

AJET

CONNECT

magazine

October Issue

2013



AJET PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE CALLS

Need a little motivation? Wondering what to do after JET? Join us on **Tuesday, October 22nd from 22:00 - 22:30** for an online call with Ann Sado, a Tokyo-based professional with over 40 years of experience. Sado started as an English teacher then moved onto work with big name companies including Reebok, L'Oreal, Coach, and Coca-Cola in positions such as Brand Development Manager, Vice President. Sado will speak about her 5P Theory (Passion, Patience, Professionalism, Peak Performance, and Paradise) which motivates those who hear it! Spots are limited.

Click [HERE](#) for more info and to register.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR OF CONNECT MAGAZINE!

This month, like almost every month, has been a busy time to live in Fukushima. In the wake of the Olympic announcement (covered in detail in this issue), and with further complications at the nuclear plants, the spotlight is once again on us. I think I speak for many when I say it's a tiring occupation to be a resident of Fukushima, and not because of the prefecture itself. The constant battle many of us fight is against continuing negative perceptions and overseas overreactions so extreme as to be hilarious (and saddening). The true effect of the nuclear disaster isn't in the soil or the water, but in the minds of the public, who know nothing else about our prefecture.

As JETs, we are very visible members of the community here and abroad. As much as we represent our home countries in Japan, we represent Japan to our social circles back home. I know that I, for one, get a barrage of messages from family and friends every time the news back home reports on an earthquake or new development at Fukushima Daiichi. My usual response?

Fukushima is fine.

I, like all of us living here, am well aware of the scope of the disasters that befell the prefecture on March 11th, as much as I am aware that life has continued on. Fukushima (the third-largest prefecture in Japan) is so much more than the power plants. Fukushima is mountains and *onsen*, snowboarding and beaches, peaches and bear ramen, samurai and Dali paintings, and home to tens of thousands of wonderful, wonderful people. These things and more make up Fukushima for me, and these things are beautiful in spite of what happened two and a half years ago. So much of this prefecture is untouched by radiation, unaffected by tsunami, and yet it's known for little else.

I would encourage any JETs looking for a taste of northern Japan to visit Fukushima. Not only as tourists, but as the cultural ambassadors we were all chosen to be. Your presence, your confidence, your support means everything. Don't just come here to volunteer on the coast, come here to meet people and enjoy the sights and taste the local foods. You haven't lived until you've snowboarded down a mountain with a gorgeous lake spread below, or seen the colors of autumn hiking along volcanic-colored ponds, or seen the summer night sky lit ablaze with 30-foot flames and alive with festival music.

Come and see the real Fukushima. When you do, send me a message. I'll buy you a drink (limit: ten or so people a month, or until I run out of money).

All the best,

Steven
3rd-year Fukushima ALT
Head Editor of Connect Magazine

Like my "I Love Fukushima" t-shirt in the above photo? Get your own and show some Lucky Island love at <http://le4f.fujet.org/>

Up late?



So are we.

AJET Peer Support Group

A confidential, anonymous resource by JETs, for JETs. Now available free over Skype.

050-5534-5566 or **ajetpsg** **20:00-07:00**
(You'll hear a short message in Japanese) (Voice calls only) Every night of the year

Prepare for life in Japan with JapanesePod101.com

AJET and JapanesePod101.com have partnered to offer all AJET teachers an exclusive **20% OFF** discount on any Basic or Premium subscription!



AT JAPANESEPOD101.COM YOU'LL GET:

- Short and fun lessons from **Absolute Beginner to Advanced**
- Detailed explanations with **PDF lesson notes**
- Kana and Kanji **video lessons**
- **Mobile lessons** to load onto your smartphone or MP3 player
- New lessons teaching practical Japanese **every week**
- Spaced Repetition **Flashcards**

Save 20% on any Basic or Premium subscription with coupon code **AJET**
JAPANESEPOD101.COM/AJET



KAY SAYS...



Greetings from Fukuoka! Each month, I'm going to update you on the AJET National Council's activities in my Chair column here. My goal is to be transparent with your Council's actions so that YOU stay engaged. And, feel comfortable to reach out to me with YOUR feedback on how to improve National AJET aka our national JET community. We'll do our best to realize your feedback—so don't be shy!

First things first, a huge THANK YOU to current and alum JETs who took part in positive change by filling out our AJET Autumn Surveys last month! One of AJET National Council's largest duties is to represent your opinions to the Three Ministries and CLAIR on how to improve the JET Programme. Change doesn't happen overnight, and your Council's goal is to get the discussion started about improving disaster preparedness in addition to increasing community involvement and professional development opportunities for JETs.

