

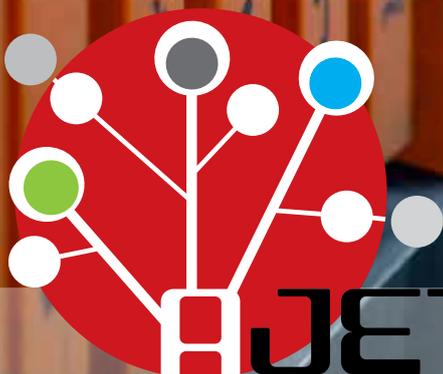
AJET

CONNECT

magazine

January Issue

2014



AJET

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR OF CONNECT MAGAZINE!



Welcome to 2014 and welcome to this year's first issue of Connect magazine! 2013 saw lots of changes and incredible progress for Connect, in no small part thanks to all of you. To all of our contributors, readers, supporters, sponsors, well-wishers, and team members, I personally want to say thank you so very much for making this a great year for Connect magazine.

What did we accomplish in 2013? Well, I'd like to recap some of it in reflection before looking forward to this new year.

- Saw big changes in our visual identity thanks to our fantastic designer Melinda Lange, including 2-page magazine layout, clear sections, bold colors, and more.
- Enjoyed working with more contributors than ever before in our history as a publication. In 2013, we worked with literally hundreds of writers, photographers, and contributors throughout the community.
- Began new features to get you more involved, including the Reader Poll, Ask/Connect, Block Spotlight, CrossConnect, and lots of clickable links for added internet connectivity!
- Made our first big step towards full online publication by releasing all of our issues on issuu.com for easy in-browser access and social media sharing.
- Surpassed 50,000 reads and 7,500 subscribers!

All fantastic things! But we wouldn't be content to just sit on last year's successes and float on through next year. What would January be without some resolutions? Here are my personal resolutions for Connect for this coming year.

- ➔ Constantly increase the quality of our magazine with

engaging writing, gorgeous photos, and one-of-a-kind content from professionals and people you know.

- ➔ Give our talented writers and photographers even more of a platform by increasing Connect's presence and readership online.
- ➔ Better promote more of our readers' blogs, portfolios, and websites, so you can get more great stuff from the writers you like.
- ➔ Get Connect in the hands of influential websites and publications about Japan around the world, while featuring great new content from those partner publications.
- ➔ Make contributing articles, photographs, haiku questions, and comments easier via online forms and increased digital connectivity.
- ➔ By the end of 2014, see Connect come completely online.

They may be lofty goals, but I've got a great team and an enthusiastic community behind me. The sky's the limit! I look forward to working with all of you in the coming year and seeing all the amazing things you share. May 2014 bring you happiness, success, joy, and everything good.

All my best,

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

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FROM THE AJET CHAIR, KAY MAKISHI...



Happy New Year, JET family! I hope you're all returning back safely and recharged from your home countries, exotic vacations or...trip to the local grocery store.

What was AJET National Council doing before break? We were representing *your* voice to the Japanese government and CLAIR at the **AJET Opinion Exchange** in December. Thank you to everyone who sent us their feedback on how to improve the JET Programme and our community—from wanting more French ALTs, to how the new English education system and Tokyo Olympics are going to affect JETs nationwide. We asked and big changes are under way! Stay tuned for an official summary of the discussions coming soon. (FYI: We're finding new webmasters now. Hopefully the reports will be uploaded to site beginning of January. Julia is drafting blurb for reports.)

Also, thank you to everyone who participated in our *first ever AJET Exec eMeet & Greet!* It wouldn't have been a success without you! Did you know that your AJET Exec members (Martin, 5th-year Shimane ALT and Vice-Chair, Alan, 4th-year Fukushima ALT and Treasurer, and I) Skype meet every single week to discuss how we can make our national JET community (National AJET) even better? We absolutely loved your involvement and passion, and are working on making your ideas become reality. Missed the last one? Don't worry, there will be more coming soon! Subscribe to eConnect News and learn when and how to sign-up [HERE](#).

In 2014, your AJET National Council is ready to rock n' roll with some great services for you again! Sarah Stout, your AJET Director of Professional and Educational Development, organized our third **AJET Professional Development Conference Call** speaker: former JET Robert Fritz, now an Associate Professor at Nagasaki University. He'll be talking to us JETs about how to improve relations with our JTEs. Register your spot [HERE](#).

On a personal note, in my spare time when I'm not volunteering

as AJET Chair, I'm training for the Tokyo Marathon! It's only two months away now and I'm equally stoked and scared. This is my first race—ever. Before training, I couldn't even run 5 km. But, the feeling of self-progress is addicting and that's what keeps me going. I always have doubts, but I never have regrets.

Let's make 2014 rock, everyone!

Yours in JET community service,

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

※As always, if you ever have any questions or feedback about AJET or, just want to drop a line to say 'hey!', feel free to email me at kay.makishi@ajet.net.

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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

As I sit in the southern hemisphere waiting out the last hours of 2013, I join every other human being in thinking over the past year. For me, it's been an incredible year of opportunity and fortune (appropriate, since it was my snake-tastic Zodiac Year). I'm looking forward to opening 2014 with another week in New Zealand before returning to Japan for a big Block 2 Snowboarding weekend at Zao Onsen. Reach me anytime for any reason at connect.editor@ajet.net.

Melinda Lange Layout and Design

Another month has gone by and it's STILL COLD! After two winters in Japan, this Floridian is still not used to having cold toes. I hope you all are having a wonderful holiday! I'm literally writing this as I'm packing my carry-on to visit the States, wondering whether or not I packed too much in the suitcase I sent to the airport. This issue is coming to you from up in the sky, crossing international datelines before it's even released!



Josiah David Director of Public Relations

Salut! I'm Josiah, stationed in wonderful Yamanashi, a hub for some great contributors and staff here at Connect! I'm your new PR Director and a regular contributor. I just got back from a wonderful (and very cold) trip to Canada and am ready to help take this magazine to the next level! To feature your blog or website in Connect or vice-versa, email me at connect.pr@ajet.net.



Sterling Diesel Assistant Designer

New Year's is a good time to be mindful of the change that happens around us on a daily basis. Not only is the day and month going to change, but so will the year. (Get your brain ready to write the full date correctly!) I'm looking forward to this new year not only as an adventurer at large, but as a new member of the Connect magazine family.



Ola Weber Copyediting

Early this January, I lined up some volunteer work at an organic farm in Nagano to learn about natural food processing of traditional foods. I was lucky that the work took place indoors, cause I had to save my body heat for the slopes! Staying at a charming little ski-out *ryokan* at the base Togari ski resort, I was super impressed with my first ski experience in Japan. Now, I have my sights set on hitting the slopes around Sapporo during February's Snowfest, but I'll definitely need to invest in some extra layers!



Matthew Jones Culture Editor

Ugh... what's that? ANOTHER Connect? But didn't we just do that? What do you mean it's January... Ok, maybe I'm just a *little* worn out from New Year's Eve. But can you blame me? The New Year is a great time in Japan. Between sales, parties and special foods; your calendar will fill right up. This New Year also brings the Year of the Horse, so strap on your runners, get out there, and run until that newly acquired winter weight disappears—I know I need to!



Tom Morin-Robinson Entertainment Editor

Happy New Year's, dear readers! I hope you've taken full advantage of the holidays. Over the last week I've found myself petting the Bambis in Nara, taking in the obligatory sights of Kyoto and drinking my way through the back streets of Osaka. Predictably, I've ended up taking way too many photos. Go check 'em 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

Dear reader, did you score any fukubukuro (福袋 lucky/ mystery bag) from your favourite stores over the New Year? As you peruse this issue of Connect, I'm probably finishing up my Kyushu driving holiday, having enjoyed our Culture Editor Matt's fine hospitality, soaked in a couple of onsens, marvelled at Mother Nature's handiwork and eaten 7,493 bowls of tonkotsu ramen. I've set myself two modest (but potentially challenging) targets for 2014: journal every day and cut out sugar. I'd love to hear about your goals—whether big or small, fashion-related or otherwise—at connect.fashion@ajet.net!



Ariane Bobiash Food Editor

Hello readers, and Happy New Year to you all! I hope you've all settled back in to life at school or in the office after the holidays. December was a very busy month for me; I helped plan the All Shikoku Field Day, a greatly successful Sports Day-style event held in Western Tokushima attended by Tokushima, Kagawa, and Kochi prefecture JETs. Lots of fun was had, with sumo matches and pie-eating contests being some of the highlights. For winter break, I had fun in the sun with family and friends in Indonesia and even got to see komodo dragons in the flesh! I once again took advantage of all the delicious and cheap fruit available in the country.



If you have a story idea or want to comment on one of our articles, send Xan and I an email at connect.food@ajet.net.

Xan Wetherall Food Editor

That windchill! That temperature! That lack of indoor heating! It's very, very... January, isn't it? Welcome to Connect 2014! I hope your vacation was extra super crazy refreshing—you're going to need it! It's a brand new year, and it's time to get cracking on those resolutions. Remember when you swore up and down you'd publish your cook book last year? No? Oh, that was me. Well, this year for sure, right?! My resolution for this year is to learn how to grill the perfect steak, using only a frying pan, and a Japanese fish oven! What's your foodie resolution? Tell Ariane and I all about it over at connect.food@ajet.net!



Hugo Dragonetti Sports Editor

Happy New Year! That trip that you took in the sun is now a distant memory and it's back to teaching in not so warm classrooms. But the New Year brings new opportunities and, depending on where you are in Japan, a good amount of snowfall, so I'm hoping to try snowboarding for the first time at the end of the month.



If you're taking up a new sport as one of your New Year's resolutions, please get in touch and tell me about it. connect.sports@ajet.net

Caroline Bellinger Travel Editor

Happy holidays everyone! As you read this, I'm stockpiling some much-needed Vitamin D in Australia. I've been lucky enough to take four weeks off to visit friends and family across the country—some who I haven't seen in two and a half years! Life at the moment is a blissful state of beers and barbecues in the sun. Regardless of whether you headed home for the holidays, or stayed in Japan and embraced some of the many amazing winter activities this country has to offer, I hope you come back feeling refreshed and ready to tackle 2014 with gusto!



Michelle Castro Volunteering Editor

This past month I have been trying to stay warm and eat as much kimchi nabe as possible. I recently played in a soccer game against students and reminded how much I enjoy the game. My current focus is sending gifts to friends I made while on the JET Programme that have now finished their contract and are pursuing bigger and bright things in other countries. You can send me your volunteer stories at connect.volunteering@ajet.net



Kelly Merks Events Editor

After hosting large Thanksgiving and Festivus events, I am ready to chill for a few weeks. And that's exactly what I'll be doing this winter break when I visit friends in Seoul for the third time: chilling my fingers and toes off in South Korea's very blustery winter. In the downtime, though, I plan to bake plenty of bread, start some vegetable seeds indoors, try my hand at making mozzarella cheese, and catch up on my reading list. I would love to hear your book recommendations and about interesting events happening where you are. Let me know at connect.events@ajet.net.



ASK / CONNECT

Make your **voice** heard in the pages of **Connect magazine!**

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 and respond to your questions, comments, and witty observations right here.

Click the **button below** to get **Connect-ed!**

connect.editor@ajet.net

CONNECT

READERS' POLL

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

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

This Month's Question

The new year has begun, and with it always comes a fresh batch of New Year's resolutions. We want to hear about your self-made promises for 2014! We'll feature some of our favorites in the February issue.

What's your New Year's resolution for the coming year?

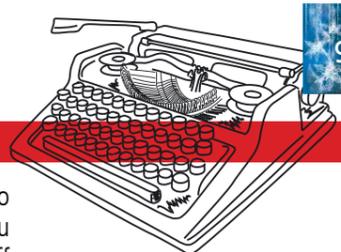
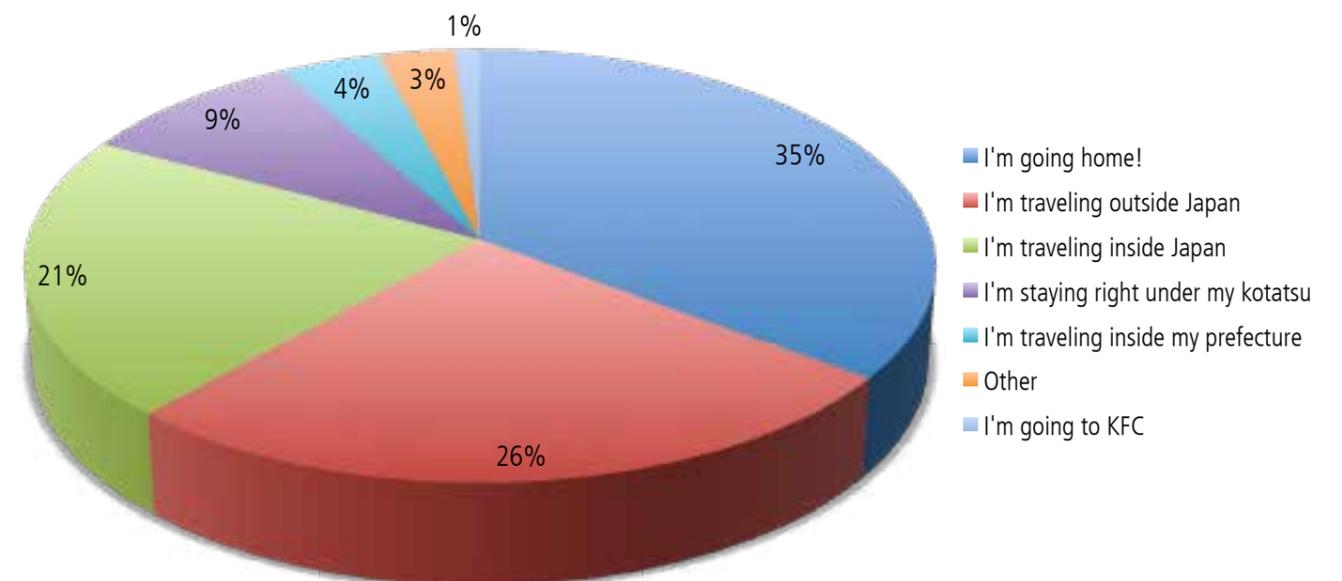
(Text box for submissions:)

I didn't make any resolutions

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

Last Month's Results

As we all enter the winter holiday season, the community scatters to the winds for a few weeks to all kinds of adventures. We asked you what your plans for these two school-free weeks are, and you responded overwhelmingly that you are leaving Japan on a jet plane. One brave soul among you is off to KFC for a traditional Christmas bucket. Whether home or to some exciting exotic destination, to those of you traveling this winter, bon voyage and いってらっしゃい!



TOP APPS FOR JAPAN

Dustin Henrich, Osaka

The New Year has started, and for many, comes New Year's resolutions. Maybe you want to improve your Japanese or take the JLPT, travel to as many prefectures as possible in the next year, master the swirl of Takoyaki, or find some way to connect with your students. These smartphone apps can give you the tools to help check off those resolutions.

JAPANESE DICTIONARY

Android—JED
iOS—imiwa?

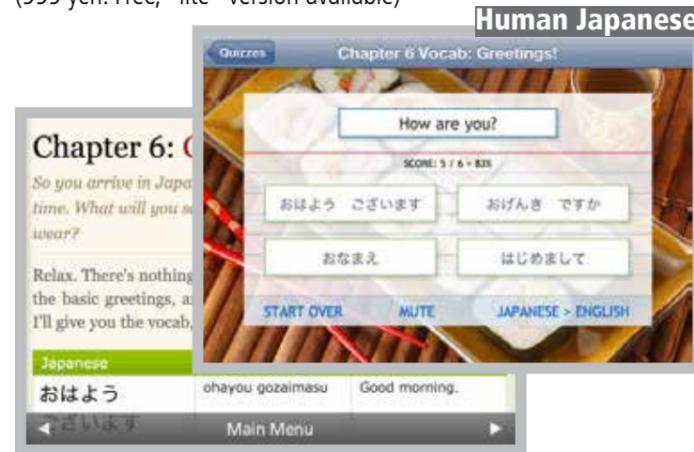


- ⇒ Work offline, no data usage so you can save your battery
- ⇒ Search and view results as you type
- ⇒ Search in English or Japanese (romaji, kana, and kanji!)
- ⇒ Search results contain readings, words, and expressions
- ⇒ Animated stroke order diagrams
- ⇒ Search for kanji via radicals or drawing
- ⇒ Save words for later in lists
- ⇒ Copy and paste into other apps or messengers

We also recommend Google Translate for both Android and Apple for use in a pinch on those big blocks of text! The Android version also offers text recognition via photo capture!

