, bringing the total number of bonno to 108."¹

Indeed, 108 is a lot of sins, and *Joya no Kane* is an efficient way for Buddhists to address all of them. These bells are not your granny's dinner bells, either. The largest bell, cast in 1636 for Chion-in in Kyoto, weighs 70 tons, is 3.3 meters tall, and requires 17 monks to ring it¹. Japan, ever the fan of superlatives,

recognizes bells in a number of Buddhist temples: Nara's Todai-ji, famous for housing a large *daibutsu*, has a matching massive bell; Fukuoka's Kanzeon-ji and Kyoto's Myoshin-ji have bells that are considered to be the oldest, dating back to around 700 AD; and the bell at Miidera in Shiga is said to have the most beautiful sound¹.

The City of Yokohama puts its mark on this centuries-old tradition with *Joya no Kiteki*, or New Year Horns. Ships harbored at Yokohama Port sound their horns at midnight, signifying the start of the New Year². Observers at Minato Mirai, near the port, countdown with the Cosmo Clock 21—a Ferris wheel bearing the largest clock in the world—while enjoying the sounds of the horns, as well as a brief fireworks show.

So, if you are in Japan on New Year's Eve and find yourself feeling penitent, or searching for something to resonate with, or if you just want a new cultural experience, head to one of your community's Buddhist temples to participate in *Joya no Kane*. You may even be asked to ring the temple's bell!

Have you observed Joya no Kane? Does your community have a unique way to welcome the New Year, or say sayonara to the old one? We would love to hear your experiences. Tell us about them at connect.events@ajet.net.

Sources:

¹ <http://www.chopsticksny.com/contents/yokoso/2011/11/7311>

² http://www.world-guides.com/asia/japan/kanto/yokohama/yokohama_events.html

THIS MONTH IN EVENTS...

Is it cold in here, or is winter just glad to see us? Cold fronts swept through in mid-November, taking parts of Japan by surprise. But this month's Events section is solid as always, giving you event information written by JETs from all over.

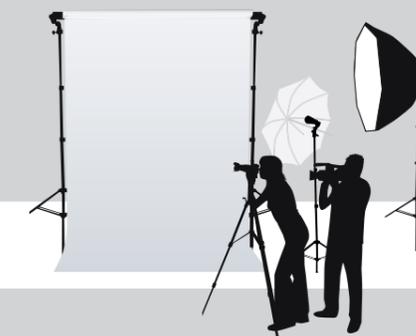
The editorial talks up *Joya no Kane*, the year-end Buddhist tradition of ringing massive temple bells. This month's JET Spotlight shines on former Fukushima ALT Jason Ishida, who fills us in on a local fundraising event and the difference it is making in some Fukushima communities. If you are in Tohoku, his events are the place to be!

Jess Bertubin, riding the wave of introvert pride that's recently swept social media, spells out her own experience as a new ALT in Okinawa and offers advice in 'The Introverted JET'.

The Setouchi Triennale held its third and final seasonal installation for the year from Oct. 5 to Nov. 4, and a crew of island-hopping JETs made it their business to attend and report to Connect. Read on as they share their favorite parts of the massive art festival. The Setouchi Triennale is one of the Shikoku and Chugoku regions' biggest events, and Connect is happy to include a JET commentary.

And rounding out the section is the Events Calendar, your

monthly *Connect compadre*. This month's calendar includes a lot of New Year's Eve events; so if you aren't flying home or to some warmer latitudes for the holidays, check out what your neighbors will be doing on Dec. 31.