Council members just finished analyzing your survey results at the end of September. Now, we are drafting and translating reports of the findings and recommendations to directly present to the Three Ministries and CLAIR at the Winter Opinion Exchange in December. Stay involved in the discussion with us! We'll let you know when reports are made public.

Switching gears...need some motivation at work? Well, your Council is starting a new initiative this month: AJET Professional Development Conference Calls. We're connecting you with a 40-year Tokyo education and business professional from the US to give you a talk about how to make the most out of your JET work. Don't miss this opportunity! Check out the inside cover page for more details and how to register.

On a more personal note, thanks to fellow JETs' advice, I finally hit up Yakushima. It was so refreshing to be engulfed in nature. Walking past trees that have been standing for a thousand years put time into perspective for me. It reminded me that my life is short and I shouldn't sweat the small and big stuff because the big stuff is ultimately all small stuff in the end.

This month, I challenge you to check out ONE new place you've never been before, too. It can be the next country, prefecture, town or even street over! Discover something. Open up your mind just a tad bit more. Experience life from a different angle. And, most importantly, have fun!

Yours in JET community service,

Kay
 3rd-year Fukuoka JET / 2013-2014 Chair

STAFF

Head Editor

Steven Thompson

Graphic Design and Layout

Melinda Lange

Section Editors

Caroline Bellinger
 Ariane Bobiash
 Michelle Castro
 Hugo Dragonetti
 Matthew Jones
 Kelly Merks
 Tom Morin-Robinson
 Lineng Tee
 Xan Wetherall

COVER PHOTO

Adam Carter

HAIKUS

Daniel Brooks
 Giuseppe di Martino
 Elie Vogel

Contributors

Audrey Akcasu
 Eden Aquino
 Nelson Babin-Coy
 Sarah Jane Blenkhorn
 Natalie Boon
 Jonathan Cook
 Kira Conley
 James Cowan
 Isabelle Dansereau
 Adam Douglas
 Hal Edmonson
 Yolanda Espiritu
 Amanda Fink
 Jessie Giddens
 Dustin Henrich
 Sarah Hiscock
 Alexandria Howe
 Alan Inkster
 Junko Kimura
 Shihyeng Leong
 Nick Powers Maher
 Emiko Matsumoto
 Michael Mattson
 Cat McCormick
 Jon Ivan Pinsan
 Carlos Quinn

Kimio Ozaka
 Gabriela Romeu
 Anna Sears
 Thomas Simmons
 Austin Smith
 Margaret Smith
 Emma Tome
 Alys Turner
 Claire Usmar
 Laura Welch
 Danielle Williams

This magazine contains original photos used with permission, as well royalty-free stock images downloaded under a general license from Shutterstock.com. If you are the owner of an image featured in this publication believed to be used without permission, please contact the Head of Graphic Design and Layout, Melinda Lange, at melinda.lange@ajet.net

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

From the Editor	1
From the AJET Chair	3
Meet the Connect Team	6
Ask/Connect	8
Reader Poll	9
Interview: Hal Edmonson, AJET Peer Support Group	10
Block Focus: Blocks 1 & 2	12

CULTURE

Editorial: Micro-Aggressions	14
Spotlight: Zachary Johnson	15
The History of Halloween	16
Oh no, <i>Onryo!</i> A Japanese Ghost Guide	18
All Eyes on Fukushima	20

ENTERTAINMENT

Editorial: Tom Reviews <i>Branded to Kill</i>	22
Spotlight: Maureen Leeds	23
<i>Haikyo</i> , Urban Exploration in Japan	24
Making Music in Japan: An Interview with Nelson Babin-Coy	26

FASHION

Editorial: Changing Seasons	28
Spotlight: Terry Kuo	29
Music Meets Fashion: Dressing Up for Concerts in Japan	30
Fright Night Fashion Inspiration	33

FOOD

Editorial: Cross-Cultural Food Musings	36
Spotlight: Laura Lou	37
First Impressions: Food Edition	38
Sweet Treats Fall Festival	40

SPORTS

Editorial: The Message of Recovery Behind the Tokyo Olympics	42
Spotlight: Akiyo Horiguchi	43
A Short History of Olympic Tokyo	44
Island Cruisin'	46
Can I Get a Medal, Too? Ultramarathon Running...	48

TRAVEL

Editorial: Where is Japan's Focus?	50
Spotlight: Jon Ivan Pinsan	51
Haunted Tokyo	52
One Man's Mission	54
The Happiest Place in Japan	57

VOLUNTEERING

Editorial: Out of the Box and Without a Trail	58
Spotlight: Sarah Hiscock	59
The Shimane AJET Scholarship Fund	60
Brighter Than Tomorrow: Hiroshima AJET's Charity Art Festival	61

EVENTS

Editorial: What the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Mean	62
Spotlight: 5 Places for Great <i>Kouyou</i> , Eastern Edition	63
The Tug of War	64
Gifu's <i>Gujo Odori</i>	66
Nakanojo Biennale	69
Events Calendar	70

CONTRIBUTING

Connect Contests	74
Contribute to Connect!	75

Click the article you want to read to jump straight to it! Click the Connect logo at the bottom of any page to come back here!



meet the CONNECT team!