LANGUAGE STUDY

Human Japanese (Android) (iOS)
(999 yen. Free, "lite" version available)



- ⇒ Beginner and Intermediate versions available
- ⇒ Paced well with lots of quizzes and reviews
- ⇒ Written in easy, friendly language
- ⇒ More than 500 pages of main content
- ⇒ Real, useful Japanese
- ⇒ Recordings by native speakers

Free Alternatives – Obenkyo (Android)

and Learning Japanese (iOS)

Not quite as pretty or in-depth as Human Japanese, but 999 yen cheaper!

JLPT Practice - JLPT Words (Android)

and JLPT Study (iOS)

For that week before the test when every waking moment is dedicated to staring at kanji!

NAVIGATION

Hyperdia (Android) (iOS)

Japan Transit Planner (English) (iOS)

NaviTime (Japanese only, good for practicing place names!) (Android) (iOS)

- ⇒ Hyperdia can search both train and air routes
- ⇒ Search results contain times, fares, transfers and useful links
- ⇒ Paid version lets you set your favorite station
- ⇒ NaviTime tends to feature routes that Hyperdia doesn't and can save you time and money in big cities
- ⇒ NaviTime also features bus routes!



January Issue 2014

RESTAURANTS

Gurunavi (English) (Android) (iOS)
Hot Pepper (Japanese) (Android) (iOS)



- ⇒ Both let you specify categories and types of food for fussy eaters!
- ⇒ Search by location using your phone's GPS feature
- ⇒ See pictures of the food before you head out
- ⇒ Hot Pepper is a popular social application in Japan, as well. It allows you to post to Twitter and Facebook about your experiences.

JAPANESE COOKING

Let's Cook Japanese (iOS)

Japanese Tasty Recipes (English) (Android)

Cookpad (Japanese only) (Android) (iOS)

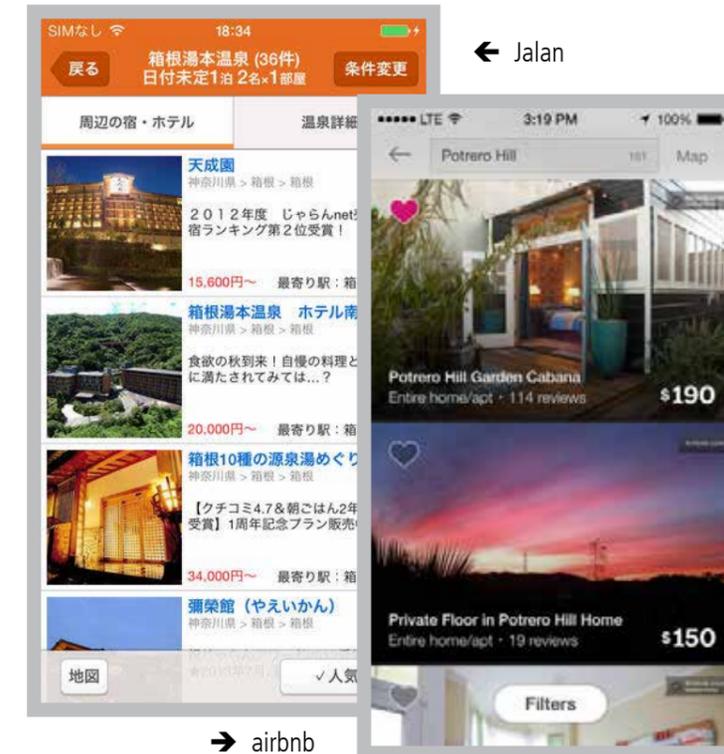


Japanese Tasy Recipes (left), ad Cookpad (right)

January Issue 2014

HOTELS

airbnb (English) (Android) (iOS)
Jalan (Japanese only) (Android) (iOS)



⇒ Want to stay in nice apartment for the weekend in Tokyo or Osaka instead of a cramped hotel? Check out airbnb where people list their apartments ranging from a room to the whole place. There are very nice apartments available for a decent price.

⇒ If you don't mind a little Japanese, Jalan has the best deals, plans, and little places anywhere online. Highly recommended.

MESSAGING

LINE (Android) (iOS)

⇒ The unquestioned king of Japanese socializing, this app lets you message, call, or video chat as much as you want. Have you bought any stickers yet? For those who don't have a credit card or prefer free, there are many free sticker sets too. Just don't ask how much I've spent.



LINE:

GAMES

LINE games Puzzles & Dragons (Android) (iOS)

- LINE has taken over Japan with numerous famous games from LINE POP, Pokopang, and Bubble. These games are perfect for those that like games on the bus or train rides, but nothing too deep like an RPG or requiring a lot of time.
- All LINE games are available to download directly from inside the LINE app in the "Games" section.
- Puzzles & Dragons (AKA "Pazudora") is another hugely popular game in Japan right now, especially for teenagers with newly acquired smartphones and random people on the train.

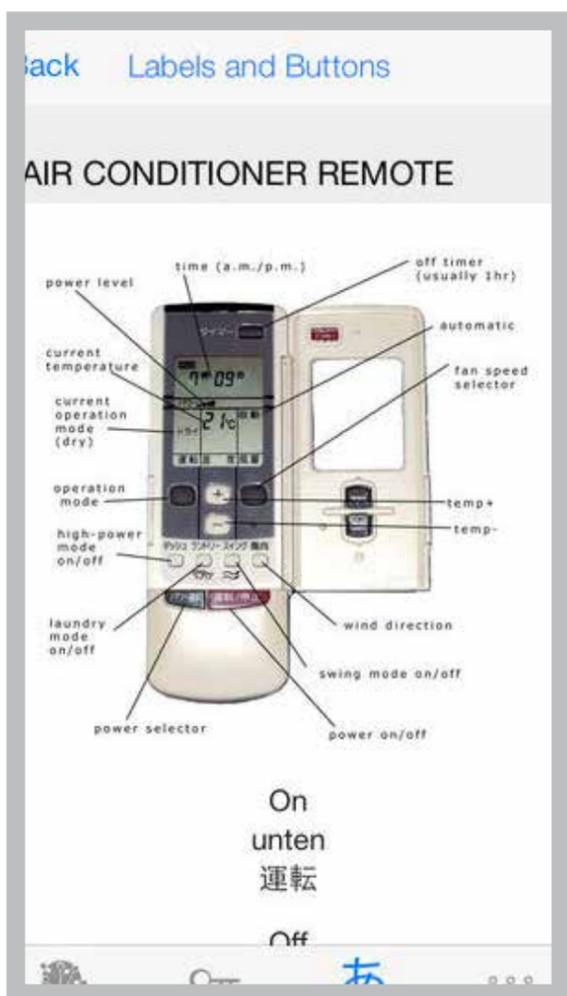


TONS OF OTHER RESOURCES FOR JAPAN

AJET iConnect (Android) (iOS)

AJET's own application for all things Japan, iConnect seeks to provide you with a complete array of resources for living here.

- Phone numbers and emergency information
- International size charts
- Tips of Japanese etiquette and daily life
- Unit and year conversion
- Labels and ATM information
- Food and medical vocabulary
- Tons more!



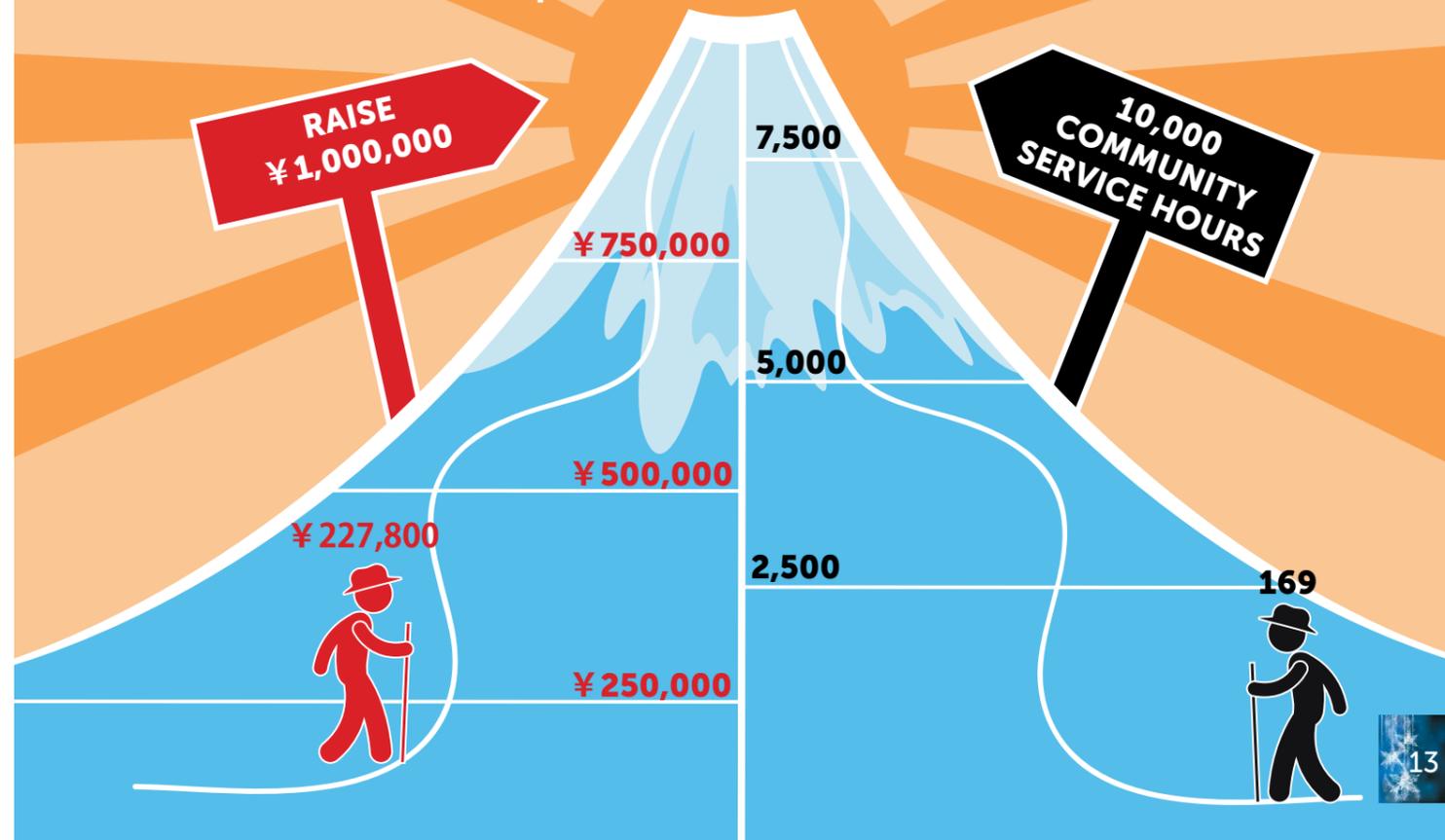
iCONNECT

CONNECT

January Issue 2014

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*

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

Top 3 Prefectures: Community Service Hours*

- Tokushima - 129 hours (82 JETs)
- Chiba - 12 hours (55 JETs)
- Saga - 10 hours (48 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!

CONNECT

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Back Japanese Reference

VOCABULARY LISTS/PHRASES

Medical Terms
Conditions, Body Parts, and More

Medical Phrases
Explaining your condition

Food and Nutrition
What's さけ? A fish or drink?

Useful Phrases
Greetings and introductions

ひらがな Hiragana/Katakana

BLOCK SPOTLIGHT

Blocks 7 & 8



Jacy Garant
Block 7 Representative,
Director of Social Media

2013 has flown by in Block 7! The Kansai area is always bustling with activities and the JET community just adds awesomeness to an already amazing region.

After a successful Halloween Block Party managed by Osaka AJET, Wakayama took over for a second block event: the Koyasan Temple Stay. This event is always a favourite amongst the local JETs and since attending during my first year on JET, I had been dreaming of opening it up to the rest of the block. Thanks to Allison and Katie of WAJET, it was made possible. Unfortunately, I had to be in Tokyo for the PA conference, but the girls had everything under control and the event was a success.

Next door, in Nara, the JETs have been volunteering their time with Smile Kids Japan, and working hard to raise money for their scholarship with a pub quiz and a T-shirt design contest. Trivia knowledge does abound around here with pub quizzes also taking place in Osaka and Mie. Wakayama's trivia event takes place in June every year. 豆しば definitely has nothing over the Block 7 peeps!

In light of the recent typhoon in the Philippines, everyone also rallied to help with initiatives ranging from simple whip-rounds at the Skill Development Conferences to a comedy show with ROR Comedy, Osaka's resident all-English stand up comedy group. Speaking of charity, in December, I went up to Kobe to help the Block 6 Charity Bake Sale. I had a great time popping popcorn all day in the company of new friends. Sandy and I have been discussing collaboration between our two blocks for bigger charity events this upcoming year. Our current ideas include a skill auction as well as a charity ball. Get ready for The Super Block 67!



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Julia Mace
Block 8 Representative,
Director of Public Relations

Happy New Year to all the JETs and especially my beloved Shikoku folks! Block 8 has seen some awesome success this past year and we hope to keep the ball rolling in 2014. First, Shikoku rocked the autumn surveys with a response rate over 30% from all four prefectures: Ehime, Kagawa, Kochi and Tokushima – easily the highest rate in all of Japan! I am especially proud of my home prefecture of Kagawa which came in first with 90% (I love you guys!). All of this survey success earned us a special prize from AJET's Project Manager: a bag of over 200 Dum-Dum lollipops which we shared at the All Shikoku Field Day.

Speaking of the All Shikoku Field Day, it was a big success! People from all over came out to Tokushima for a day of games, BBQ and shaving. Together we battled our way through a gauntlet of ancient druidic rites of passage (ask, if you dare), enjoyed some great food and then had an epic Movember auction. With all of us working together, All Shikoku Field Day raised a ton of money to benefit children's homes in Tokushima. May our battle-cry ring through the New Year: "For the children!"

On the personal front, I have been working hard for the JET community that I love so much. In eConnect News I strive to tell the world about what AJET's been up to and let JETs know about the great opportunities and events taking place around them. It's a special honor to be at the hub of JET communication and I hope I'm doing a good job serving our community. In addition to answering up to 20 emails a day, and various projects (like the AJET videos, and our new yurukyara, Tsuru-chan) I was also fortunate enough to go to the Opinion Exchange with MIC, MOFA, MEXT and CLAIR. There, my team's survey on "Life After JET" really blew some socks off. I was beaming with pride and gave my partner a covert thumbs up under the table.

2014 is going to be a busy and challenging year for this 5th-year unicorn, but as long as the JETs are beside me, I know that we'll all be alright.



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Phillippa Harvey
CIR Representative, Director of
Japanese Sales and Marketing

December has brought with it a close to the busiest season of my year as a CIR! It's a time when many NPOs, schools and other groups have their main calendar of exchange activities, and local governments put out a lot of information that needs translating. It has also bought to a close the first half of my time as CIR Representative on the National AJET Council! Where did the time go?

As your CIR representative, I am a contact point on the National Council for CIRs to submit their opinions and questions, network and help them promote their activities through AJET channels. I work together with the CIR Network Representatives, promote professional development opportunities and disseminate information from AJET on the CIR homepage.

I am also the Director Of Japanese Sales and Marketing, which means I research Japanese businesses and services to bring new opportunities to the JET community. Researching, cold-calling, providing information and negotiating in Japanese—good business-Japanese practice!

The biggest task I have had this year is leading a six-member team to write the Disaster Awareness and Preparation survey, promote it, analyse it and finally write the report itself. And don't forget translating it! This was a mammoth task spanning four months and I hope that you enjoy reading it and find the results as interesting as we do.

Outside of AJET, in November the CIR Midyear Conference was held in Chiba and it was a great chance to meet other CIRs from across Japan, exchange ideas and listen to what they are up to. Great fun and very educational.

Looking forward to a busy 2014! Happy new year!



This month we're talking with the hard-working council members of Blocks 7 & 8, which includes the 4 prefectures of Shikoku, Wakayama, Mie, Nara, and Osaka! Read what your council members are up to inside and outside of AJET business below.

CULTURE

EDITORIAL Omikuji

This New Year's, don't be afraid of *omikuji*—the little paper fortunes you can buy at most temples in Japan. Yes it's true that you can get a good, bad, or mixed fortune, but that just adds to the excitement! Comparing your future success as a pachinko whiz-kid with your unlucky-in-love friends is just part of any JET's New Year experience.

Omikuji also make for great souvenirs, so I advise you to pick some up and send home the good—or bad—news. If you get a shockingly bad fortune this New Year's, send me a choice quote and I'll include it in my section! connect.culture@ajet.net

SPOTLIGHT



The Year of the Horse

The horse: easily the best animal in the whole zodiac, and I'm not just saying that because it's my birth year's animal. Okay, maybe just a little, but it was a good year in which to be born.