SPOTLIGHT

Jason Ishida, Organizer of Rock

Eyes for Fukushima (E4F) hosted a live music night called FUKU ROCK 13 on July 6th, 2013. It was held at a local club called NEO, and entertainment included ten performances that ranged from rock and acoustic sets to dancing and karaoke. We also had six guest DJs spinning until late in the evening. The club owner of NEO has been heavily involved with another charity called ON THE ROAD, which was very active in efforts to clean up radiation. OTR is now raising funds to build a massive indoor skate park and event space in order to provide a radiation-free recreation area for children. More than 100 people came to enjoy the show and support E4F and OTR's cause, raising about 70,000 yen for the project. Because the event was such a huge success and everyone had a blast, we hope to hold the second official FUKU ROCK in 2014. Keep your eyes peeled for more info at <http://eyesforfukushima.com>, and e-mail us anytime at eyes4fukushima@gmail.com

Jason Ishida was a 5th-year ALT in Fukushima-ken, where he still lives and works. You can find more information about ON THE ROAD and its skate park project at <http://otr-fukushima.blogspot.jp/> and <https://otr.or.jp/project/fukushima.php>.

Tell us about someone who makes a difference in your community at connect.events@ajet.net.



The peace of solitude is a powerful way to recharge, especially for introverts, but it can be elusive with our busy lives as JETs.

THE INTROVERTED JET

Jess Bertubin, Okinawa

Several weeks ago, I was enjoying a great dinner with some fellow JETs. In the back of my mind, however, I worried that maybe they thought I was pretending. I had grown quiet halfway through dinner and my voice had dropped from its usual anime-esque high pitch to a more subdued level—that is, when I decided to speak at all.

But it wasn't that I had become bored or tired. The truth is, I'm an introvert. This probably comes as a surprise to people who have met me. At Tokyo Orientation, I was constantly noted for my *genki* personality. Some would call that extroversion, but it's not.

In his Lifehacker article, "How Introverts and Extroverts Can Peacefully Coexist," Eric Ravenscraft expands on the basic understanding that introverts recharge by being alone and extroverts recharge by being social. He does so by comparing introversion and extroversion to being right or left handed. We all have a dominant side, he explains, but it doesn't mean we can't adapt to the other when necessary.

In my case, I wasn't pretending at Orientation or dinner. I'm basically an introvert who's learned how to temporarily be an extrovert. But as an introvert, being *genki* takes quite a toll. Think of a fighting video game where your character has to charge up in order to do their special move. In my case, being *genki* is my special move and I charge up by being by myself.

However, just like in a video game, introverts can only use that special move for a limited time before having to recharge. For an introverted JET, this can be a big challenge because being *genki* is the key to nearly everything. As an ALT, I had to learn how to recharge just between classes. But since I run my *genki*-meter down during the day, I spend my free time recharging—which means I tend to shy away from the loud festivals and instead choose low-key events that I can enjoy at my own pace.

I've found that the following tips have helped me balance

recharging my *genki*-meter and the constant requests to go to events:

1. Acceptance. The first step to anything! Make peace with your introversion and be OK with saying 'no' to invites. Besides, it's impossible for anyone, extroverts included, to attend every single event out there.

2. Plan ahead. Create a schedule and pencil in the events that most interest you, as well as some days to recharge. Also, use visualization: take some time to mentally prepare for an event before you go.

3. Make it count. At an event, tap into your inner extrovert and immerse yourself both in the event and in the people you're with. And don't be afraid to step out for a mini-break: a few minutes in the bathroom during an all-day event can be just the energizer you need.

So to all other introverted JETs out there: don't feel guilty if you're not at every festival or every party. Just watch your *genki*-meter and make the events you do attend really special!

Jess Bertubin is a 1st-year ALT in Okinawa. She was born in Okinawa, raised in Hawaii, is Filipino by blood, but has a universal stomach. She can be found taking long walks for the sake of long walks or scribbling in a notebook or eating some new food—or all of the above, all at the same time!

*How do you like to recharge your battery? Has moving to Japan changed your *genki*-meter? Tell us how you collect yourself at connect.events@ajet.net.*

THE 2013 SETOUCHI TRIENNALE

Julie Pliner, Tokushima

It was a cloudy day when the six of us boarded the ferry aimed for Naoshima. Not the big fluffy cumulus clouds often seen in the summer, but a thin sheet of fog that dulled the blue sky and made us secretly yearn for a hot cup of apple cider and a fire—or maybe that's just me. At any rate, our adventure had begun, and there is nothing like a good ferry ride to make you feel as if you're truly going on an adventure: bound for a new location that undoubtedly holds a promise of excitement and discovery!