Steven Thompson Head Editor

September really did fly by for me! It helps that I had my birthday to look forward to (September 28th, if you want to send a card next year), and celebrated it for a week-and-a-half with friends and pizza. A lot of my favorite TV is also starting back up, so while my friends obsess over *Breaking Bad*, I can finally find out exactly How I Met Your Mother. When I'm not glued to Netflix, I'm reading about the amazing things everyone is up to around Japan. I really do love seeing the stories you send in, and I want to see us more and more Connected to you, the readers. Drop me a line anytime at connect.editor@ajet.net with your ideas, questions, and feedback!

Melinda Lange Layout and Design



Hey, y'all! I love all the excitement that October brings! I can't tell you how excited I am for Halloween this year. I'm prepared with my stickers, got my eye on a costume from Don Quixote, and I'm volunteering for the International Festival in Saitama *Shintoshin* for the third year in a row. Also, when it's not typhooning, the temperature lowers itself to a nice and breezy sub-boiling temperature. I've even been considering taking a jacket with me when I go out, and have riskily switched to a heavier blanket at night. Watch this crazy Florida girl try and prepare for winter in Saitama. Bwahaha! Email me anytime at melinda.lange@ajet.net.

Ariane Bobash Food Editor



Hello readers! Hope you've all had a fab September and a smooth transition back in to your work routines. I, for one, am looking forward to exercising outdoors more as we head into fall! The upcoming cooler weather also means I'll actually be cooking again, since making anything other than smoothies, salads, and fruit seemed silly in the summer heat. In fact, I made my first soup in ages this week (leek-*kabocha*-sweet potato), hooray! What will you be whipping up as the mercury goes down? Tell Xan and I at connect.food@ajet.net.

Xan Wetherall Food Editor



Woah, did September pass in a flash of lights and colors, or was that just me? One week I can't keep up with all the tomatoes in my garden, next week the plants're shriveling in the cold! Never mind, autumn is officially here, and for me, that means pesto time! This summer, I grew ten basil plants, which I used in various recipes, but now that the weather's getting colder, it's time to pluck them all up, and grind them down with my new food processor! Got any food prep you're rushing to finish, or just want to beg some pesto off me? Hollar at me and Ariane at connect.food@ajet.net!



Hugo Dragonetti Sports Editor

Hello! I hope it's all going great for you now that we're well and truly back at work.

Over the next few weeks I'll be spending a lot of my time either coaching students for an English speech contest or planning for a Halloween party that I'll be hosting with other JETs in my area. I'll hopefully find time to visit some beaches in Kagoshima to enjoy the last month or so of warm weather by surfing and paddle boarding. If there's anything sports-related you'd like to share, horror stories or otherwise, please get in touch! connect.sports@ajet.net



Caroline Bellinger Travel Editor

It's getting colder, peeps. Some of you are about to find yourselves under piles of snow for six months straight. While that calls for a big "huzzah!" from all us skier/boarder types, for everyone

else, that means endless daydreams of warmer climes. I recommend spending the next couple of months planning your ultimate winter break—whether it's to hit the slopes or to chill out on white-sand beaches. Need some inspiration? Have a travel question you need answered? Had a great adventure you want to share with others? Then get in touch! connect.travel@ajet.net



Matthew Jones Culture Editor

Hey hey hey! October is the month of Halloween, so get out there for some ghoulishly good fun. Japan is one of the few countries that not only accepts fancy dress, but actively encourages it! Halloween is one of the few holidays that I really love, and luckily, Japan seems to be joining me in that. I'm in Nagasaki City, a city famous for its interaction with foreign culture, so I'm in Halloween heaven. Make sure to remember that, while zombies are definitely "in" this year, a samurai zombie hunter is way cooler.