The horse is said to be fast acting, decisive and strong, so get ready for a year that just flies by. Over the next month or two, you may see a lot of figurines for sale in shops, and a post-office clerk may even surprise you with an unexpected reward in the form of a little construction model. Some of us, or at least those of us who were born in 1990, might even receive little horse shaped goods as gifts from very traditional teachers.

THIS MONTH IN CULTURE...

You may have noticed that we tightened our belts this issue here at Connect; a little over-indulgence in Christmas treats and travel may have occurred, but we've still got a buckle-straining amount of content ready for you. If you don't know what an *omikuji* is, check out the editorial sidebar and then head to a temple to grab one before they're all snatched up. Did you know 2014 is the Year of the Horse? No? Well then read the Spotlight and find out about this most auspicious of animals. In the section itself, I talk a bit about the muddled controversy surrounding whale hunting in Japan, and Verity Townshend shares her love of cats and their cafes.



WHALE WATCHING



Matthew Jones

Matthew Jones is the culture editor here at Connect, and he loves nothing more than a bit of research into the nitty-gritty of Japanese life. This month, he's looking at the annual Japanese whale hunt, and the controversy surrounding it.

Once, I was invited to a teacher's house, and was served a very special kind of fish. Upon eating it, the teacher eagerly told me that I had just eaten whale, possibly hoping to get a reaction from me.

He was disappointed. I personally have no problem with the idea of Japanese people eating whale or dolphin meat. This may make me unpopular, but I don't believe that any group of people should be able to tell another nation or group of people what they can and cannot do in their own territory.

I would call groups of people who behave in such a manner terrorists (or at least extremists), because they use force and intimidation to persuade others to adopt their beliefs. No matter how noble the intents of Sea Shepherd and other groups like them may be, they don't have the right to impose their values on other people.

Sea Shepherd's founder, Paul Watson, spent fifteen months evading authorities at sea, after he fled courts in Germany and had an Interpol Red Notice placed on him^{1,2,3}. Thankfully, many of Sea Shepherd's supporters and members do not fully support the drastic measures taken by this small minority.

In December, a Japanese whaling fleet left Shimonoseki for the Antarctic Ocean⁴. The hunt is expected to go on until March, and the fleet hopes to catch roughly one thousand minke whales. The stated purpose of this hunt is scientific research, however, the majority of the meat ends up being processed and sold to markets and stores.

The Japanese government is quick to defend the tradition, saying that whaling is a part of Japan's culinary heritage, and that the hunt is done with research and sustainability in mind. Recently however, the hunts have been encountering problems, reporting a catch of only 103 whales this last year.

Arguments surrounding the issue revolve mainly around the twin

points of sustainability and sovereignty. The pro-whaling side insists that they are practicing sustainable whaling, and that any attempt to interfere with them is a violation of their national sovereignty. The anti-whaling side maintains that there is no such thing as sustainable whaling, and that whales may unknowingly stray from protected areas into whaling areas.

Regardless of the arguments, the whaling industry—in Japan at least—is facing a serious decline in popularity. In fact, the industry relies on subsidies from the Japanese government to remain afloat. In 2012, those subsidies reached 2.28 billion yen⁵. In modern Japan, with fiscal belts being tightened and Tohoku Earthquake recovery efforts taking top priority, the whaling industry may find itself dead in the water without government funds.

In the end, it appears as though whaling industries will collapse, not because of international sanctions, or action by a small group of activists, but because of a lack of demand. Such is the way of the world; old ways often sink into the background and disappear. So if you don't support whaling, simply don't support it. Without your money it will fade—not with a bang, but with a whimper instead.

Matthew is glad he at least tried whale, even if he didn't really like it, or any sushi for that matter. He's great fun at enkais and parties, because people love avoiding sushi restaurants, right?

¹ <http://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News-media-releases/2012/N20120807Bis>

² <http://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News-media-releases/2012/N20120914>

³ <http://japandailynews.com/sea-shepherd-founder-on-land-once-again-vows-to-fight-civil-suit-from-japanese-whalers-0138876/>

⁴ <http://japandailynews.com/japanese-ships-leave-for-annual-antarctic-whale-hunt-0940644/>

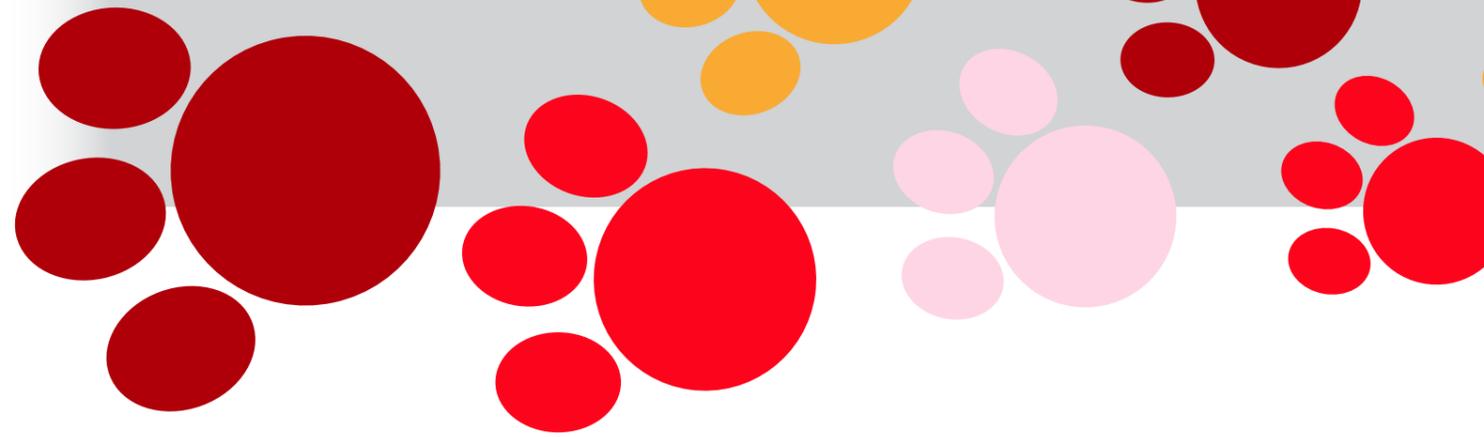
⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/04/japan-whaling-industry-dead-water>

CAT CAFES

AND

KITTY- CHAN

Verity Townsend, Hyogo



Have you seen cat cafes around your town? Ever wondered just exactly what they were? Well, Verity Townsend has braved the fur, claws, and cute little faces of her local cat cafe to give us this special little insight into a very different kind of cafe than what she is used to...

I'll admit it; I'm a cat person. Since childhood, my family unit has included our very own pet neko and growing up, there were plenty of cats around my English neighborhood. I grew up with a very clever and beautiful cat called Gem. She lived until she was 23 years old and, daft though it sounds, was more like a big sister to me than a pet. With a general lack of cats in the area where I was posted on JET, about two months into my stay I was craving some feline company.

Now, if you've been in Japan for any length of time, you'll have seen signs warning not to feed feral cats. During summer evenings, you may hear the sounds of a pack of cats getting to know one another a little better. If you're unfortunate enough to wander down an unlucky alley, you may also discover that feral cats can be quite defensive when approached. Thankfully, Japan offers a much more fun - not to mention safe - way of interacting with cats. That's right, I decided that it was time to give one of Japan's ubiquitous cat cafes a try. The only problem was, which one?

Indeed, there are so many cat cafes that it was difficult to know where to start. I was a little skeptical of the idea of a cat cafe at first, and I was mostly concerned with finding a place where the animals were healthy and well cared for. Taking on a recommendation from a friend, I went to Neko no Jikan in Nakazaki-cho, Osaka.

Upon arrival, I stepped over their cheerful cat-themed welcoming mat and up a narrow wooden staircase. On one side of the cafe was a small shop and the entrance to the cat area, and on the other side was the cafe itself. These two areas tend to be separate at the vast majority of cat cafes - and for good reason. Before going in, I had been imagining precariously balancing a piece of cake while a waving cat tail threatened to knock it out of my hand—a familiar but awkward situation experienced by many cat owners.

To my relief, the customer pays a set fee for an hour of playtime with the cats, followed by a cake set in the cafe area. Before stepping into the cat haven, you take off your shoes and wash your hands. You then open the gate and join the cats with open arms. The cat room at this cafe is Japanese style - a large tatami room with many fun shelves on the walls for the cats to sit on.

There are also lockers for your bags and cupboards with treats and toys. For a small fee, you can buy these to entertain the cats, but prepare yourself to get pounced on if you decide to do so!

On subsequent trips with friends, my partner, or even my visiting family, I found myself getting to know the family of cats who live there. One of my favorites is a minute tabby cat with bulbous eyes by the name of Chacha-chan. Chacha-chan loves to sit on people's laps and always makes a beeline for me when I go there. Another much-loved feline is Blue-kun, a big and beautiful Maine-Coon. A bit more standoffish compared with Chacha-chan, Blue-kun magnificently strides around the place as if he owns it. There is a useful book of cat profiles you can flick through to find out the names and various details about each furry little friend. These read like something out of a match.com profile, listing likes and dislikes, hobbies and so on.

Although they are common in the big cities of Japan, the cat cafe phenomenon actually started in Taiwan in 1998. After my first visit to Neko no Jikan, I discovered that it was the first ever cat cafe in Japan, having opened in 2004.

Now, Japan's love affair with the neko is not a new thing, I mean just look at Hello Kitty, or as she is known to our students, Kitty-chan. Let me tell you, that Kitty is anything but a chan, she's definitely a san, since you know, she's almost 40 years old! This means that not only is she older than all of our students, she may be older than some of their parents too! With the country growing up under the cutesy eyes of Kitty-san it is unsurprising that the cat cafe phenomenon has exploded here.

It's not just cats though; lately there's been a boom in other types of animal-related cafes, such as rabbit cafes, owl cafes and others. Also, at Huis Ten Bosch, a Dutch theme park in Nagasaki, Kyushu, you can rent out immaculately groomed and well-cared for dogs to accompany you around the park.

Restrictions on pets in most rented apartments and long working hours make it difficult for many Japanese people to keep a companion animal. Therefore, pet cafes give people a chance to relax by playing with, petting, or just merely watching such creatures.

Unsurprisingly, one of the main motivations for people who visit cat cafes is simply that they want to stroke a cat and enjoy the comfort and relaxation that this brings. If you are an animal lover, visiting one of these cafes might be just the thing to vanquish those winter blues.



Verity Townsend is a 2nd-year ALT in Hyogo Prefecture. She can natter on for hours about kimono, 60s and 70s Japanese and Indian cinema, and retro video games.



ENTERTAINMENT

THIS MONTH IN ENTERTAINMENT...

Sometimes I feel like whatever is running the big clock up there is being mighty inconsiderate. It's like they don't even realize that some of us could use a bit of extra time to finish all this stuff we have to do. I'm thinking, instead of making another inane resolution this year, I'm going to set up some time shrines to Chronos, Kāla, and maybe Xiuhtecuhtli just to see if they'll respond well to flattery and slow things down a bit. While the New Year is certainly a time to reminisce fondly on the projects you never finished and the poor life decisions you've made, it's also a time for unnecessarily lengthy end of the year lists. And that's just what this month's Entertainment section has for you fine folks. Take a look below for a write up of the 15 (well, 14) best records released in 2013. Maybe you'll find a good soundtrack to which to sip that flat champagne still sitting on your kitchen counter. If you actually want to leave your house, I've also put together a brief concert calendar with some of the biggest acts coming through Japan this month. Enjoy!



OUR ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call 2013 the most musically exciting year of the entire decade. Granted, we've only had three years thus far, but I'm predicting that this one won't be easy to top. In the world of entertainment news, the hardworking editors over at BuzzFeed have had one field day after another with Miley's twerking fiasco, the 'Chadvril' marriage (at least back in Canada), and most recently the meticulous dissection of Kanye's "Bound 2" video. The way things have been going, I almost want to rank the year's momentous occasions by number of .gif files produced, but I fear that policy might result in an over-representation—if such a thing is possible—of rapidly shaking behinds and very little actual music. Instead, I'll be opting for a more traditional listing of the top albums of the year. Huge players across all genres have released albums this year, so in the interest of fostering some variety, this article will feature three separate lists. One from Chris Cullen, a CIR in Utsunomiya, Tochigi, who moonlights as a DJ; one from Christian Keck an ALT in Sano, Tochigi, a talented musician in his own right; and one from myself.

Purity Ring will eat this one up.

4. Disclosure – Settle



Bangers and mash, hold the mash. The first time I heard this Surrey duo was back in 2011, around the time of their self-released EP, Carnival. One of my friends commented at the time that, "these guys are going to blow up". Graduating from posting tracks on YouTube to selling out shows around the world in just two years, Disclosure certainly fulfilled expectations. Although they don't add much to the fundamentals of early 90s garage and 2-step, they've rejuvenated the very best things about these genres and crafted a dance album with barely an ounce of filler. Each track drives the record forward with well-curated samples and top notch vocal features. Definitely an act to see live.

My albums of the year

5. Chvrches – The Bones of What You Believe



It won't take any more than the first 20 seconds of TBOWYB's opening single 'The Mother We Share' for you to be tapping your foot, and I'm willing to bet, it'll be tapping right through to the end of the record. Looking to get people dancing, Glasgow-based Chvrches have released a fast paced and highly accessible synth-pop album with some of the catchiest hooks

I've heard in years. However, the true star of the show is lead singer Lauren Mayberry with her uniquely captivating voice. Clean, powerful, and bursting with emotion, she delivers a warmth and humanity that is often lacking in the genre. Fans of pop-infused electronic acts like Passion Pit, Grimes, m83, and

3. Rhye – Woman



I mentioned Rhye a few issues back when they were in Japan for Fuji Rock, but their excellence bears repeating. Their brilliant R&B love letter, Woman, has stuck with me in a big way over the year and has unequivocally earned itself a spot on this list. Working in harps, horns, and syrupy slow beats, Canadian Michael Milosh and Denmark native Robin Braun

have crafted an extremely beautiful, personal, and mature soul record. The lyrics, devoid of melodrama, jaunt effortlessly between subtle sexiness and soul-wrenching candor, brought to life by Milosh's expertly controlled and almost feminine countertenor. Smooth enough to cream your coffee, Woman is the perfect intimate companion to some winter melancholy.

SPOTLIGHT

Concerts in January

Electrox

What: A major electronic festival featuring Redfoo, Steve Aoki, Headhunters, Steve Angello, Nero, Modestep, and others.

When: January 4th 13:00

Where: Makuhari Messe, Tokyo. Access from JR Kaihin-Makuhari station.

How Much: 11,000 yen

MGMT

What: The popular electronic act touring for their 2013 self-titled third album.

When: January 8th 18:00

Where: Namba Hatch, Osaka. Access from JR Oebashi station.

How Much: 6,500 yen

Phoenix

What: French alt rockers touring for their 2013 album *Bankrupt*.

When: January 12th 18:00

Where: Ipm Hall, Osaka. Access from Osaka Business Park subway station.

How Much: 6,800 yen

Shugo Tokumaru and Mitsume

What: Two heavy-hitter Japanese indie rock bands. Both are must sees for some local flavor.

When: January 13th 17:30

Where: Unit, Daikanyama, Tokyo. Access from Nakameguro JR station.

How much: 3,900 yen

Savages

What: All girl post-punk group touring their 2013 debut album *Silence Yourself*.

When: January 22nd 19:00

Where: Liquidroom, Ebisu, Tokyo. Access from JR Ebisu station.

How much: 5,000 yen

2. Daft Punk – Random Access Memories



A divisive album to be sure, it's been tough to cut through all the hype and form an honest opinion about RAM. Some purists feel that it's not electronic enough; deviating too far from that electro-house sound they grew up with. To those people, I recommend taking a look at let-downs and wishy-washy releases like *Human After All* and the *Tron* soundtrack. It was time for a change and it couldn't have been done better than with RAM. Collecting the sounds of dance music past and converging the talents of incredible artists like Giorgio Moroder, Niles Rogers, and Noah Lennox, Daft Punk have succeeded crafting a masterfully produced record that is without a doubt their best release since *Discovery*.

1. Jon Hopkins – Immunity



English producer Jon Hopkins was a newcomer for me this year, but he's been making music for well over a decade. He's worked on production and film scores with high profile names like Coldplay and Brian Eno and has released no fewer than four studio albums. After toiling away in relative obscurity, he more than deserves the attention he's been

getting for *Immunity*. It is a genre-bending journey of an album, something to be taken in as a whole to be appreciated properly. Travelling through the record, you'll experience field recordings that morph into crescendos of crushing electronica, only to slow and widen into vast ambient soundscapes and minimalist piano compositions. Hopkins' experience and talent as a producer shine through in this release; each sound, from creaking floor boards to booming drum machines, makes its own mark, without ever taking attention away from the whole. Pack your bags for this one; it'll take you far from home. Don't forget your headphones.