There is a certain solace found in knowing that many others are having similar exploits to you, and that countless other ferries had, have, and will continue to trudge into those dark green waters—all with the goal of giving thousands of people the opportunity to see and appreciate art. Today was the last day of the Setouchi Triennale, a tri-annual international art festival spanning the 12 islands of the Seto Inland Sea, and I felt grateful to join the masses in art exploration.

According to the 2013 Setouchi Triennale official pamphlet, the International Art Festival, called 'Art Setouchi', was designed in response to the fear that these islands were losing their unique characteristics because of aging populations and decline in local vitality. This festival was therefore created "in hopes of bringing the vitality back to these islands, where nature and the lifestyles of the people have coalesced together."¹

This creative solution seems to have accomplished its mission, for after a visit to any of the islands one can see how this grand scale art project truly serves to showcase the unique culture of each island. Additionally, many artists and businesses have taken up residence on the islands, building permanent installations and creating unique and interactive businesses. Though much of the art is only on display during the festival, many islands have permanent installations that you can interact with throughout the year.

Naoshima, otherwise known as 'Art Island', is one of these places. With the *Love Onsen*, *Art House Project*, and a handful of dreamy museums, Naoshima is the perfect place to hop on a bus or bicycle and start exploring. The following anecdotes are impressions from some of the lovely people I spent the day with.

The day trip to Naoshima during Setouchi Triennale was fantastic. It was such a beautiful island with art all around. We went to both museums on the island and saw the giant pumpkins, not to mention the random pieces of art that were all along the grounds. The buses and shuttles made it really easy to get around

and it seemed that every building on the island was a piece of art work in itself. I would definitely go back to Naoshima again.



Danielle and Sergio playing around at "The Pumpkin," one of Naoshima's more popular art installations.



The Monet Exhibit at the Chichu Art Museum

The Chi Chu Art Museum was my favorite experience of all, and more specifically the Monet exhibit. Every exhibit in the museum was amazing in its own way, from being extremely relaxing and peaceful to being a bit trippy, but the Monet was really remarkable. The way the floor felt and the natural light used to light the white walls just made the paintings pop. We sat down in the middle of the room and just took some time to soak it in. Even the actual buildings that made up the museum were art themselves, the way they were shaped and built into the mountain.

Danielle Williams is a 3rd-year JET from Michigan living in Sanagochi, Tokushima, home of the famous momoichigo!



A wall at the Chichu Art Museum, building design by architect Tadao Ando



From Naoshima, looking back toward Takamatsu in the morning



As an architecture major in college, I took several art and architecture history classes. One of the architects I studied was Tadao Ando. It was a pleasure to be able to wander through some of his work on Naoshima. The buildings are amazing, and the art inside is spectacular!

We had a lovely time. Naoshima is an easy day trip from mainland Shikoku. Though there were many people visiting that day, it never seemed overly crowded. Public transportation on the island was fast and easy, and the museums were amazing!

Brandon Bollom is a Texan and 2nd-year ALT currently living in Kamiyama, Tokushima. He enjoys splurging for delicious cheese at Costco, going on adventures with his wife Becky and harassing his kitty cat Manmaru.

THERE IS A CERTAIN SOLACE FOUND IN KNOWING THAT MANY OTHERS ARE HAVING SIMILAR EXPLOITS TO YOU



Traces Blue



Many hands working together to create Traces Blue

After a day of exploring Naoshima, I waved goodbye to my friends and headed over to the nearby island of Teshima. Also called 'Milk Island' because of its history of dairy farming, this island turned out to be full of surprises. From sipping tea at Tobias Rehberger's cafe to exploring *Distant Memory*, a house made entirely of windows, it really was an incredible day!