Tom Morin-Robinson Entertainment Editor

Hey everyone! With September out the door, I'm finally back in my teaching groove and rejoicing in being able to go outside with little to no risk of heat stroke. I took full advantage of those back-to-back three-day weekends and made my way over to Busan, South Korea for a *kimchi* and *soju* extravaganza, and then to Tokyo for some fun in the big city. I've also been working on my photography which you can check out at tommrphoto.tumblr.com. 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 readers, how was your September? I spent time packing away my summer wear (whilst saying hello to scarves, coats and boots that'll keep me toasty), enjoying sparkling conversations, hitting up Tokyo Disneyland and enjoying S/S 2014 runway looks courtesy of Fashion Week. On the 6th, I will participate in my school's marathon for the 2nd time, a character-building 43 km for girls and 100 km (!) for boys. After that, I'm looking forward to hiking and *momiji*-chasing with friends and family. Do let me know what's captivated you fashion and beauty-wise as the seasons change at connect.fashion@ajet.net!

Michelle Castro Volunteering Editor



Greetings! I hope that you are settling into work and decorating your living space at home. I am still glowing from having spent over a week in Kyushu. I took part in a scavenger hunt in Nagasaki, and spent the day going from one beautiful place to another. You can read about it in my editorial. After Nagasaki, I drove to Saga Prefecture and saw some pottery, before falling in love with the city of Beppu in Oita Prefecture. I will visit it again just to experience their unique mud and sand onsens. Lastly, I made it to the Takachiho Gorge in Miyazaki and ended my day by driving up to Kumamoto to see Mt. Aso's active volcano. Have an interesting story to share? Then send it my way connect.volunteering@ajet.net

Kelly Merks Events Editor



The fall school term begins my last full year as a JET. I enjoyed my high school's *bunkasai* in September, being cheesy with my students, buying the goodies in their shops, playing games, and watching their sports matches. But October, one of my favorite months, is here, bringing with it Halloween parties galore and a good excuse to use Michael Jackson's "Thriller" music video as an English lesson (which, yes, I do). I will be heading to Japan's largest Oktoberfest in Yokohama, and bringing out the *nabe*—one of my favorite ways to cook Japanese food—on cooler nights. What are you up to this month? Let me know at connect.events@ajet.net.



ASK / CONNECT

Ask/Connect is your space to get in touch with the Connect staff and the Connect community. If you have a question that you'd like answered for everyone, we'll do our best to respond. If there's something we don't know, we'll find someone who does! If you have a question about life in Japan, would like to know something about AJET, want to respond to any of the articles or editorials in this month's issue, or if you just want to say something nice about us, here's the place to do it! **Ask your questions at connect.editor@ajet.net!**

Here's what we heard this month!



A student just came out to me. Well, I might have subtly "made" him do it... Since meeting this shy, beautiful, quiet boy who's more interested in talking to me about Hollywood fashion, "western" celebs and hair than baseball and cars like his male peers, I had an inkling about him. Today, after seeing him bullied for the umpteenth time, I went to him and asked if he could keep a secret. He said "yes", and I told him I have a girlfriend. The first thing he said was, "I'm gay, too!"

I just want him to feel it's completely fine, and that he should never tolerate being bullied. Do you folks think I went too far by outing myself to a student?

-- Karmen Rabé via Stonewall Japan

Karmen, we think that not only did you do the right thing, but you've done something quite commendable. Our jobs here, and our place in schools, gives us the unique position of having a lot of attention and a memorable impact on the students we encounter. One of the best things we can do is to make sure that impact is positive and supportive, inside and outside the classroom. Bullying is a serious issue in Japan, and reaching out to a student in friendship can make a world of difference. You may also consider checking out <http://heartschool.jp/>, which has LGBT resources in Japanese.



I am applying for JET this year and I have some concerns for my daughter who is allergic to fish and shellfish. A current JET friend told me to check y'all out for help and guidance. Thanks again!

-- Halley Waldrop Hixson via JETfood

Our intrepid Food editor and founder of JETfood, Xan Wetherall, says "Medical allergies are a serious thing, and despite the abundance of seafood in Japan, both fish and shellfish can be avoided, as long as you know what to look for!" Some good resources that we recommend for identifying and avoiding allergens include the JET diary—which all JETs receive at Tokyo Orientation—Hokkaido AJET's invaluable guide Veg Out! (available at <http://www.hajet.org/lang/en/publications/#veg>) which has information on dietary restrictions of all kinds, and Select Wisely (<http://selectwisely.com/>) which provides laminated cards for those living abroad with food and drug allergies. The website Surviving in Japan has a great, in-depth article on reading Japanese food labels, with lots of applicable vocab (<http://www.survivinginJapan.com/2012/04/ultimate-guide-to-reading-food-labels.html>).



Hello, my parents are going to be in Tokyo in February so I was just wondering if you would recommend any hotels or things to do?