Tom Morin-Robinson is a second-year ALT living in Utsunomiya, Tochigi. An avid music-nerd, he spends far too many nights organizing his iTunes metadata.

Christian's albums of the year



5. Chance the Rapper – Acid Rap

Soul-sampling rap! Rejoice! Chance the Rapper is part of the new generation of rappers setting the bar exquisitely high. He is a throwback to the early sounds of Kanye West tracks, sporting J Dilla-like delivery.

There is playfulness in his rhymes¾full of yelps and shouts and “NeNeNeNe”—they're drug-induced, yet intelligent and conscious. Humility and reflection flows through the entire mix tape. He isn't talking about guns or cars or blunts; he's not here to brag, but rather to tell his story. *Acid Rap* is a full work of art, not a platform. The album is a vivid portrait of Chicago gun violence, of trivialized hard drug use, and of the inextricability of family life and street life.

4. Daft Punk – Random Access Memories



Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories* offers the question: what is the state of music today? The huge promotional campaign surrounding the album's release had them explaining this 70's rock album to the world—RAM was recorded sans computers in an attempt to bring music back to quality and form. Daft Punk spent nearly a million dollars

recording this album. Top-flight studio musicians, star studded guest features, and complete analogue recording. Shedding the disappointment of *Human After All* and the epic techno of their establishment, RAM is an easy listen with soft 70's rock at its core. They could have said, “screw it” and made twelve EDM club hits that everyone would have gobbled up. Rather, RAM confirmed Daft Punk as musicians and not just robots.

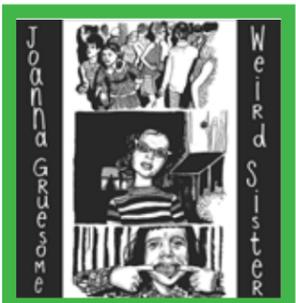
3. My Bloody Valentine – m b v



Twenty-two years after their last full length LP¾and during the year of the comeback, 2013—m b v is a dream-come-true revival album. Kevin Shields and company did not radically change their wall-of-sound shoegaze-style, but rather expounded and expanded upon their work. Blurry, wispy vocals blended with destructively loud, bent-out guitars and supportive,

aggressive drums. MBV practically invented shoegaze. Take notes younglings. m b v had very little pre-emptive promotion and minimal interference with the original recipe. Amidst the throws of a 90s fad, m b v is a living fossil and formidable proof that there is nothing, and I mean nothing, like the original.

2. Joanna Gruesome – Weird Sister



Trends are trends. Right now, 90's sounds are alive and well. But if there is any garage band that stands out, it is Joanna Gruesome thrashing their way through *Weird Sister*. The album clocks in at a mere 28 minutes and delivers the kind of tenacity and energy that takes death metal bands 80 minutes. The five-piece band goes hard and fast,

in and out of scorched feedback and dissonant guitar chords to lovely, airy choruses and catchy hooks. The origins are garage punk and thrash, but vocalist Alanna McArdle gives much more to the genres. There are occasional audio fidelity issues, cussing, feedback, and beauty. Not bad for kids who met in an anger management group.

1. Night Beds – Country Sleep



Nashville/Colorado Spring's Winston Yellen, AKA Night Beds, delivers a classic with *Country Sleep*. From start to finish the lugubrious feelings brought on from loneliness and uncertainty are painted with pain-staking detail and patience. It's devoid of outside influence—rooted in old but unmistakably new.

Yellen took out a loan in order to record the album in Johnny Cash's former house. The album cascades and develops as you listen—tinged with country drum rhythms, lap steel, guitars, stringed instruments. Coupled with one of the most striking vocalists/lyricists since Robin Pecknold, *Country Sleep* sits ahead of every comeback and trend band of 2013. The future of folk and country music is in good hands.

Christian is a second-year ALT in Sano, Tochigi. An active musician in Japan, he enjoys recording music at home wearing over-sized sweaters and chowing on Skippy peanut butter. You can keep up with his projects and words at: www.christianwilliam.bandcamp.com or @ifcwilliam

Chris's albums of the year

5. Oneohtrix Point Never – R Plus Seven



An initially baffling collection of sounds—there is very little here which could even be generously described as a typical song—that rewards multiple listens by revealing previously unnoticed elements, subsequently making sense of the broader whole. All elements of great headspace music are present, and the unconventional presentation

forces the listener to make sense of the synthesis of sounds on their own. A challenging, but highly gratifying, listen.



4. Bibio – Silver Wilkinson

For my money, this is the most complete and musically accomplished¾not to mention most cohesive in narrative—in Bibio's catalog of truly excellent albums.

The overall melancholy is tempered by expertly placed moments of upbeat lightness which offer a poignant counterpoint, making it an artfully balanced collection of songs that elegantly vacillates between extremes of muted emotion.

2. Kanye West – Yeezus



If only Mr. West would hurry up and complete his transition from superstar rapper to reclusive pop culture enigma, perhaps we could be spared the frequent media outbursts that make liking the creator of such a captivating, unexpected, left-field, puzzling, clever, and misogynistic album so trying.

Mr. West, please just stick to pushing your artistic boundaries and making great albums every few years.

1. Machinedrum – Vapor City



Picking up where he left off with *Room(s)*, Machinedrum uses this album to showcase his mastery of incorporating myriad influences and fashioning them into a logical whole which speaks with a singular voice. This collection of disarmingly delicate and ethereal songs, built on a foundation of frenetic drum programming will have

you struggling to decide whether you'd rather cut a rug or sink into your sofa. Lilacs & Champagne—off-kilter, decades-old library record samples: check. Liberal sprinklings of B-movie dialogue: check. Wailing, wistful, overdubbed guitar solos: check. This collection of disparate elements, unified through improbable alchemy, comes together to create a striking portrait of a fantastical, hazily remembered memory from a bygone era.

Chris Cullen is a second-year CIR living in Utsunomiya whose musical snobbery is tempered by his secret shame at never having properly learned to play an instrument.



FASHION & BEAUTY

EDITORIAL Putting Your Best Fashion Foot Forward in 2014

In Japan, a new season/fiscal year/school year officially begins in April, coinciding with the blooming of the beautiful sakura. However, since New Year's Eve has historically been a popular time for making resolutions, how about considering some style updates starting this month?

Oftentimes, small changes or a bit of pattern interrupt are all you need. My friend Robert has always felt self-conscious about his looks and weight. We found a good hairstylist, got him a cool pair of glasses and picked up three well-tailored work shirts. Not all of us are interested in fashion and beauty, but it's true that when you look good, you (tend to) feel good. Robert certainly does.

So here are three ideas I hope you'll consider:

1. Try a colour or style that you don't usually wear

I'm not advocating that you put wear bright orange when you've always been a grey, black and navy kinda guy, but how about a bit of olive, mustard or eggshell white? Style your hair slightly differently, and accessorise!

2. Let someone else give you style advice

I favour subdued, earthy colours and subtle, clever tailoring. For my wedding dinner, I (hesitantly) agreed to try on the fuchsia, floor-length, belaced, diamante-encrusted gown and elaborate make-up suggested by my bridal consultant. I don't think I'll ever doll up that way again, but I'm glad my family has photos to reminisce over when we're old and wrinkly.

3. Get more sleep, and drink more water

Sure, make-up, exercise and clothing are all important, but you literally look and feel like a million bucks if you can clock in 7 hours per night and substitute snacking for water-guzzling.

We'd love to hear about your commonsensical, unusual or life-changing fashion and beauty tips at connect.fashion@ajet.net!

THIS MONTH IN FASHION AND BEAUTY...

January is the proverbial time for new beginnings, so in this month's editorial, I hope to help kickstart the process by mooting some ideas about revamping your style.

January, unfortunately, also makes us feel cold and miserable, so style-confident and entertaining John Weber and yours truly decided to team up to bring readers a short, fun and practical checklist to keep you looking put-together no matter how low the temperature goes.



WINTER GROOMING TIPS

John Weber, Hokkaido
Lineng Tee, Yamanashi

Baby, it's cold outside...so let's stay indoors awhile longer, converging in centrally-heated libraries, JR trains and shopping malls, huddling together under the kotatstu, turning up air-conditioners and space heaters, anything to get through the chilly January nights.

Only problem is, cold temperatures and dry air wreak havoc on hair and skin, and make most of us feel hungry and sluggish. If you've been living in your pajamas and fear that you are starting to become housebound, allow us to recommend a few tried-and-tested grooming tips for winter.

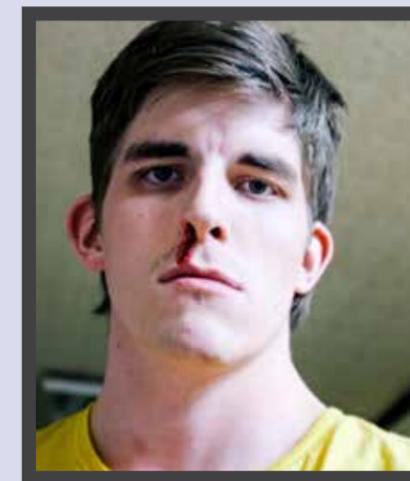
JOHN SAYS:

1. Shave regularly

Beards are rad, but I have the facial hair equivalent of a 13 year old. Keeping the stubble at bay makes me appear more "put together" in the wintry weather.



2. Learn how to humidify your home



When the heater is on high and the air gets dry, you might have to deal with scaly skin, dry eyes or a nosebleed. Humidifiers get much-needed moisture into the air, and even a pot of water on top of your heater will keep the vampires in check.

3. Sweat it out

Go for a daily jog, engage in winter sports, hit the dance floor or swim laps at an indoor pool. Staying active is a good thing, since perspiration clears your pores and gives you a healthy glow. Regular physical activity provides you with more energy to push through that busy block of classes or morning free period internet surfing.

4. Mineral scrub your mug

Slough off the dead skin and reverse the long face of winter. I use a Korean green tea product from the Golden Shop that a friend gifted me. Look for microbeads that provide gentle exfoliation in facial foams/scrubs—plenty of choices at your local drugstore.

5. Tame the little hairs too!

Skip the Yeti-meets-Frida-Kahlo monobrow and senior citizen nose hair look this year. Be young, be responsible. Whether it's spring, summer, winter or fall, trim or tweeze any straggler hairs before you suit up. A bit of regular maintenance goes a long way towards making a polished first impression.

LINENG SAYS:

1. Moisturise everything



Anything that's flaky, lined, chapped or dry is uncomfortable and unattractive. Use gentle cleansers and richer moisturisers. Two simple things that work a treat: Put on a facemask before bedtime, and go to bed with your hands and feet moisturised and protected by gloves and socks. You'll wake up with smooth, supple skin. Oh, don't forget your lip balm before leaving the house.

2. Slather on sunscreen

It may be cold and cloudy, but UV rays are there just the same. Winter sun can still damage your skin, so apply a broad-spectrum, non-comedogenic sunscreen to your face and hands 20-30 minutes before going outside.

3. Avoid superhot baths

Taking a hot shower or sitting in a hot bathtub feels fantastically warm and relaxing. Be careful though, since strong heat actually

dries skin out. If possible, take shorter baths/showers using warm water. If you crave a scalding hot bath, head to a proper onsen. Most tout health benefits like smooth skin, pain relief and improved circulation.

4. Prevent flyaway hair

Static loves and clings to me. I've tried to comb my hair less often and pay attention to how I layer clothing, and have even been tempted to buy anti-static spray. What seems to be working is stylist-recommended conditioner. I like Wella and La Biosthetique.

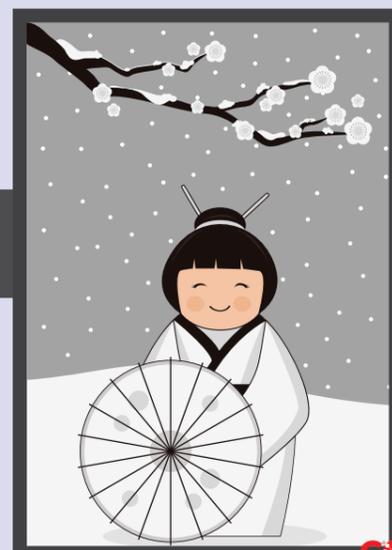
5. Masks are not just for colds

Whether you've genuinely caught a cold, are having flushed cheeks, a red nose or a sudden pimple outbreak, a mask can spare you from having to answer questions or getting strange looks. Gotta love how ubiquitous, accepted and handy they are in Japan!



John has adjusted to the winter wonderlands of Hokkaido after plenty of trial and error. When he's not slipping or sliding on ice, he's seeking and enjoying adventure. He reckons these tips should bring out the gentleman in most anyone.

Having spent most of her life in a perennially hot and humid country, Lineng is not too keen on cold weather. However, since part of her post-JET plans involve Canada, she's decided to make the most of January by conducting experiments to find the best Japanese winter products.



... IT'S TIME TO START
THINKING ABOUT

NATIONAL AJET ELECTIONS

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.

2. A PLAN

How about becoming an AJET National Council member for an opportunity to contribute to National AJET - your national JET community!

Elections are in February.



AJET CONNECT magazine



FOOD

EDITORIAL Meeting with VegJET in Kyoto

During the time when visitors from every corner of the country and beyond gather to bask in the beauty of Kyoto's *koyou*, a group of veggie JETs met up to celebrate their love of delicious vegetarian food. What was originally going to be a small get together at a vegan restaurant to celebrate a member's birthday, turned into a full-fledged meet-up, attended by about fifteen VegJETs and friends. The official meet-up was a Sunday lunch at the aptly named Vegans restaurant near Fushimi Inari shrine; but the unofficial Saturday night dinner at Café Proverbs 15:17 was attended by almost as many people.

Having been to about fifteen of Tokyo's vegetarian restaurants and a couple in Osaka, I thought I had seen the best of what vegetarian cuisine Japan had to offer. I was wrong. Café Proverbs had an extensive menu of delicious goodies ranging from South East Asian inspired 'meat' skewers in peanut sauce and veggie gyoza, to spicy soymilk ramen and tempeh club sandwiches. The restaurant is closing this month, but the owners, who are involved in the local music scene, are planning on re-opening again in 2014 in a new space with room for live shows.



On Sunday we trekked over to Vegans restaurant, excited to gorge ourselves on what promised to be another delicious meal. The restaurant exceeded our expectations, with impeccable food and huge portions being the norm. It is said that the chef and owner used to own a yakiniku restaurant, but after going vegetarian decided to keep his love of cooking alive through a new restaurant. Although now vegan, the chef's aptitude comes through in the unbelievably tasty seitan bulgogi dish and mochi 'cheese' pizza! Dessert came in the form of a humongous soft-serve soy ice cream sundae. I highly recommend paying a visit to either of these establishments when visiting Kyoto—you will not be disappointed!

THIS MONTH IN FOOD...

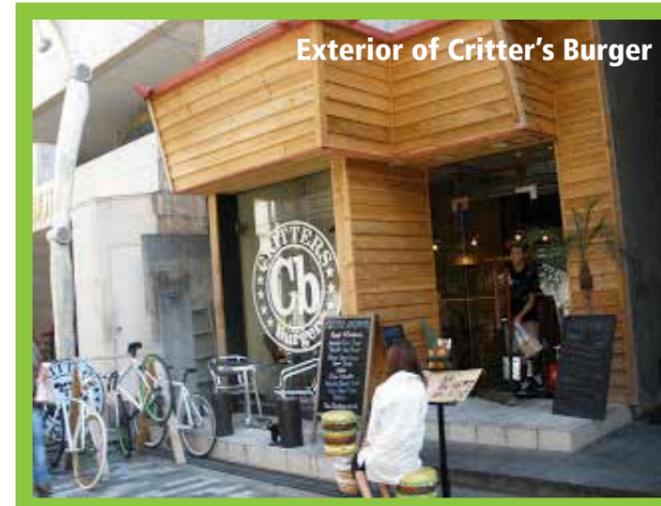
Hello foodies! I hope the holiday season has treated you all well, and that you got to stuff your face with delicious goodies wherever you were for winter break. This month's slimmed-down Food section is all about restaurants in Japan. We start off with my editorial where I tell you about the VegJET group's fall meet-up in beautiful Kyoto. You can then read about which restaurants all over Japan JETs love best—be sure to keep these places in mind during your upcoming domestic travels! If you want to tell us about your holiday food adventures or anything else, be sure to contact Xan and I at connect.food@ajet.net.



This month, JETs far and wide weigh in on their favorite restaurants in Japan. From small town cafés to big city eateries, check them out below!