Look who fell into the rabbit hole at Tobias Rehberger's cafe



A peek into Distant Memory



My favorite part of the day was getting to talk to one of the collaborators in the project *Traces Blue*, Daisuke Goda. This project explores themes of change, as well as the ties that bind day-to-day life. We had the opportunity to hear all about what the project meant to him and how special it was to collaborate with Australian artists Craig Walsh and Hiromi Tango. This project, as he explained to me, is "so much more than what you can see! It is the relationships and bonds we created with Australia, it's the way this project involved

the entire community." More can be seen and read about this amazing project on Hiromi Tango's website: <http://hiromitango.com/Traces-Blue>

After exploring any of the 12 islands participating in the Setouchi Triennale, I think one cannot help but come away inspired and with a better idea of all that is possible and accomplished through art. This event continually transforms artists, residents, and visitors alike, and I encourage everyone who seeks beauty and adventure to add the Setouchi Triennale to their Life List.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go make some art.

Julie Pliner is a 2nd-year JET who has been having a steamy love affair with Asia for the last ten years. She likes parasite anecdotes, making faces at random babies, and sleeping on strangers' couches.

Did you attend the Setouchi Triennale? Does your community have a special art festival you want to plug? Let us know! connect.events@ajet.net

Sources

¹ 2013 Setouchi Triennale official pamphlet. Accessed on November 13, 2013 at <http://setouchi-artfest.jp/en/>.



Artist Daisuke Goda

EVENTS CALENDAR DECEMBER



Remember: Every link in Connect is clickable!

Let us know about what's up in your block for next month! Your area's event could appear on the next Event Calendar and be promoted by AJET at ajet.net/events! Send them to connect.events@ajet.net.



*The block colours are coordinated to the map.

BLOCK 1

Namahage Festival

Dec. 31
Oga, Akita

A reverse Halloween of sorts: people dressed as Namahage, a spooky *oni*, visit houses to both scare children into good behavior and bless the household in the coming year... that is, if the family's hospitality of mochi and sake appeases the Namahage.

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

Naked Festival at Iizume Inari Shrine

Dec. 31
Goshogawara, Aomori

It's as crazy as it sounds: spending New Year's Eve carrying offerings for protection from disaster and illness in the new year and risking frostbite during all sorts of events, while surrounded by a sea of naked men. Except, OK, the naked men are wearing socks, sandals and *fundoshi*.

http://www.apinet.jp/Detail_display_00004062.html

BLOCK 2

Kohata no Hata Festival

Dec. 1
Nihonmatsu, Fukushima

Boasted as one of Japan's best banner festivals, the event has a long—nearly 1,000 years—and rich tradition. Braving cold winds and often snow, crowds carry flag-style banners or blow conch-shell trumpets and walk along the ridge of Mt. Kihata.

<http://bit.ly/17hJqNx>

BLOCK 3

Chichibu Yomatsuri

Dec. 2–3
Chichibu, Saitama

This night festival is one of Japan's best parade float festivals, comprised of six large, ornate floats that represent each village in the area. The festival also boasts a 2.5-hour fireworks display, which is uncommon during the winter months.

<http://www.sainokuni-kanko.jp/eng/festival/070.html>

Koga Chochin Saomomi Matsuri

Dec. 7
Koga, Ibaraki

Chochin translates loosely to lantern battle, leaving no room for confusion. Lit lanterns are raised high on bamboo poles, and competitors do their best to extinguish other lanterns from below.

<http://www.kogakanko.jp/chochin/>

Shimotsuki Festival

Dec. 1, 7, 11, 13–15
Iida, Nagano

This festival is tucked away in the isolated Ina valley of southern Nagano. It is your typical, wonderful harvest festival, where locals go to their favored shrine to dance and sing through the night and be purified by priests in the morning as they pray for a spring bounty.

Email info@tohyamago.com for access information.

BLOCK 4

Akoh Gishi-sai

Dec. 14
Minato, Tokyo

This event memorializes the loyalty of the 47 *Akoh Gishi*, one of Japan's best-loved and most-told stories. On Dec. 14, 1703, these 47 *ronin* avenged their master's death by killing his enemy and committing a mass ritual suicide. Today, crowds of people come to Sengaku-ji, where the *ronin* remains rest, and watch a procession of community members dressed as the famous 47.