-- Suzanne Fish via JET-setters

Hey, Suzanne! As the holiday season and spring break loom on the calendar, many people find themselves making plans for visitors. Whether it's your parents or friends back home, what to do in the largest city in Japan after you leave the airport? After making sure you've got a place to stay (consider Japanese-style tatami rooms for a new experience!), branch out into the city. Must-see sights include Asakusa along the Sumida river, where you can visit Senso-ji, stand in the presence of SkyTree, and partake in traditional shops and sweets; Shibuya's famous crossing has all the razzle and dazzle that people expect from Tokyo, along with tons of shopping, dining, and Bunkamura, where there's always a film, art gallery, or live theater on display; Ueno and Yoyogi parks are perfect for that quiet interlude from all the noise and crowds (also, pandas!). If you have time to take a day trip out of the city, Kamakura's giant Buddha and Nikko's breathtaking nature and onsens are worth the train fare!

Many of these recommendations came from the wise, experienced travelers at JET-setters, a Facebook group where the community can swap travel tips and get answers for their questions, anywhere they may be going in or out of Japan! (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/201254443340605/>)



I'm finding it hard to keep my mouth shut when I see bad teaching. I was qualified to teach English before I came to Japan, and it feels like everything I've been taught was a waste. I had an English lesson today where the teacher didn't utter a single word of English and I was expected to stand at the back and stay quiet. Does anyone else feel like they could be being more productive?

-- Vikki Coulson

Your experience is one commonly felt by many ALTs in classrooms in Japan, especially among those who have teaching experience and certification. It can be frustrating when you feel you're being underutilized, but there are ways you can improve your situation! The top thing to remember is that your responsibility is to be an asset of support in the classroom. We are, after all, hired as assistant language teachers. That being said, if you have experience in language instruction, make it known in a respectful and open communication. ALTs come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and your teachers may not know what you're capable of, and may not want to overload you! Offer to take over part or all of the lesson planning. If the curriculum is strict, ask for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class to do a warm-up activity. Find time after each class to discuss how it went and what you'd like to do next time. Having materials prepared ahead of time, and clearly demonstrating what you plan to do, puts a lot of teachers' worries at ease.

If you're in elementary schools, remember that English education only recently became compulsory, and many homeroom teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching something they themselves don't understand and weren't trained in. Chances are, if you offer to take some of the workload, they'll be relieved!

The last thing is to remember that the "E" in JET stands for "exchange" and not necessarily "English" or "education," and there are so many ways you can bring your language and culture to the students outside the 50 minutes of classtime you have. Sit with students at lunch, visit clubs and other classes besides English, start an English bulletin board, anything you can do to make yourself a shining beacon of awesomeness at you schools! Just saying hello and smiling in the hallways can open up a floodgate of English/ Japanese conversation.

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

This Month's Question

The hot topic in Japan (and this month's issue) is the announcement that Tokyo will host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. You can read our varied reactions and opinions in the following pages, but we want to know what **you** think.

Do you think it's a good idea for Tokyo to host the Olympics in 2020?

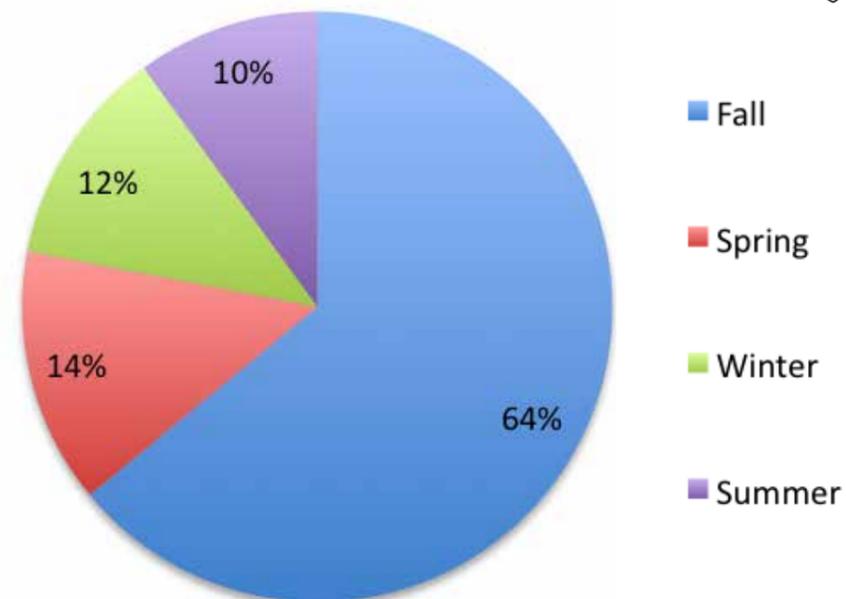
- Yes
- No
- I have mixed feelings
- I don't care

Also 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

What is your favorite season in Japan?