Critter's Burger

→ Robert J. Bliss, 4th-year Tokushima JET



Exterior of Critter's Burger

Do you enjoy a good American-style hamburger? Of COURSE you do! I heartily recommend unto you Critter's Burger in Osaka, located in Shinsaibashi. They make, in my opinion, the best burgers of any restaurant, anywhere, ever. Not just in Japan. They have 24 varieties of burgers which can be further customized by adding up to eight additional toppings such as jalapeno, bacon, avocado, etc.... If you're not feeling like beef, you can substitute the meat for either fillet-o-fish or avocado and grilled tomato—or both! So much customization. Their side menu includes sandwiches, Buffalo wings, fries & onion rings, and SO MUCH MORE. They also have amazing milkshakes. Go to Critter's, is what I'm saying. You'll never think of hamburger restaurants the same again. (<http://critters.jp>)

Mulakat

→ Vikki Coulson 1st-year Hyogo JET



Vikki at Mulakat

One thing that I wanted to do when I came to Japan was find a decent Indian food restaurant. I know that sounds odd, moving to Japan and wanting to find Indian food, but the heart wants what the heart wants! I'm lucky enough to have discovered a

local Indian restaurant in Miki that meets all of my expectations. Mulakat is a quiet restaurant providing real value for money. I was surprised to only pay 1,990 yen for 2 different curries of my choice, rice, a piece of tandoori chicken, a samosa, a poppadum, a salad, a drink, and a naan bread the size of a tennis racket. For those who want a decent curry in Hyogo, feel free to join the Miki City ALTs!

FISHMAN

→ Olivia Doggett, 2nd-year Fukuoka JET



FISHMAN'S tastefully decorated interior

Fukuoka is famous for its good restaurants. When visitors stay with me I often feel the pressure to live up to the city's epicurean reputation. If I want to impress my guests, like really give them a "I'm in mother \$%&ing Japan" moment, I bring them to this place called FISHMAN (quite literally, 魚男). FISHMAN's mission statement is twofold: to serve the freshest locally-sourced ingredients, and to personally know the person selling it. These criteria mean a couple of things: the food is phenomenal, and the food is expensive. Ninety minutes of all-you-can-drink—really beautiful cocktails, mind you—along with a six or seven course meal will rack you up about 5,000 yen. For fresh, ethically responsible and environmentally friendly food, which is presented beautifully, this may not be such a high cost for you. I have yet to have a bad meal here. This place is as much about the food as it is about the experience. (<http://www.m-and-co.net/fishman/>)

Coffee House Ishikawa

→ Michelle Gerson, 1st-year Ishikawa JET

Walking down a beautiful tree-lined street in Kanazawa, I made my way to find my writing group at our meeting place. After meeting them, we began our quest to find some vegan food at Café Mojo, an artistic café in downtown Kanazawa. But alas, my heart was ripped from my chest as we reached our destination and realized that Café Mojo was closed! As we walked away dejected, my writing group saw a small dark-windowed restaurant. It was smoky with photos on the walls that told a thousand tales—it was right out of a film noir. As a vegan, the owner went out of her way to make certain there was something I could eat. She made me hand-squeezed orange juice and delicious spaghetti and salad that must have been prepared

by the gods of Mt. Olympus themselves! It was such a friendly place that we stayed at the Coffee House Ishikawa-mon for six hours, talking and enjoying the atmosphere. Good food, good atmosphere, and good staff! What more could one ask for?

Devilcraft

→ Kelly Merks, 3rd-year Saitama JET



Devilcraft's Hammamatsucho location interior

My favorite restaurant in Japan is Devilcraft in south Tokyo. It has two of the things I miss most about living in the US: good craft beer and great Chicago-style pizza. The beer menu, which has beers from Japanese and American breweries, changes daily, so I always try something new when I am there. Almost all the food is made in-house and from scratch, from the pizza sauces and salad dressings to the desserts—which I never get around to because the pizzas are so filling. Expect to spend a pretty penny if you go, though you likely won't regret it. (<http://en.devilcraft.jp/>)

Pure Cafe

→ Ariana Fischer, 1st year Saitama JET



Kansai Ragu sandwich at Pure Cafe

My favorite restaurant is Pure Cafe in Aoyama, Tokyo! All of the dishes (except for the desserts) are very healthy, and everything is vegan. And most of it is very reasonably priced—the sandwich set, which includes a sandwich, bowl of soup, small salad, and

a drink, is 1,200 yen. But my favorite part about the cafe is that they always have unusual sandwiches and salads, and the offerings change roughly every month. Last time I visited I tried the "Konsai Ragu" Sandwich - a sandwich stuffed with lotus root, onion, burdock root, carrot, root ragout sauce, and lettuce. Sounds strange, I know, but it was honestly one of the most delicious sandwiches I've ever eaten. And for dessert, I got the Cream Maron (Chestnut) Tart, which was also absolutely amazing. I've been there four times now, and I haven't been disappointed once! I can't wait to go again! (<http://pure-cafe.com>)

Sanji's



Sanji's mouthwatering curry

→ Luke Hendrikse, 2nd year Kumamoto JET

Cheese Naan! Now that I have your attention I want to share with you the best Indian restaurant in Japan. "Sanji's" is an Indian restaurant in Kumamoto Prefecture. They serve over 20 types of curry and offer 6 levels of spiciness. Now, some might say that this is just your typical Indian restaurant in Japan, but once you try some curry at Sanji's you will understand what the fuss is about. Just ask any ALT in Kumamoto and chances are they have been to one of the Sanji locations and realized they will never find curry as good as at this place. I travelled to India during spring break trying to find a curry that could live up to Sanji's, but I was unsuccessful. So if you're in the area please don't forget to make a trip to one of their three locations!

Café Morpho

→ Kat McKormick, 1st year Nara JET



Banana caramel pancake at Cafe Morpho

Café Morpho in Kyoto is amazing! I've only been to this vegan café once, but can't wait to return. My husband and I went in November last year, and the place had a great atmosphere and delicious food. There's not a huge amount of space, and I'd imagine on weekends this place may get very busy, so if it's an important date then do call ahead. The staff was really friendly, and the service was great. I ordered the Thai green curry and my husband ordered a vegan plate. Both dishes came with a generous portion of salad, and were really good value (priced between 800-950 yen for each dish.) They were both really flavoursome too, the green curry was lovely and spicy! For dessert, I had the banana caramel pancake - such a great combination. It is a little walk from the main tourist spots in Kyoto but well worth it for delicious vegan food. I'll definitely be back here soon!

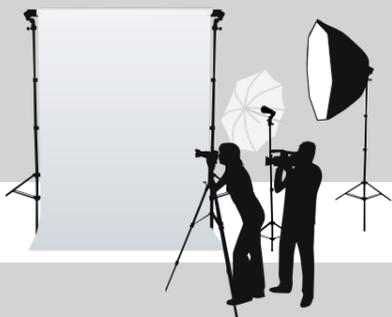
SPORTS

THIS MONTH IN SPORTS...

The articles in this month's sports section focus on two very different races.

The sports section kicks off the New Year with a short piece by runner Mike Hegarty, who unknowingly clinched first place in his age-group category at the Kyoto Tamba 5km Road Race. Mike's article nicely highlights the difference in meaning attached to the word 'veteran' at road races in Japan and the UK.

Next up is a light-hearted article by James Pashley about a race to climb 3,333 steps held every November in the town of Misato, Kumamoto Prefecture. The race, known as 'Attack the Nihon-Ichi', covers the largest number of stone steps anywhere in Japan and attracts a wide variety of participants. If you're hesitant about participating in a local race of any kind during your time in Japan, check out James' article. It's an amusing and encouraging read that successfully captures the spirit of local races in Japan.



SPOTLIGHT

Topher Chavis, Weekend Volcano Hopper

Growing up near the base of the Appalachian Mountains in the United States, Topher has always been an avid hiker and lover of the outdoors. Taking every opportunity to be out in nature, he went to university in a small mountain town, just to be closer to the action.

Topher is now a 5th-year JET, living in rural Kagoshima Prefecture. He is surrounded by Kirishima Mountain to the north, and Mount Takakuma to the south—both of which comprise the Kyushu Nature Trail. Between the two, he has plenty of peaks and trails to choose from for a day hike. One of his favorites is the climb up to Takachiho no Mine, on the eastern side of Kirishima Mountain. It's a challenging hike, but the spectacular views make it worth the effort.

Having access to these mountains has given Topher a taste of the wild side of Japan, a usually tame and structured country.

VETERAN

Mike Hegarty, Kyoto



Kyoto tamba

There comes a time for every runner when, due to advancing years, they leave their Senior runner days behind and become a Veteran. In the UK, 40 years of age traditionally marks this watershed. So I was taken by surprise when I discovered that, at the tender age of 33, I'm considered to be a Veteran in Japan.

As I crossed the finishing line of the recent Kyoto Tamba 5KM Road Race in 4th place, I'd naturally assumed that, being denied a podium position, any prizes or glory had escaped my grasp. I quickly got changed, did a few miles easy jogging, and headed home. Unbeknown to me, a prize ceremony took place whilst I was jogging around the woods close to the track stadium where the race had finished, and the prize for the 1st Veteran finisher went unclaimed.

The results of the race were published in a local newspaper a couple of days later. I was stopped in the corridor at work by a fellow teacher who congratulated me and enquired as to what prize I'd received. I had no idea what they were talking about and told her that as the 4th finisher, I hadn't won anything. Later that day, a group of teachers, all of whom had also seen the said article, discussed the situation and explained to me that I'd won the Veteran aged 30-49 category of the race and was, therefore, eligible to claim a prize.

Phone calls were made and a teacher popped out of work on my behalf to the track stadium, and I was presented with my first ever prize as a Veteran Runner by the school Vice Principal, to the accompaniment of a round of applause from the staff still present in the teaching room after the day's lessons had concluded. I got my first glimpse of the sort of prizes given out to runners in Japan. The haul included a bottle of locally produced wine, a certificate, a trophy and 2 pens. Some runners don't like being classified as a Veteran, with its connotations of sunsets and best years being behind you, but I'm not complaining.

Mike Hegarty is a first-year British ALT in Kyoto Prefecture. Before joining the JET Programme, he was a History Teacher and Head of Department in a senior high school in northern England for 10 years. His main hobby and passion is middle distance running. You can follow his blog at <http://runningtalk.blogspot.jp/>



ATTACKING THE 3,333 STEPS

James Pashlev, Kumamoto

If you're anything like me, then the idea of a staircase with 3,333 steps is inconceivable. During my time in rural Japan I've become happily accustomed to the absence of staircases in my life. Apart from my occasional forays into *ichi* and *san nensei* territory at school, the most climbing I do is going the wrong way up an escalator for giggles. So the challenge of 'Attack Nihon Ichi', Japan's longest stairway, on a sunny November morning seemed like a fun challenge with friends. I became even more enthusiastic as our planning developed and I signed up—even though I still had no concept of anything above ten steps in a flight.

The challenge is a race. Not in the conventional sense of first back wins. It's a time challenge, a real *contre la montre*. You predict your time, declare it, and then try to get as close to it as possible, without the aid of a watch. There are prizes for those demigods with wings on their feet, the fastest finishers in the race, who can fly up and down the mountain. But for mere mortals like myself, there is also a chance for glory. Finish the closest to your self-predicted time and you too can scoop a prize. If not, there's always the raffle as a fall-back.

Travelling in convoy with other ALTs and friends from the northwest Kyushu towns of Tamana, Arao, Omuta and Nankan, we descended upon misty Misato in Kumamoto Prefecture. A short shuttle bus took us to the registration area and by this time my nerves were starting to kick in. I spent so long pinning my race number that I missed the first wave of interviews with the KKT TV crew. I told everyone that it was okay, and that I would deliver a flawless interview at the top, composed, measured, and professional.

Many people had told me about the difficulties of the event. I was ready, I thought. I was aware it would be harder coming down than going up—that my 'knees would be laughing'. But in that meeting area, waiting for our start time, I was becoming tense. What if I really had bitten off more than I could chew? Had I left enough time for obligatory TV interviews? What if my blasé prediction of 1hr 55min and 30 seconds came and went? 30 seconds?! I know it sounds a bit silly, but they had taken

the time to print a seconds column, so I felt obliged to use it. I had already thrown out the foolish notion of running, but I reassured everyone that I would walk up and probably run down, depending on how strong I felt.

As we approached the base of the steps, I still had no real concept of the challenge ahead. Sure, people had told me, but I just couldn't visualise it. As I turned the corner, one piece of advice was racing through my mind, "After the first 100 of the 6,666 steps you'll be thinking why on Earth did I sign up for this? But at the end it will feel awesome."

Setting out in the middle of a pack at a family event is always tricky. You're inevitably going to be delayed by people having fun, while you're trying to put on a good show. I soon settled into my pace, and with my chin up, went for it. Overtaking on staircases is hard at the best of times, so patience and perseverance and cat-like reactions were needed to slip in to any gap that opened. I made slow progress, but it was progress nonetheless.

After about 250 steps of climbing, I realised what people had been telling me was coming to pass. My legs were starting to ache, but I just kept going. The staircases are arranged in such a way that it's impossible to see very far ahead. The climb has many rest points, but I soon I began to notice fellow racers just randomly stopping or sitting in the middle of the steps.

Then, a break in the tree line, sunshine illuminated a pillar of success; I had reached the course's halfway point. I'd signed up for the full course, but I was praying there had been an error and they would turn me round. It was not to be. The event staff encouraged me on, and it gave me a huge boost. My legs were screaming, but I knew I was on the last half of the climb up.

I just kept walking. I just kept thinking, "Keep moving, if you stop, you won't start again." I just kept going. Despite the shouts of "ganbare!", I was acutely aware of how nobody was coming down yet. I had no comprehension of where I was on the mountain.

I had heard fables about a series of flat sections, with stepping-stones, before steeper climbing. And when I found them, I was



"It's all fun and games until someone starts walking"



overjoyed. There are huge rocks that are used as stepping-stones. It suddenly became like a game, and I was springing along, refreshed, from step to step.

Then it happened. First a few drips, then a trickle. People were coming down. There was an end. Those coming down had shared my pain. They were doing all they could to spur me on, especially the elementary school students, who were flying down with no fear. I knew there was a way to go, but there was hope in my darkest hour.

The steps began again. I just kept going, slower but still going. I felt bad for the people I passed, but it was do or die time. I blurted out words of encouragement, half for them, and half for my own motivation.

Finally I encountered a camera crew, trying to capture my last few steps. I was in the most dishevelled state, smiling as I reached the top, using weak Japanese to say "アイ・アム・本当におしまい." Then I realised that I was smiling, and I was joking on camera. I was elated to have reached the top. My interview was not as I had planned, but it was fun.

I drank my free water and got the time from a fellow climber. I had scaled the Misato 'Matterhorn' in 55 minutes. If I could just make it down in less than an hour I would beat my predicted time. A jam sandwich and adrenalin wave later, and I was jogging down the first steps. The race was on and I felt good again.

Looking down, I realised how steep the steps were and slowed to a less life-threatening pace, I shouted encouragement to all the climbers, who could not believe that I was on my way down. If I could do it, they sure could. I took perverse pleasure in shouting, "Go, Go, Go" at the TV programme hosts, who certainly were not in their energetic, pre-race interview state any more.

Like a gazelle, I bounded across the stepping-stones. My knees were indeed giggling, but my relief and high spirits kept me genki. Then, suddenly, with no warning, my legs turned to jelly. The last 300 steps down were undoubtedly the hardest for me. My focus became more about not rolling, rather than springing, down each step.

It felt surreal to reach the last step and finally the flat road again. People around me started to jog towards the finish line, while I was swinging my stiffening legs. I ambled to the finish line. With many smiles and much support, I bounced a little to loosen my legs before sitting to watch the entertainment and awards ceremony. I pretended to be relaxed, but in reality, I was struggling to move.

The steps were definitely one of the hardest challenges I have tried. I am not an athlete—running baths often results in me sweating—but it was certainly one of the most rewarding experiences I've had in Japan. I came in 15 minutes faster than my time prediction. I also met many generous, kind, wonderful, and supportive strangers.

It was a great day out, and I heartily recommend it to everyone. The sense of satisfaction is amazing. Three days later my calves were still reminding me of how mean I was to them. Although it was tough at the time, in hindsight, I loved every minute.

I will go again next year and try to beat my time, or at least match it. I hope to see you there too!

James Pashley, 35, is a second-year JHSIES JET based in Tamana City, Kumamoto and originally from England. He has a bachelor's degree in Landscape Architecture and a master's degree in Three Dimensional Design, specialising in child development through outdoor play and play provision for children. He hopes to gain more understanding of this within Japan. Away from school he is an occasional runner, cycling enthusiast and keen gardener.

TRAVEL

EDITORIAL Armchair Traveler

Need inspiration? Check out these travel-related websites to begin planning your next trip!