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

Akibasan Gongen Fire Festival

Dec. 6
Odawara, Kanagawa

Held at the Buddhist Ryokakuin Temple, monks engage in esoteric incantations and rituals and defy all pacifist norms by bearing halberds, broad axes, and bows and arrows. In the evening, they walk over smoldering coals for two hours. Ouch!

<http://www.city.odawara.kanagawa.jp/kanko/event/DEC/hibusematuri.html>



BLOCK 5

Ikenoue Purification Ceremony Dec. 14 Gifu, Gifu

Men of certain superstitiously unlucky ages—called *yakudoshi*—brave the cold waters of the Nagara River in this old Buddhist tradition to purify themselves and pray for personal achievement and fulfillment.

http://www.gifucvb.or.jp/en/02_event/02_07.html

BLOCK 6

PET Bottle Illumination Dec. 1–Jan. 3 Higashiomi, Shiga

Illumination events happen all over Japan, but this is the first—and possibly only—illumination using approximately 12,000 used PET bottles. This event, in its 11th year, aims to educate children about eco-friendly practices while putting on a good show.

http://www.biwako-visitors.jp/search/event_9536.html?utm_source=bvrss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=rs

Okeru Mairi Dec. 31 Kyoto, Kyoto

This year-end event is named after a series of events at Yasaka Shrine, where the *okeru* herb, which is believed to have cleansing and immunity-boosting properties, is ceremonially burned to cast away evil spirits and promote longevity.

<http://www.yasaka-jinja.or.jp/en/event.html>

BLOCK 9

Warai-kou Dec. 1 Hofu, Yamaguchi

Watch grown men in traditional Japanese garb duke it out from the bottom of their lungs in this laughing battle.

<http://www.city.hofu.yamaguchi.jp/site/kankou-site/waraihou.html>

Morotabune Shinji Dec. 3 Mihonoseki, Shimane

Men recreate a Shinto myth at this spiritual rite: two canoes of nine men each meet in Mihonoseki harbor, splash each other with sea water, and have canoe races. In the evening, offerings of food and wine are made at the nearby shrine.

<http://www.mihonoseki-kankou.jp/matsuri/page4.html>

Rakugo English Performance Dec. 8 Matsue, Shimane

Rakugo is part theater, part comedy, but is wholly entertaining. This art form is uniquely Japanese and is about 300 years old. Enjoy seeing rakugo in English at the Shimane Art Museum.

Contact performer Yukio Kashima for more info: k-ocha@e-ocha.jp

BLOCK 7

Yassai Hossai Dec. 14 Sakai, Osaka

When Shinto god Ebisu washed ashore at Ishizu-no-Hama, fishermen burned 108, or yassai hossai, firewood bundles to warm him. Today, this evening festival celebrates Ebisu's arrival with fire, and attendees are encouraged to walk the burning embers once the fires are low.

<http://www.city.sakai.lg.jp/english/visitors/newsletter/December2012January2/index02.html>

Itsukushima Shrine Fire Prevention Festival Dec. 31 Hatsukaichi, Hiroshima

This event is also called *Chinka-sai*. Families gather at this picturesque shrine with homemade pine torches to ward off disastrous fires and wish for good luck in the New Year.

http://www.miyajima.or.jp/english/event/event_chinka.html



BLOCK 10

Oshiroi Matsuri Dec. 2 Asakura, Fukuoka

In one of Kyushu's more unique and silly festivals, freshly harvested rice is ground and mixed with water to make a paste, which is spread on worshippers' faces. Some use the face paint to predict the following year's harvest, and some include it in their livestock's feed to ward off illness.

<http://www.crossroadfukuoka.jp/en/event/?mode=detail&id=4000000000847>

BLOCK 8

Mitoyo City International Christmas Party Dec. 15 Mitoyo, Kagawa

A truly international shindig, complete with live music and dancing, finger foods, and a holiday quiz. Foreigners pay only 500 yen. Visit the Facebook event page for more information:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/718959168132582/>

Takamatsu Fuyu Matsuri Dec. 20–26 Takamatsu, Kagawa

The City boasts this festival as its signature winter event. Crowds gather to watch children's performances, dance contests, and other events, in an expertly illuminated park.