You guys spoke really strongly in favor of Japan's autumnal allure! It must be the near-perfect weather, beautiful colors, and abundant fall events!



HAL EDMONSON, NATIONAL COORDINATOR for the AJET PEER SUPPORT GROUP



This month we spoke with Hal Edmonson, a fifth-year JET in Aomori Prefecture who serves as the National Coordinator for the AJET Peer Support Group. This isn't the only way Hal serves the AJET community, either. Those of you who arrived in Tokyo this year will have seen him cheerfully helping out as a Tokyo Orientation Assistant and leading the Driving in Japan workshop. While we had his ear, we were able to ask him some questions submitted by the community about the work PSG does and what it's all about.

It operates every evening of the year from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m., and is staffed by trained volunteers who are ready and able to assist their fellow JETs. This can range from practical things, like information on medical services or counseling referrals, to more complex situations like work issues, culture shock or depression. Whatever a JET needs, even if it's just someone to speak to in English for a little while, we'll do our best to help.

PSG isn't to be confused with professional counseling, but volunteers have training along the lines of what PAs receive (and indeed they train together from time to time), and are there to listen and help guide JETs in the right direction if nothing else.

Most important, PSG is **completely anonymous and confidential**. We never ask names or identifying information from callers, never log phone numbers, and volunteers are bound by a strict confidentiality policy. Outside of an immediate threat of physical harm to one's self or other, PSG never shares the details of calls with anyone.

What sort of training do volunteers receive?

Great question!

PSG's philosophy is to support JETs in navigating their own way around the issues that they face. That's by necessity, since our volunteers have no personal knowledge of the situation, or the people involved, making it hard to just give straight-up advice in many cases. Also, everyone can learn something new about a problem by talking it through in the right environment—as I think most of our experiences can attest.

All PSG Volunteers participate in about twenty-five hours of training before they work the line, and many of them also attend the PA training conference, so we have a lot of overlapping skills with the PA Community. Underlying all that, however, is the fact that our volunteers are also current JETs. They've been in schools and city halls, and understand the challenges of JET because they've faced them as well. They get it, basically, and that's no small thing.

Most of our training is geared toward creating that kind of

environment, and becoming better listeners. When you say 'good listener', it can be kind of a fuzzy term. Most of us don't really think about what goes into it, we just know it when we see it. But there's so much that can be learned! Checking personal biases, asking open questions, being careful not to subtly judge the actions of another person, paying attention to the tempo of the conversation—all these take practice, and we spend hours discussing and practicing them with each other. It's not all that different than what friends do with each other every day—the only difference is that after a conversation, we stop and debrief it, pointing out the places where we might have interrupted, or missed something important. That's the more theoretical component of training.

Many JETs ring PSG with a more concrete issue—finding a doctor, say, or legal trouble—and they may also want to deal with it themselves rather than involving a PA or a supervisor, but don't know where to begin...We spend a considerable amount of time learning about the resources that are available to JETs and foreign residents of Japan. We maintain the PSG Wiki (currently undergoing some serious renovation), a listing of resources in each prefecture and nationwide that has been compiled by PAs and PSG volunteers, and are generally in pretty close contact with CLAIR as new resources emerge. We have phone numbers and websites at our fingertips, too, so we can dispense that info fairly quickly. If we can't talk a problem through completely, our goal is to be able to point callers in the right direction as efficiently as possible.

How can someone start volunteering for PSG?

PSG recruits new volunteers once each year, typically in Early Spring. If you're interested, keep a look out in AJET Connect, CLAIR News, and your PAs e-mails for our recruitment bulletins in February or March. Successful applicants will participate in approximately 25 hours of training (held via conference call) in May before beginning to work PSG's lines.

How did PSG get started?

To my mind, the most impressive thing about PSG is that it exists solely for, and is supported by, its community. Many current JETs are unaware that some of the most visible elements of the support system, like Prefectural Advisors, the counseling staff affiliated with CLAIR, and the JETLine, didn't exist in the early days of the program. A handful of JETs—some with experience staffing hotlines—created the group to fill what they saw as a void in the support network. Back then, it was a pretty rag-tag operation—a few phone numbers that were circulated around the grapevine that you could call. As it grew, particularly in the wake of the Kobe Earthquake in 1995, the service went

to an all-night, every-night system. Even then, though, before call-forwarding technology, the logistics were difficult. There actually used to be an answering machine in some person's house, and the message would be changed every night to give the home numbers of the volunteer on duty that night!