"I put the travel option on StumbleUpon. It's the best for finding random blogs, tips, and new booking sites!"
Fiona Murray, Kagoshima

"I love Japan-Guide. I love it so much. I must have read 90% of it. It's always the first place I link my friends to when they tell me they are going to come and visit, and the browse by region feature has made the planning of two long trips possible. With everything there is to see and do in Japan, it would be impossible for one information source to cover it all, but Japan-Guide covers a whole lot of it and is very easy to navigate. Oh man, I love Japan-Guide—I think I'll miss it more than the food when I go home!"
Lily Zampatti, Hyogo

"Tripturner.com—know what you want, but don't know where to go? Use the sliders on the home pages to fine tune your ideal trip. Do you want more "beach" or "mountain"? "high-end" or "thrifty"? "relaxing" or "active"? Based on your choices, the site will recommend options and allow you to book hotels."

Caroline Bellinger, Yamagata

"I love the 'to everywhere' option on SkyScanner. So simple, but so inspiring/tempting."

Charlotte Griffiths, Hyogo

"The Frugal Traveler section in the New York Times is usually good."

Kevin Sheffler, Hyogo

THIS MONTH IN TRAVEL...

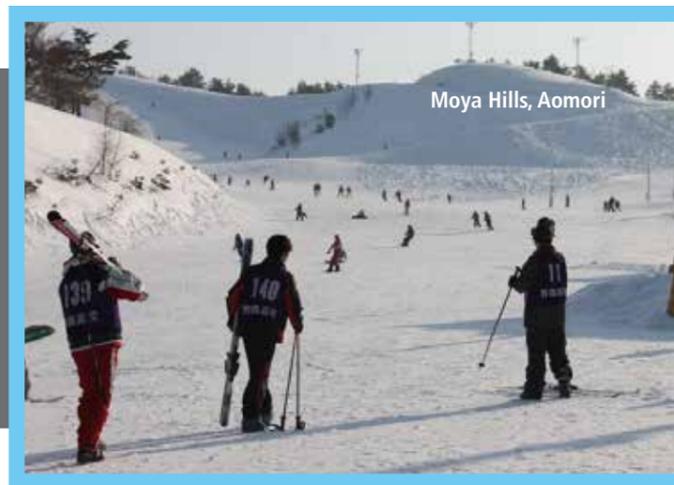
Hey travelers! How are you? Where are you? As much as we've worked hard to bring you this issue, part of me is hoping you haven't had time to read it straight away because you've been up to your eyeballs in holiday fun. But now that you're here—welcome! This month's Travel section delivers part two of our 'Hot and Cold' special. There's more expert tips from our wonderful readers to eight international destinations for those in desperate need of some sun, as well as plenty of winter fun that can be had right here in Japan. Stuck at your desk? Never fear—with the help of some of our readers, I've compiled a list of five travel-related websites to inspire your next adventure. Enjoy!



CHILL OUT PART 2 ICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN!

Finally accepted winter is here and looking for some snowy adventure? In this second part of our 'Cold' special, we look at three more local destinations to entice you out of hibernation. Take top tips from our experts and discover the snow monkeys at Jigokudani Yaen-Koen in Nagano, the easy-access powder slopes of Hyogo, and Aomori's White Battle snowball fight, held early next month. As we say, if you can't beat winter, enjoy it!

AOMORI by Alexandra Brueckner



Ajigasawa, is another great place for snow bunnies, regardless of experience. For those who really want to test themselves, Mount Hakkoda—with its amazing snow monsters and untouched powder—is heaven. Skiing and snowboarding aren't the only things that make Aomori a winter-lover's haven, though. If snowshoeing is more up your alley, Hakkoda is the perfect spot for that, as well. In a more competitive category, Shichinohe hosts its annual White Battle snowball fight in early February. And while Sapporo's yuki matsuri might hold the top spot, the snow festival near Lake Towada is nothing to sniff at either. If you're more the type to lounge in a ryokan, head to Kuroishi's Aoni, where you can soak while enjoying the glow of its many oil lanterns, or Fukaura's Furofushi, where you'll be treated to a seaside view. Finally, if all you're looking for is some food to warm you from the inside out, drown yourself in a bowl of miso curry milk ramen topped with a pat of butter at Aomori-shi's 大西. It's the best way to fight off the chill of Aomori's winter, and—trust me—it's a lot more delicious than it sounds.



If you're looking for a place to indulge in the very best that winter has to offer, Aomori is calling your name. For snowboarders and skiers, we've got locales that cater to every skill level. Those unsteady on their boards and skis can head to Aomori-shi's Moya Hills. Naqua Shirakami, on the western side of the prefecture near

CONNECT
January Issue 2014

Alexandra Brueckner is a third-year ALT in Aomori prefecture. When she's not eating as much sushi as her 別腹-equipped body can handle, she tweets from @halloitsalex and blogs at theglobetrottinggeek.wordpress.com.

HYOGO

by Charlotte Griffiths



Sky Valley, Hyogo

Hyogo may not initially be your go-to prefecture for wintry fun but, at the heart of Japan, its transport connections make it an excellent option these holidays.

Tajima, Hyogo's northern and mountainous region plays host to the region's best snow. Sky Valley is one of Hyogo's bigger mountains, home to a decent snow park and runs to suit all levels. Nearby Hachi Kita Kogen, the biggest and most snow-sure mountain, tends to fill up with posers and beginners; hug the top of the mountain for some of the prefecture's best powder. Access may not be as easy, but Hyogo's tallest mountain Hyounosen also boasts a small ski resort and excellent discounts on the onsens at the foot of the mountain. Although, if it's onsen you're after, then having the delightful hot-spring town Kinosakionsen a 90 minute drive from the slopes is the perfect excuse to make a week of it in Hyogo this festive season.

Shinki Bus organise all-inclusive day trips from various locations in Hyogo and its neighbouring prefectures to the northern resorts. To blend in with the local ladies, totter up to your 7 AM bus in miniskirt, heels and false eyelashes, snow gear in a wheelee bag. I kid you not.

Those in the urban sprawl of Hyogo's southern coast should aim for Kobe's glorious Mt Rokko for a learner's slope, sledging and snow men. Once the sun sets, take in the splendour of one of Japan's top three night views—while of course keeping warm with a cup of hot sake.



Sky Valley, Hyogo

NAGANO

by Charlotte Griffiths

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.

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 seasonnaire-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.



Hakuba, Nagano

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.

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/>)

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.



SUN-SEEKING PART 2 REVENGE OF THE SUN

Waited until the New Year to take your overseas holiday and looking for some inspiration? Never fear! In part two of our 'Hot' special, we bring you four more countries to explore. Our readers share their expert advice and inside tips—from the harrowing history of Cambodia and the wildlife sanctuaries of Malaysia, to hiking in Nepal and temple-to-beach hopping in Sri Lanka. There's still time to book a last-minute break—go on, you deserve it!

CAMBODIA

by Dan Ayres

Cambodia is a small country that packs a punch. Once the beating heart of the mighty Khmer Empire, it was left devastated after the brutal genocide under the Khmer Rouge. However, like the phoenix, it has risen once more and now shines as a most rewarding place to travel, boasting ancient temples, remarkable scenery and some of the friendliest locals in Southeast Asia.

GETTING THERE AND AROUND: Cambodia's main airport is Phnom Penh, from where buses jettison travellers around the country. A great way of observing the various temples around Angkor is by hiring a driver with a scooter, who will gladly take you from A to B.

SEE AND DO: Angkor Wat was the crowning glory of the Khmer Empire, and remains a must-see destination. Siem Reap is a charming town with an old-world feel and a lively night life, and is the main base for travellers exploring the Angkor temples. River-crossed Phnom Penh has a laid back vibe, whilst the former

prison of S21 is a vital and harrowing testimony to the genocide in the 1970s. On the southern coastline, clear waves lap against the shores of Sihanoukville, where beach BBQs and fire shows are the order of the day.

EAT: Aromatic and plentiful, Cambodian cuisine is an under-sung delight. Fish amok, a savoury mousse with coconut and lemon grass, is a firm favourite. Peckish beach dwellers are never too far away from ang dtray-meuk, barbecued squid flavoured with fish sauce and spices.

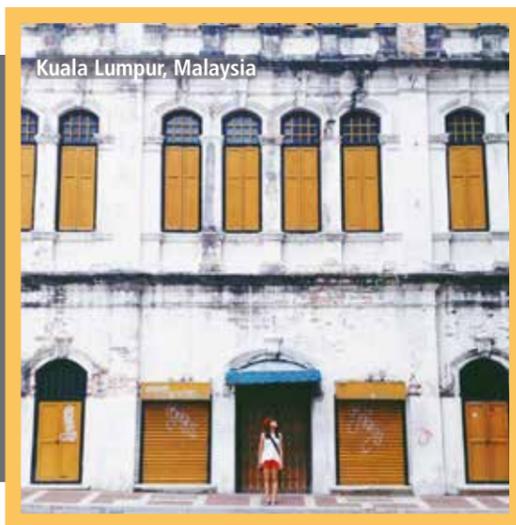
Dan Ayres is a second-year ALT living in Omura, Nagasaki Prefecture. He is a travel enthusiast with a penchant for over-eating and lying in hammocks.



Angkor Wat, Cambodia

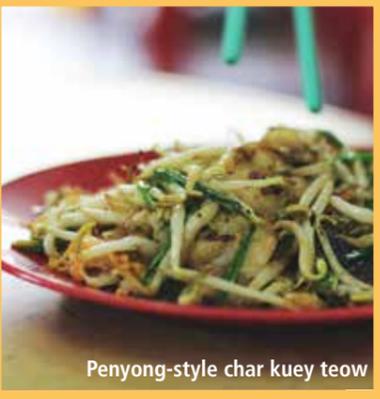
MALAYSIA
by Jasmin Lau

Sandwiched between Thailand and Singapore, Malaysia is often overshadowed by its more famous neighbours. But hey, what's the most important thing in a sandwich? The filling! Admittedly, Malaysia may be famous as one of the worst smelling places on the planet, with the double whammy of the infamous durian fruit, and the rafflesia flower, but it has plenty more to offer.



GETTING THERE AND AROUND: Malaysian Airlines flies from Tokyo Narita to Kuala Lumpur, and Air Asia flights are available from Haneda and Kansai International Airport. Public transport isn't great, but taxis are cheap. Make sure you ask them to switch on the meter before you get in the taxi and be wary of scams. Do not use a taxi tout from the airport; take the KLIA express into the city central or use an official taxi booth.

SEE AND DO: East Malaysia offers gorgeous rainforests, and Sabah and Sarawak are home to the orang asli, the indigenous people of Malaysia. On the Malaysian peninsula, Kuala Lumpur is a shopping haven, and there are several islands off the coasts that offer beautiful beaches and trekking trails. Some pretty awesome activities include hiking Mt Kinabalu, South-East Asia's highest mountain. Dive or snorkel off the coast of Sipadan Island, and help out at a turtle sanctuary (list of locations here: <http://www.malaysia-wildlife-and-nature.com/turtle-sanctuaries.html>). Shop in Kuala Lumpur, party in Bukit Bintang and visit the islands of Redang, Langkawi, Tioman or Pangkor. Check out Penang and Malacca to get a flavour of local history and eat great food.



EAT: Sample Penang-style char kuey teow, a magnificent noodle dish. Have banana leaf rice in any roadside Indian stall. Try nasi lemak, which literally translates to fatty rice, or roti canai, a simple flatbread for any time during the day.

Jasmin Lau is a first-year JET living in Shizuoka Prefecture with an unnerving love for Totoro and Japanese food. She lives to eat, dance and travel and you will probably bump into her wherever there is good coffee, or thrift shops and music.

NEPAL
by Dan Ayres

Home to some of the worlds most magnificent mountains and a culture as colourful and unique as its two-tiered flag, Nepal is a destination that stands tall.



GETTING THERE AND AROUND: Most visitors arrive in Kathmandu by air, from where buses blasting out Hindi classics tear around the country. Brave travellers can take a seat on the rooftop, adding a healthy dose of adrenaline to proceedings.

SEE AND DO: Sprawling Kathmandu is an eye-popping entrance point for most travellers. Bursting with traffic—vehicular, human and bovine—the city's charms can be found on the rooftop terraces of Thamel or the temples of Durbar Square. Peace and serenity can be found in the idyllic 'Garden of Dreams,' whilst culture enthusiasts can visit the magnificent stupas of Boudha and Swayambhunath, known affectionately as the 'monkey

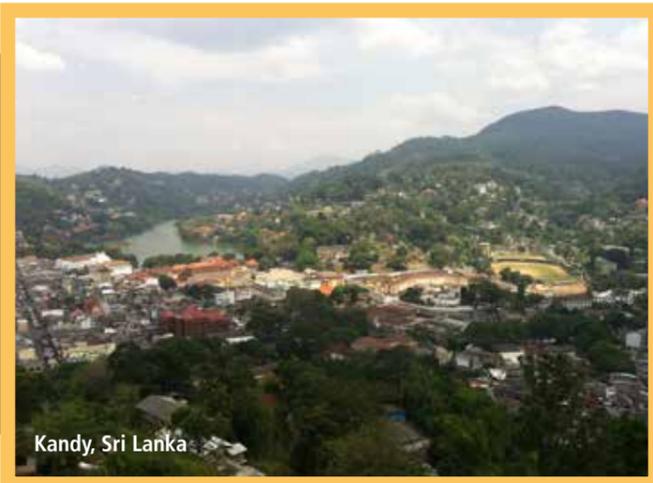


Chitwan, Nepal

temple.' The ancient city of Bhaktapur is a UNESCO heritage site situated in the east corner of Kathmandu valley. Crowned by the epic Himalayas, Nepal is home to some of the greatest trekking in the world. Travellers can embark on the journey to Everest Base Camp, or undertake the mighty Annapurna Circuit trek that affords breathtaking views of Mount Machapuchare. Pokhara is a stunning lakeside city offering outdoor activities such as paragliding and kayaking. In the southern region known as the 'Terai' lies Chitwan national park. Here, travellers can embark on safari excursions on foot, in a jeep or even on the back of an elephant. In the early morning and at dusk, elephant trainers lead their hulking companions to the river for bathing. For a handful of rupees, tourists can assist in cleaning and playing with the amiable pachyderms—a true once-in-a-lifetime experience.

EAT: The vast majority of Nepalis dine on *dhaal bhaat* (rice and lentils) three times a day. Other cuisines abound however, such as succulent *momos* (Tibetan dumplings) and Indian sweets.

SRI LANKA
by Chris Barstow



Kandy, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a lush, tropical paradise located off the southern tip of India, bursting with a rich palette of delights for visitors. Recently emerging from a bitter civil war which raged for a quarter of a century, Sri Lanka has become an increasingly popular tourist destination offering beaches, temples and breathtaking beauty at budget prices.

GETTING THERE AND AROUND: Flights arrive at Bandaranaike International Airport, north of the capital Colombo. From there, buses run to the major cities, although cheap taxis are available if you want to take a more direct and stress-free route to your

destination. Within cities and resorts, tuk-tuks are plentiful and inexpensive.

SEE AND DO: Although sun-worshippers may wish to head to the beach resorts of Negombo and Mount Lavinia on the west of the island, richer rewards are to be found elsewhere. The bustling city of Kandy contains the unmissable Temple of the Tooth Relic, one of Buddhism's most holy sites. Meanwhile, Yala National Park in the south of the island rewards visitors with glimpses of elephants, leopards and other exotic wildlife. The morning train from Kandy to Colombo offers some truly stunning scenery as the rickety carriages slowly trundle from the central mountains to the capital via dozens of century-old colonial era stations. For more adventurous types, winter is also the perfect time to learn to surf on the south coast's Weligama Beach.



Negombo Beach, Sri Lanka

EAT: As well as the ubiquitous (and delicious) curry and rice options, excellent seafood can be found in coastal areas. Don't miss the *kottu roti* sold by street vendors!

Chris Barstow was an ALT in Yamagata City and the Entertainment Editor for AJET Connect before wanderlust took him to pastures new. This winter, he will be found floating in the Southern Hemisphere as a teacher on the Peace Boat's 81st Global Voyage.



Tuk-tuk in Kandy, Sri Lanka

Read about more warm wonderlands at AJET.net!

VOLUNTEERING

THIS MONTH IN VOLUNTEERING...

For this month's spotlight the focus is on Fukushima's AJET Casino Night which was a socially conscious leavers party that raised money for Jimmy's Village School, an English-school for poor and underprivileged children in Cambodia written by Kris Mokes. Next we have an article written by Ben Picone's who takes his Bukatsu seriously and his article on how and why you should volunteer your time to participate in club sports at your schools can help you become more involved at school and create a deeper connection to your community.

Lastly Kat Truong and Courtney Merson's article about Niigata's Charity musical event which is an event that has been going on for seventeen years and helps raise money to help build schools in Papua New Guinea. The cast and crew put a twist on popular stories and perform it throughout the prefecture.