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

Snow Carnival at Mt. Ishizuchi Dec. 22 Saijo, Ehime

You wouldn't be alone if Shikoku is not the first place you think of when considering snowy vacations, but this carnival is worth a detour.

<http://saijo-imadoki.heteml.jp/archives/4508>

Fukuoka Ramen Show 2013 Dec. 11–15 Fukuoka, Fukuoka

Specialty ramen shops from different regions of Japan descend upon Fukuoka, home of the hearty Hakata ramen, to collaborate and serve up their goods. One bowl is 750 yen.

For a list of attendees, visit <http://ramen-kyokai.jp/topics/archives/305>.

Nagasaki Christmas Walk Dec. 8 and 22 Nagasaki, Nagasaki

Enjoy a walking tour of central Nagasaki, illuminated with Christmas lights, ending at the famous Oura Cathedral for a special Christmas performance.

Reservations are required and can be made online: <http://www.saruku.info/course/G327.html>.

2013 Saga Charity Christmas Party Dec. 14 Saga, Saga

Started in 1989 by foreigners and Japanese who wanted to raise money to give back to their community, the party hosts hundreds of people each year who come for good food, entertainment, and international exchange.

Email info@ccp.com for more information.

BLOCK 11

Naha Marathon Dec. 1 Naha, Okinawa

Registration is full, but that's no reason not to cheer on the 25,000 runners taking to the streets of Naha!

<http://www.naha-marathon.jp/en/>

Itoman Peaceful Illumination Dec. 16–Jan. 3 Itoman, Okinawa

Held at a vineyard that was one a WWII battleground, this illumination, currently in its 14th year, is marketed as a prayer for peace, hope, and harmony. There are also fun events planned for New Years Eve.

<http://www.oki-nightlife.com/event/post/1872>



CONNECT CONTESTS AND CONTRIBUTING

CONTRIBUTING

Go somewhere amazing recently? Have kitchen tips to share? Organizing an underwater Quidditch tournament? Here at Connect, we're looking for 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, photo spreads, and more.

SPOTLIGHT

Every section of the magazine features one JET (or non-JET!) every month who's doing something interesting or praiseworthy. From fashionistas to volunteering superheroes to master chefs, tell us 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 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 feel 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!

PHOTOGRAPHY 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!

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.

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 Joshua Del Pino's winning photo this month. Here are all the fantastic submissions we received!



"Kongo-in Temple in the Morning Mist" – Orrin Heath, Kyoto



"Matsue Suitoro" – Joshua Del Pino, Shimane



"Sword Art" – Orrin Heath, Kyoto



"Yozukuhade" – Joshua Del Pino, Shimane

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HAIKU

The racing storm clouds
Are listening to the crow
She has much to say
✂ Julia Mace, Kagawa

Blanket on my lap
And kairo in my shoes
Winter's come early
✂ Julia Mace

Manx cat malkins play
While whiskers, dozens, swiftly
Stay the heart of me
✂ Giuseppe di Martino, Yamagata

Blue waves in Japan
Turn brown when they meet the sand
Like the Texas coast.
✂ Jaime Sepulveda, Miyazaki

Tortillas farewell,
Rice is on the menu now,
Oishi donburi.
✂ Jaime Sepulveda

Three tongues become one:
Japa-Spana-Enga-lish
Hai, sí, yes – say what?
✂ Jaime Sepulveda

Entering the home
Soft carpet beneath my feet
Complete without shoes.
✂ Kat Truong, Niigata

An Illinoisian
Must remind themselves of this:
It's "A-be," not "Abe."
✂ Laurel Williams, Nagasaki

December brings peace,
NaNoWriMo is over,
Now we can relax.
✂ Martin Yearley, Ishikawa



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