These days, the technology is much better. We have call-forwarding online, so there's just one nationwide number (050-5534-5566, or 'AJETPSG' on Skype) that connects directly to the volunteers working on a given night. There's also certainly a bit more institutional support for our work. PSG receives AJET's financial backing, and shares training techniques with the PAs. But in the end, PSG is still an independent organization that is sustained by the JET Community. Even though the JET world is always in flux, PSG has been on the line every night for over fifteen years—no small feat, if I may say so myself.

Can you think of a specific time you've really made an impact?

I can't discuss any specific calls, but I've lost count of the number of JETs I've been able to provide a needed ear and some good resources on the PSG line. Paul Tillich famously said that "the first duty of love is to listen". He wasn't talking about PSG, of course, but it's a nice reminder that quite often, time and space to explore an issue without judgment or pressure is the greatest gift we can offer each other.



Tell us about yourself. How'd you get started with PSG?

I really do want to de-emphasize my own role in this as much as possible. The reason for that is two-fold: One, it's about the service, not me. Second, PSG relies on two-way anonymity. Many callers come to us because they're wary of judgment, and we take a lot of pains to de-personalize the service. We never publish/reveal the names of our volunteers for that precise reason (although mine is public for administrative reasons).

That being said, I'm originally from Wisconsin, in the U.S., and am currently a fifth-year JET in Aomori Prefecture. I did quite a bit of peer counseling in University, and PSG was a pretty logical place to keep that skill set up in Japan—particularly since it fits with my future plans. I started volunteering for PSG at the end of my first year, and am now serving as the National Coordinator for the organization. Really, though, the organization has its own procedures and ethos that sustains it more than any members or leaders. I'm a caretaker of work that started long before I came to Japan, and will continue after I'm gone. It's a humbling opportunity to play that role.

What is PSG?

The simplest explanation of the Peer Support Group is that it is a volunteer-run support hotline specifically for the JET Community.



AJET Peer Support Group
Confidential Listening & Referral Service

050-5534-5566

Skype: AJETPSG

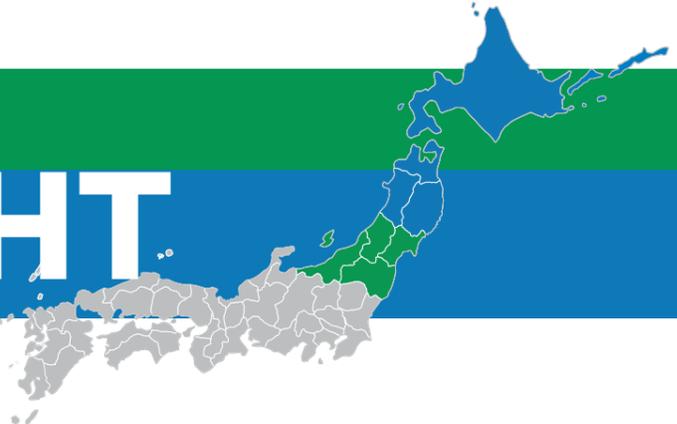
8pm - 7am, every night

If you call, you will hear a brief message in Japanese before you are connected.

PSG only accepts voice calls on Skype--no IMs please!

BLOCK SPOTLIGHT

Block Focus: Blocks 1 & 2



Blocks 1 and 2: the lands north of the Wall (such as the Shirakawa no Seki), the lands of (almost) always-winter, the lands where a whopping four of your AJET National Council representatives live, play, and work (and work).

In Block Focus, we'll take a closer look at your council and what they're doing throughout Japan. Read about their big community events and their small, strange personal lives below!

Alan Inkster, Fukushima Treasurer for the AJET National Council



Twice a year, the AJET National Council meets with the Ministry of Internal Communication, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and CLAIR to hold Opinion Exchanges to report on the current state of the JET Programme and discuss how it could be improved. We do this by selecting important issues and creating reports to deliver at these meetings. We are currently preparing for the Spring Opinion Exchange where we will discuss how much involvement JETs have in their local communities, how well informed JETs are about procedures in the event of a natural disaster or emergency, and how the JET Programme assists participants in their post-JET ambitions.

Here in Fukushima, we welcomed the new arrivals with a three-day orientation and various regional welcome parties. At my local welcome party, we enjoyed a delicious BBQ and had time to set up a few tents ready to be camped in before a sudden torrential downpour cancelled our grand camping plans and turned it into a social swimming event to which I had forgotten to bring my swimming shorts. Despite not being able to enjoy nature for as long as we had intended, getting soaked proved to be a strangely rewarding bonding opportunity.