SPOTLIGHT

Fukushima AJET's Casino Night Leavers Party

This year, the Fukushima AJET (FuJET) council decided to take a different approach with our leaver's party. The biggest change was a focus on turning the party into something more—into a charity event to help Jimmy's Village School, an English-school for poor and underprivileged children in Cambodia. With a plan spearheaded by FuJET's co-presidents, Joshua 'Rokan' Tweedy and Erika Ehren, the Leavers party incorporated casino games and a silent auction in the evening's festivities.

The casino games, staffed by FuJET and Eyes for Fukushima members, included: Texas Hold 'Em Poker, black jack, and roulette. **and raised 16,000 yen for charity!** The silent auction featured everything from baked goods to guided tours and **brought in 15,000 yen for Jimmy's Village School!**

It was a night of sequins, cards, and high stakes. Not only did people get to dance, be merry, and say their good-byes to dear friends, but we all got together to show the love and strength of the Fukushima community will continue to reach out to help people not only around Fukushima prefecture but around the globe.

Kris Mokes, FuJET's Webmaster, is a third-year ALT in Fukushima's Samurai City, Aizuwakamatsu. Her love for Fukushima and Japan goes far back to her days as a small child reading about Japanese history and the Boshin War. Oh, and Sailor Moon may have something to do with it, too.



THE NIIGATA CHARITY MUSICAL

Kat Truong & Courtney Merson, Niigata



Having fun at musical practice



A scene from last year's performance



Practicing dances at musical practice

What do good friends, cold winters, singing, and dancing all have in common? They are the main ingredients of the Niigata Charity Musical! The musical has been a tradition and major part of the Niigata JET experience for almost seventeen years. During long, stormy winters when many people want to hide under their kotatsu, the cast and crew of the musical are working together to create a fun show to help raise money for international charity!

Members of the musical are Niigata ALTs and CIRs who travel throughout the prefecture almost every other weekend for rehearsals from late September until the last performance in mid-March. However, the creative process begins in early summer when the cast chooses a story to adapt for the stage—and they subsequently turn that story on its head. New twists are introduced; every word of the script is written by the cast. A sample of recent productions include adaptations of "The Snow Queen", "Aladdin", "Shamisen Hero", "Beauty and the Beast", and our 2014 show is "Sleeping Beauty". Even the musical numbers—which are popular songs from the radio, internet, or other musicals—feature original lyrics specific to the story.

The musical typically travels throughout the prefecture to perform in seven locations during weekends in February and March, with an evening show on Saturday followed by a matinee on Sunday. Aside from paying for performance venue costs, all proceeds go towards the Niigata charity. For many years, Niigata has focused on building schools in Papua New Guinea, and last year alone, thanks to the amazing turnout of supporters, the musical raised 495,382 yen. Enough to build a school! Cast members who have visited PNG find it a remarkable experience. They come back with amazing stories and proof that their contribution has made

a difference, strengthening a beautiful connection between the people of Papua New Guinea and the musical.

We hope that many of you can come see the musical for yourselves in all its glory. Buy a ticket and watch a performance! If you are interested in learning more about the musical or the charity, please go to AJETNiigata.com/musical. Questions? E-mail niigatacharitymusical@gmail.com.

The 2014 Musical Directors for the Niigata Charity Musical are Courtney Merson and Kat Truong. They have a song in their hearts and the hope that you'll come out to see their show!

Courtney is a 3rd-year ALT from Santa Cruz, California, U.S.A. She has been in the musical since she arrived, playing various parts and working behind the scenes. She did many musicals while growing up, but this is her first time directing.

Kat is a 2nd-year ALT from Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. She was in the musical last year as the antagonist. She has a passion for writing and singing, which got her involved with the musical. Though this is her first time directing a stage production, she has managed and directed student film productions.

A note from Steven and Xan: Fukushima and Niigata are currently in discussions about bringing the Niigata Musical to Fukushima for a special one night only show. Stay tuned to the Block 2 Facebook page for news!

THE BUKATSU

Ben Picone, Shimane

Bukatsu. It's the reason some kids come to school at all. It's what keeps the teachers and kids busy on weekends. It's the cause of hour-long pep rally and award ceremony assemblies. But how does it affect us as ALTs? Why is it important to us at all? How can we use bukatsu to improve our day-to-day interactions with students and teachers, even without joining in ourselves? I believe that getting involved in your school's bukatsu can be a transforming experience, and can change both the way the school views you, as well as the way you experience your life at school.

Bukatsu, or a school's club activities, are a part of every school in one way or another. Some schools have dozens of clubs, ranging from sports to performing arts to more studious clubs. Other schools may only have one club the entire school participates in. Students, too, vary in their level of commitment. For some, their sport or activity is their life. Teachers, too, are all involved with some bukatsu. And when it comes to city tournament season, the entire school seems to revolve around them – it's all teachers talk about, and sometimes classes are even shortened to give the kids more time to practice. Where do we as ALTs fall in all of this? How much can and should we get involved?

I firmly believe that bukatsu is one of the best ways an ALT can become more of a part of their school and communities. Getting into bukatsu shows to the other teachers your interest in becoming involved with the students and the school, and in return, you'll find teachers approach you who never invested in building a relationship with you before. At enkais, you'll have more to talk about that just whether or not you can use chopsticks or eat sashimi. It's something many of teachers have put a lot of time into, so it's something they are always happy to talk about. I've found acceptance outside of the school, as well. Parents who see you cheering on games or hear about you practicing with their kids find it easier to approach you and have some common ground to make conversation. I've had parents invite me to their homes, take me out to lunch, and even include me on a family trip to Kyushu. Joining bukatsu has affected me as much outside of school as it has inside.

For the students, it's another opportunity to interact with you in a more relaxed setting. Kids who hated English became best friends with me the second I was removed from the classroom. They tried their best to use English when explaining the drills we were doing for that day or the rules to the game we were playing. To them, by playing their sport with them, I stopped being just an English tool and became a real person. And though I was a teacher, joining a club leveled the playing field for them; for once, they had something they could teach to me as well. From the beginning, simply showing an interest in their hobbies broke barriers I didn't even know existed. And a better relationship with an ALT can and does foster an interest in English and foreign countries. These day-to-day interactions are some of the best paths to influencing the lives of my students, in ways that are harder to do simply in the classroom.

Getting involved in a bukatsu doesn't have to mean strapping on a kendo mask or running 5 kilometers every day. It's easy for an ALT to use club activities to improve their standing without committing your life a new hobby. Ask your kids when their games or performances are, and stop by to cheer them on. They practice for so long and work so hard at their clubs, so it really means a lot to them when they know you have come to support them. Especially with smaller schools, kids and teachers definitely



Ben Picone with Shimaneko, the prefectural mascot



He shoots! He scores!



Teamwork and courage



Watching baseball after school

take notice when you are there. Into taking pictures? Bring your camera and try your hand at some sports photography. Teachers and students are always happy to get photos from games and events.

Simply being aware of the different clubs at your school can go miles to helping improve relationships, as well. Try to keep track of what club students are in, instead of just their names. Keep track of the captain of the soccer team or the all-star pitcher on the baseball team. Knowing a student's hobby makes you seem much more interested in them as a person, and you'll always have something to talk about during lunches or break times. It gives you a chance to congratulate them when they win a game or perform at a festival, ask them about their upcoming games, or just chat. And, it can all tie back to English; being able to talk to someone about something they are passionate about gives them a reason and drive to communicate their ideas that are different from their classroom's textbook English.

Like anything in Japan, being accepted as part of a club takes time. How much you can get involved depends on the club and the teacher in charge. Some teachers are not comfortable with an ALT joining for various reasons; worries about the students getting distracted, for example. Some teachers demand a level of commitment that might not be reasonable for an ALT with multiple schools.

My advice is to take things slowly, and make sure to ask for permission along the way. With starting something new, people are always eager to dive right in and get started. But it's important to let things happen naturally! Step back and observe the way things work, try to gauge when it's appropriate to be there and when to back out. And don't be frustrated if things aren't the way you want right away. Especially in Japan, everything takes time.

Some of the most common problems ALTs face—wanting to be a bigger part of the school, building relationships with students and teachers, and becoming a part of the community—can all be alleviated with bukatsu. If it's possible, joining in can be challenging and rewarding, as well as an invaluable chance to get the know kids. Even without participating, however, being aware of different clubs and important games can help an ALT feel a part of their school. The connections you and make with students, whether you join in on the club, watch from the stands, or just make small talk, strengthen the relationship you have with your school, can do wonders in improving your JET Programme experience.

Ben Picone is a third-year JET from Masuda, Shimane. He enjoys long bathes in the local onsen that overlooks the ocean and eating kinako-flavored sweets. His favorite Japanese food is okonomiyaki with extra mayo. Most days you can find him at bukatsu playing some sort of sport or at least looking sporty. He doesn't climb mountains; instead he serenades them with his French horn after practicing with his student's brass band. When Ben is not at bukatsu he is usually enjoys gaming on Wii U.

EVENTS

EDITORIAL Nanakusa Cleansing

The first few days of the new year in Japan are ripe with cultural events. While most who live here are familiar with *Ganjitsu* (元日, New Years Day) and *Seijin no hi* (成人の日, Coming-of-Age Day), an oft overlooked Japanese tradition is *Nanakusa* (七草) on Jan. 7. "Nanakusa," the literal translation of which is "seven herbs," is a day for warmth and cleansing after days of drinking and eating mochi and indulgent *osechi* meals.

Like many other wonderful Japanese foods, *nanakusa-gayu*, a soupy porridge of rice and seven special herbs, was imported from China centuries ago¹. While the seven herbs may follow some local varietal prescriptions, the general herb recipe is meant to ease common wintertime ailments and restore a person's natural energy. These herbs are among the first spring sprouts to appear, smudges of green foliage in the otherwise pallid winter landscape: water dropwort (芹, *seri*), shepherd's purse (薺, *nazuna*), cudweed (御形, *gogyō*), chickweed (繁縷, *hakobera*), nipplewort (仏の座, *hotokenoza*), turnip (菘, *suzuna*), and radish (蘿蔔, *suzushiro*)¹.

If *nanakusa-gayu* is something you want to prepare, it's as easy as going to your neighborhood supermarket on Jan. 5, 6, or 7 and searching for a pack of 春の七草 (*haru no nanakusa*, or "spring seven herbs"; autumn has its own seven herbs, too). Though this porridge is nourishing, don't mistake it as an exciting or particularly tasty dish. Some recipes suggest enhancing the dish with *kombu dashi* and a pinch or two of salt. Other than that, try to keep the spirit of the dish, and consider yourself (and your stomach) rejuvenated for 2014!

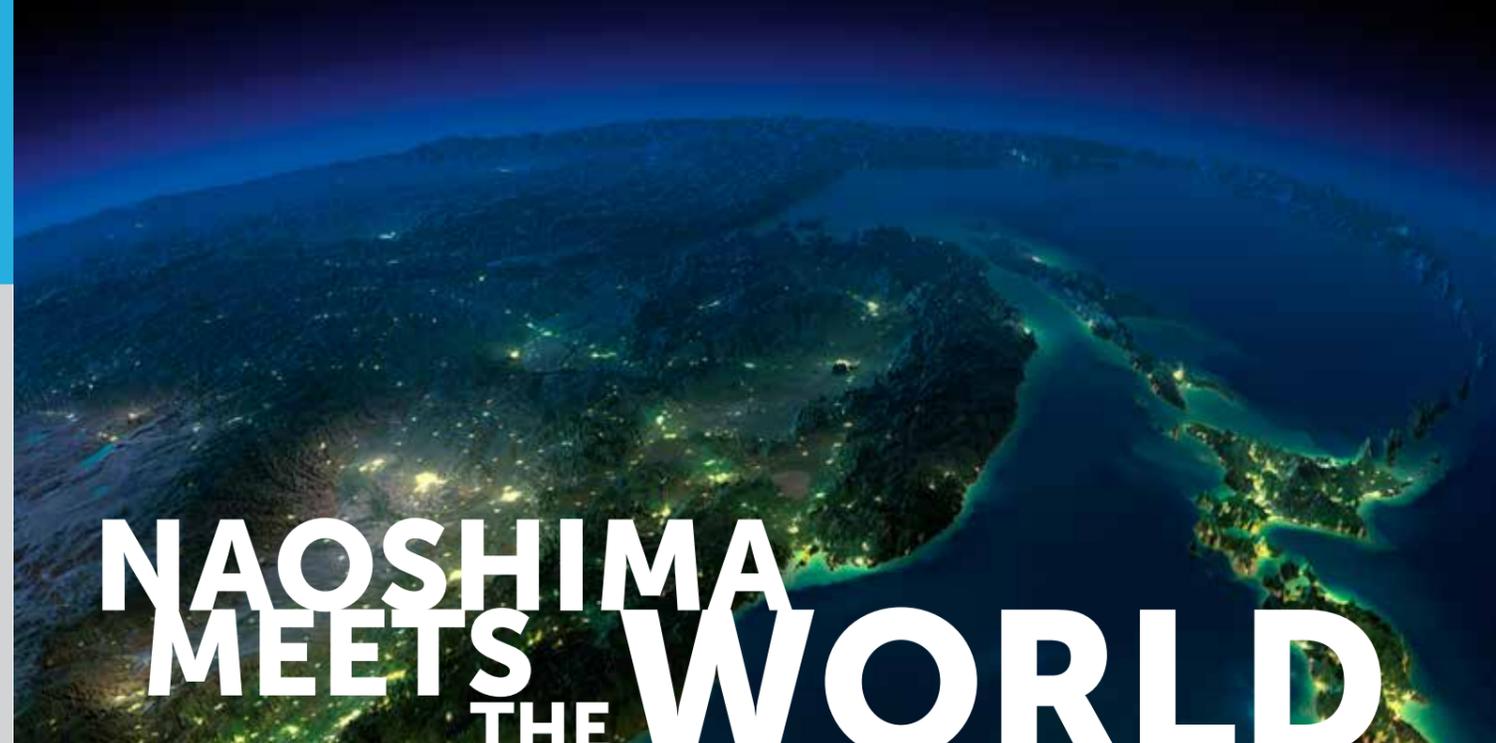
Different cultures celebrate the New Year with different foods and dishes. Have you tried some new foods at Japanese events you are excited about? Have you brought over your own culture's New Year culinary traditions? Tell us at connect.events@ajet.net or connect.food@ajet.net.

¹ <http://japanesestudynow.com/?p=6160>

THIS MONTH IN EVENTS...

Even though the Events section is the last section of Connect, we're here to help you start 2014 on the right page. Set your stomach straight after reading about Nanakusa, a little-known Japanese cultural event, and let Kagawa ALT Thomas Monaghan reset your post-winter holiday mind. Monaghan, the only JET on the idyllic island of Naoshima, fills the Events pages with tales and photos of Meet the World, the island's homegrown English education event. Monaghan's article demonstrates just how invested the island's schools are into this unique program and illustrates how the students and the local and international communities benefit from this tailor-made approach.

This month's Events Calendar incorporates two changes. First, because Connect's January and February issues are halved, the calendars for these months are also leaner. And beginning in this month's issue, the Events Calendar introduces a slightly different format: the calendar will now include events from the 10th of the month to the 9th of the following month to offer you a little more time to plan for events. No more mad dashes to buy overnight bus tickets for the anime convention in Tokyo. No scrambling to take last-second *nenkyuu* for that concert in Osaka or that fire festival in the neighboring prefecture. We hope this change helps you make the most of your time on JET!



Thomas Monaghan, Kagawa

For many years, Naoshima was just another forgotten island in the Seto Inland Sea. Part of Kagawa prefecture but closer to Okayama, its declining population of just a few thousand is sustained by a small fishing industry and the sprawling Mitsubishi materials factory on its northern coast. After visiting in the 1960s, the American writer Donald Richie wrote, "Naoshima is a small, beautiful, somehow sad little island".

In the past twenty years, however, much has changed on Naoshima. Under the leadership of Benesse Corporation, Naoshima now boasts three spectacular art museums—these contemporary structures are literally buried into the hills—by the architect Tadao Ando. There is also an 'art house project' area where restored local buildings are redesigned by contemporary Japanese and foreign artists; beautifully reforested hills; and numerous other contemporary art exhibits. The island now features prominently in many travel guides of Japan, and has received glowing profiles from international press, including The Guardian, The New York Times and Time Magazine. As a must-see destination during this year's Setouchi Triennial, thousands of tourists visited via the easy connections with Okayama and Takamatsu.

As the island's sole ALT, even in this past year I have noticed change. New cafés and guesthouses have sprung up, and the streets are busier with sightseers. Local economic priorities are changing towards tourist services and promotion, and local residents are increasingly exposed to media attention and international visitors. Most of these visitors, of course, speak to the locals in English.

All this gives Naoshima's roughly two hundred elementary and junior high school students—a unique perspective. For several years now, Naoshima has followed a special homemade English curriculum, with weekly classes for every grade. Once a week, I even teach the toddlers in the nursery! Most rewardingly, starting from the later elementary school grades and throughout junior high school, students work

on projects in which they explain and describe their island. Centered around a mock-up of one of Naoshima's villages, they role-play situations like giving directions to lost tourists and sharing their opinion on art pieces displayed in the museums. Their English education is close and relevant to their world.

Every year these efforts culminate in a school event called Meet the World, which was held this year on November 30th. This year 24 ALTs from five different prefectures and five different countries came to spend a day joining students in fun English activities and having a memorable time on Naoshima.

In the morning, ALTs started by meeting 9th graders. The students were unfazed by speaking with ALTs two-on-two, and their above-average English ability allowed for natural and free conversation about everything from school lunches to Harry Styles.

Students then accompanied ALTs to the elementary school, chatting happily along the way. As the ALTs entered the gymnasium, 120 elementary school students buzzed with



ALTs introduced themselves to students



Luke chatting with friendly 3rd graders



ALTs had fun playing the "missing card" game with 5th graders



ALTs joined in with the 6th graders' drama

JETs from several prefectures traveled to Naoshima to support Meet the World. Here's what some of them have to say about the event and their experiences there.

Luke Beatson, 2nd-year ALT, Kagawa:

"It was very enjoyable. It's my second year doing it—so much fun. It was lovely meeting the children and playing games with them all day. I think it was very good for the students; it looks like they've been putting in a lot of work and have been looking forward to it for a very long time. I'm looking forward to next year."

Thomas Simmons:

"It was very enlightening. We got a peek into one of Japan's three English pilot programs. We saw the potential it could have on English-speaking ability, so I was very impressed."

Hanako Suzuki:

"It was so much fun. I had a blast. I hope it was a motivating experience for the students to be able to talk with native English speakers like us. I was really impressed by everyone's pronunciation and confidence in English, in addition to their grammar and whatnot, so I hope it was a motivating and inspiring experience for them."

Gavin Hugh, 3rd-year ALT, Kagawa:

"It was an absolutely brilliant, fantastic experience. I had a cracking time. I think the students really enjoyed having an opportunity to interact with people who they normally wouldn't get a chance to. Often they only have one ALT visit the school. Having an opportunity to speak with so many people in one day is an opportunity that is irreplaceable. The fact that this is an annual event is just a tremendous achievement on the part of Naoshima's education efforts."

Alistair Walker, 2nd-year ALT, Kochi:

"Meet the World was a very interesting experience for me because I work with a very limited number of students, so I got to interact with students outside of my immediate circle. I find that very interesting and it was a pleasure to meet kids who were so enthusiastic and had such a high level of English."

Matthew Lester, 1st-year ALT, Kochi:

"Meet the World was fantastic. It was nice to finally come across an area that is so interested in teaching English that they not only work hard at teaching within their local area, but they're also inviting other native English speakers in order to further assist the education of their students. As for the level of English displayed by those children, it's absolutely fantastic. As with any student it varies from pupil to pupil but as a general rule their English ability was far above anything that I've come across in Japan so far, and I think it's a fantastic achievement for Naoshima."



Gavin tries chatting with a friendly 1st grader

excitement. Each ALT had a group of students who would show them around all morning as they circulated through the English activities in each classroom. Activities included: dream jobs, where students could experience being a veterinarian, a teacher (with no hint of irony), or a sweets shop owner; skill games such as coconut shy, magnet fishing and hoopla; World Restaurant, where students pretended to be waiters and served dishes from all over the world; and expertly acted performances of old Japanese tales. Students were encouraged to speak English with ALTs throughout, asking them questions, explaining the rules, giving them quizzes, and even criticizing their poor shots!

After eating lunch together with children in their classrooms, ALTs then set off on student-led walking tours of Honmura village's Art House Projects and the Benesse Museum. ALTs were accompanied by 5th or 7th graders, who would tell them about Naoshima, answer their questions, make friendly conversation, and give them directions ("be careful of cars!"). At each exhibit groups of 6th and 8th graders were waiting to give well-prepared explanations of the various exhibits, naturally with their own comedic touches.

Preparation for Meet the World is all consuming. At least a month of English classes are given for intensive practicing of presentations, devising of games, and perfecting of pronunciation. But there is nothing else that gets the students so motivated and excited. This is their chance to show off their hard work studying English throughout the year, and also to tell some receptive, friendly foreigners from around the world about their lives and their island.

Some of those foreigners are becoming familiar faces on Naoshima. New Zealand ALT Luke Beatson has attended two years running and is already looking forward to next year's event. He attends simply because "it's lovely meeting the children and playing games with them all day."

For some ALTs, it was exciting to meet a new group of students. Alistair Walker is a 2nd-year ALT in Okawa village, Kochi, and usually works with a very limited number of students. "It was a pleasure to meet kids who were so enthusiastic and had such a high level of English," he said.

For the same reason, it was exciting for the students, too. Third-year ALT Gavin Hugh, from Kagawa, says he had a "cracking time". As he points out, "I think the students really enjoyed having an opportunity to interact with people who they normally wouldn't get a chance to. Often they only have one ALT visit the school. Having an opportunity to speak with so many people in one day is an opportunity that is irreplaceable. The fact that this is an annual event is just a tremendous achievement on the part of Naoshima's education efforts."

For Gavin, the results of such efforts were obvious. "The ability and enthusiasm displayed by the children is exemplary and, compared to other children of their age group, clearly the effects of events like this and other programs being run by Naoshima are having a profound effect on the kids' English ability. They are far beyond what would be expected of them at their age."

In fact, several ALTs were surprised that even the youngest students were able to use basic English phrases correctly. Matthew Lester, who drove five hours to attend the event from Shimanto, Kochi, where he is a first-year ALT, was most impressed by the general attitude to English learning on the island. "It was nice to finally come across an area that is so interested in teaching English that they not only work hard at teaching within their local area, but they're also inviting other native English speakers in order to further assist the education of their students," Lester said. "As for the level of English displayed by those children, it's absolutely fantastic. As with any student, it varies from pupil to pupil but as a general rule their English ability was far above anything that I've come across in Japan so far, and I think it's a fantastic achievement for Naoshima."

On one level, Meet the World works like an end-of-year exam, the ultimate test of students' English ability in a live situation. From "what colour do you like?" to talking about dreams and ambitions, the opportunities for communication in Meet the World neatly tie in with much of the vocabulary, phrases, and topics they have learned throughout the year.

On a deeper level, Meet the World can have a lasting effect on students' attitudes to communication and foreign cultures. With students from all grades, Japanese teachers from all classes, and

ALTs from various countries communicating positively together, it is a vivid demonstration of the real-world value of learning English and being open to foreign cultures. They may live on what was described as a "small, beautiful, somehow sad little island," but Naoshima's students today are learning some of the more profound lessons English education has to teach.

Thomas Monaghan is a 2nd-year ALT and, as far as he is aware, the only foreigner living on Naoshima in the Seto Inland Sea, Kagawa prefecture. He can usually be spotted on his rusty bicycle struggling up Naoshima's hills to get to the only convenience store, or scowling at tourists ruining the peace and quiet of "his island." The slow pace of island life probably makes him more dazed and laid-back than usual, which is saying something.

If you are interested in attending Meet the World next year, keep an eye out on Facebook event pages from October! And if you have a unique teaching event at your school or in your community, Connect wants to hear about it. Tell us at connect.events@ajet.net.

EVENTS CALENDAR JANUARY



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.



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*The block colours are coordinated to the map.

BLOCK 1

65th Sapporo Snow Festival

Feb. 5-11

Sapporo, Hokkaido

Ice sculptures, snow slides, and frosty Sapporo beers galore! This popular festival never disappoints, especially if you are lucky enough to tag along with HAJET at the event.

<http://www.snowfes.com/english/index.html>

Inukko Festival

Feb. 8-9

Yuzawa, Akita

If you know the story of Hachiko, you know why the Japanese are so fond of Akita dogs. This fest celebrates the prefecture's indigenous dog and other canines. Stay for the fireworks show, why don't ya?

<http://japan-attractions.jp/nature/akita-inukko-festival2014/>

BLOCK 2

Matsushima Oyster Festival

Feb. 2

Matsushima, Miyagi

The oysters of Matsushima Bay are well known, from Tohoku to France. This beachside festival celebrates the local specialty with Buddhist ceremonies, an open market, and a 100 meter long grill to cook whatever you buy or catch.

<http://www.miyagi-kankou.or.jp/wom/o-3551>

BLOCK 3

10th Annual Nabe Gassen

Jan. 26

Wako, Saitama

This one-pot competition in the Tokyo 'burbs is one of the biggest one-pot cooking competitions in Japan. 43 competitors from many prefectures join, and attendees vote on their favorite nabe. Previous winners hail from Saitama, Ishikawa, Yamagata, and Kochi.

<http://www.wako-sci.or.jp/nabe/pdf/2014pressrelease1.pdf>

Nozawa Dosojin Fire Festival

Jan. 15

Nozawa, Nagano

This is one of Japan's best fire festivals with a rich local history. Villagers work together to create a tall shaden, which is destroyed by 'opposing' villagers with torches, becoming a spectacular bonfire. Come for the action and the warmth only a sake-fueled fire festival can give you.

<http://nozawa-onsen.com/nozawa-fire-festival/>

26th Koide International Snowball Fight

Feb. 8-9

Uonuma, Niigata

Part competitive snowball fight, part costume party. Teams of five dress up (or down), and pick each other off the competition bracket at this insanely fun event. Bonus: In case of a tie, winners are determined by—what else?—playing janken.

<http://seinenbu.uonumakoide.com/yuki/>

BLOCK 4

Saiko Ice Festival

Jan. 25-Feb. 2

Kawaguchiko, Yamanashi

The Saiko Wild Bird Sanctuary is home to natural ice sculptures: trees up to 10 meters tall that take unique shape under the weight of snowfall. See Mt Fuji during the day, and enjoy the festival's illuminations after dark.

http://www.fujisan.ne.jp/event/index_e.php

Fuji Bishamonten Festival

Feb. 6-8

Fuji City, Shizuoka

This festival is all about that popular annual accessory, the daruma. Participants come in hopes of increasing their luck and prosperity for the next year, and stay to enjoy a pleasant wintertime view of Mt Fuji.

<http://www.fujisan-kkb.jp/event/detail.html?CN=47724>



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BLOCK 5

Suisen Festival

Jan. 11-26

Echizen, Fukui

This event is really three festivals in one, each on a different weekend, but all celebrating the winter abundance of daffodils and crab at the Echizen coast.

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

Nakao Snow Hut Festival

Feb. 1-14

Takayama, Gifu

If you aren't heading to Sapporo for the Snow Fest, consider trekking to this unique event of snow huts with buried hearths, "lion dances," and a nearby onsen to warm yourself in.

<http://okuhida-fuyumonogatari.com/nakao.php>

BLOCK 7

Choco-RUN 2014

Jan. 19

Toyonaka, Osaka

Yes, you read that right: a portmanteau of "chocolate" and "marathon." The event holds 2.5km, 5km, and 10km races, and platters of chocolate available to all participants. Register here for the run in Osaka or in Tokyo on Feb. 2:

<https://jtbtsports.jp/events/events-detail.php?id=2762>

Kumano Otou Matsuri

Feb. 6

Shingu, Wakayama

This transcendental festival is like a rite of passage for local males. Hundreds of men and boys run up and down Mt Gongen's old, very steep stone steps with lit torches dressed in shinishozoku, an act representing death of the old and rebirth of the new.

<http://www.pref.wakayama.lg.jp/prefg/000200/photomuseum/053.html>

BLOCK 6

Dual Fire Festivals

Jan. 14

Moriyama, Shiga

Katsube and Sumiyoshi Shrines each will hold a hi-matsuri, honoring the 800-year-old legend of Moriyama hunters slaying a giant dragon. The dragon's head landed on Sumiyoshi Shrine, and the body fell near Katsube Shrine. Katsube's festival is said to be larger, with more torches and fire.

http://www.biwako-visitors.jp/search/event_733.html

Empress Cup: Interprefectural Women's Ekiden

Jan. 12

Kyoto, Kyoto

47 teams, each representing a prefecture, run an ekiden relay the distance of a marathon through Kyoto City. Root for your home team and check the course here:

<http://www.womens-ekiden.jp/>

Miyajima Oysters Festival

Feb. 8-9

Miyajima, Hiroshima

February is the best month for oysters in Japan, and Hiroshima does not disappoint. This annual fest is the largest in the region. Sample dishes of all sorts and enjoy the live entertainment.

<http://bit.ly/18Yat6W>

BLOCK 11

Shiwasu Matsuri

Jan. 25 - 27

Misato, Miyazaki

This is a unique fire festival revering the legend of the royal Korean Baekje clan, who fled the peninsula when conquered centuries ago and whose spirits meet on the Miyazaki's shores once a year. This event is said to be where the ritual of carrying mikoshi during festivals began.

<http://www.town.miyazaki-misato.lg.jp/2524.htm>

BLOCK 8

Yukigassen Shikoku

Jan. 25-26

Miyoshi, Tokushima

A snowball fight taikai for all to enjoy, including leagues for ladies, beginners, and kids. Unwind at the nearby Iyashi no onsen afterward. Register here:

http://www.shikoku-yukigassen.jp/info_tab2/wef_info_tab2.aspx

BLOCK 9

Interprefectural Men's Ekiden

Jan. 19

Hiroshima, Hiroshima

Seven relay runners from each prefecture run 48 kilometers from the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Dome to Miyajima. See who is representing your prefecture here:

<http://www.hiroshima-ekiden.com/>

BLOCK 10

Tsurumi-dake Midwinter Endurance Contest

Jan. 26

Beppu, Oita

Do you have what it takes to cling to an ice cylinder for hours or competitively eat shaved ice? Even if you don't, you'll get a kick out of watching others' attempts to brave the cold in ways you probably have not considered.

<http://japan-attractions.jp/ja/nature/tsurumi-dake-midwinter-endurance-eontest-vol20/>

Nagasaki Lantern Festival

Jan. 31 - Feb. 14

Nagasaki, Nagasaki

Unquestionably one of Kyushu's most vibrant festivals, taking place in the city's Chinatown on and around Chinese New Year. Enjoy parades, musical performances, dragon dances, and streets beautifully adorned with lanterns and other Chinese decorations.

<http://www.nagasaki-lantern.com/>



EVENTS

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.

GET INVOLVED WITH CONNECT!

CONNECT

January Issue 2014

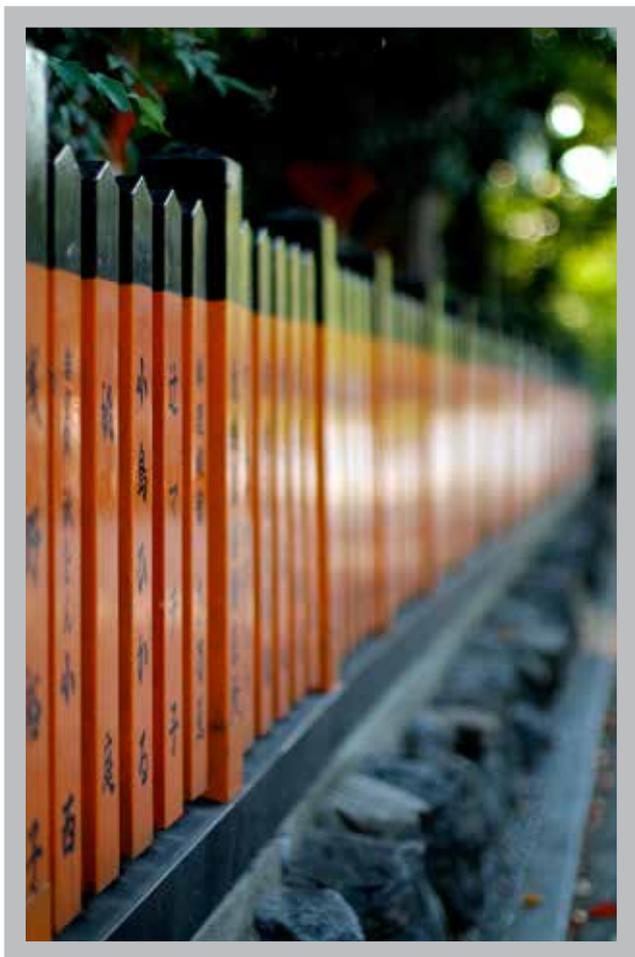
CONNECT

January Issue 2014

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 Erin Kleinfeld's winning photo this month. Here are all the fantastic submissions we received!



"Gion" - Erin Kleinfeld, Kyoto



"Kinkakuji" - Erin Kleinfeld, Kyoto

HAIKU



Black ice and crushed snow
Avoiding falling over
Eternal struggle
☞ Dan Brooks, Yamagata