The next bonding opportunity I'm looking forward to is a somewhat drier one with far less clothing. Tomorrow I'll be taking part in a sumo tournament and doing my best to improve upon my runner-up position from last year. However, the competition this year looks a lot tougher so I've been drinking two cartons of milk with my school lunch instead of the usual one. I'm bound to win now. [Editor's note – Alan did not win.]

Yolanda Espiritu, Hokkaido Block 1 Representative



Further up north, we have also been celebrating the arrival of new JETs at our welcome parties! I had the privilege of going to Akita's and am looking forward to my own in Aomori.

I think Block 1 is off to a great start for this new 2013-2014 JET year with so many people responding to events that are happening in other prefectures and making the trip there (kudos to you guys)! I'm doing the same, and have not regretted making the trips! I've already met some great people from different prefectures, and am so excited to continue supporting events that will allow us JETs to meet and hang out with one another!

The last big Nebuta Matsuri event is happening in Hachinohe, Aomori called the Aomori Nebuta 10-City Grand Matsuri, where I will meet more JETs that are coming out to hang out and see what Aomori has to offer! I'm excited to show them around! Apart from that, I am organizing an Aomori Halloween Party that, of course, anyone and everyone is invited to! The proceeds go to Everest of Apples, a charity founded by Aomori JETs. This will be on October 26th.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Volunteer Akita members, the charity led by Akita JETs. I'm finding that every time I meet new JETs, (especially from other



prefectures) it opens doors to more, and new, opportunities to meet JETs and travel. I can only hope to organize more events with you wonderful people! Some ideas I have are: raising money to send a Japanese student abroad, building houses together in developing countries and/or Tohoku (as a JET Team!) through Habitat for Humanity Japan, scavenger hunts, futsal tournaments, AND a trip to India in March, during Holly (paint war!!) or to Brazil for the World Cup, TOGETHER! Sky's the limit...let's share ideas and make things happen. Contact me and let's make the most of this year!

Xan Wetherall, Fukushima Block 2 Representative



Fukushima, Niigata, Miyagi, and Yamagata, one great big beautiful block! We kicked off the new JET year with welcome parties and orientations in EVERY prefecture, big to-dos full of the whats and hows of the local ken, as well as plenty of social liquid courage!

September was a crazy wonderful month for events in Block 2. Fukushima, joined by a Niigata JET or three, kicked the year off right, and threw itself into the yearly Canyons trip in Gunma prefecture! The two prefectures spent a memorable day jumping and flipping off of every waterfall they could find, before spending the rest of the day rafting, bungee jumping, and paragliding! Meanwhile, Yamagata prefecture's AJET gang busted out their rad dance movies with the annual party in the forest: Jomon Mura 2013! Glowsticks were spun, and bootys were shaken in copious amounts, before everyone crashed into their bunk beds for a few hours of sleep. Not to be outdone, that very same weekend, Miyagi's AJET rolled into Fukushima's Aizu area, and hiked the heck out of our illustrious Mount Bandai! Those who didn't hike had the chance to check out the illustrious Five-Colored Lakes, as well as the Morohashi Museum of Modern Art, home to one of the largest collections of Dali artwork in the world!

What about October? Well, for starters, the very first weekend of the month heralds in the annual autumn soccer tournament for JETs, taking place down in Mountainous Nagano! Players from all four Block 2 prefectures will be attending this year, representing the finest Southern Tohoku has to offer! Later on, Halloween parties are rocking up and down the Block, with a party of the Spooky, Costumed persuasion happening in each prefecture, one a week, starting October 19th!

But Xan! What about you? Well, for my part, I've been on beaches, in forests, up mountains, and down waterfalls! But I have to say, my favorite part of Block 2 lately has been... the food, of course! With the shift of the seasons, we're getting a



deluge of nashi pears and crazy-good grapes. With October here and Halloween on the horizon, it's up to yours truly to try every seasonal limited edition pumpkin food they release! I'll be sure to tell you how it goes, or you can ask me yourself if you're in the area! Feel free to crash my couch any time!

Steven Thompson, Fukushima Online Publications Editor and Head Editor of Connect



It's me again! I can imagine you all get tired of reading about me every month, so I'll be brief! Like Xan and Alan, I've been enjoying all the wonderful events Fukushima AJET has been involved in this past month, and looking forward to a busy October. I had an amazing time (as usual) canyoning in the great outdoors of Gunma in the town of Minakami. It was my first experience paragliding, and I'd be lying if I said it was anything less than majestic! Canyons is always one of my favorite trips on JET, because it affords the opportunity to branch out of my prefecture and meet people from all around Japan, it's that sort of networking that JET is such a great opportunity for.

This month was also my birthday month, and I had a great time celebrating with friends old and new in Japan. As luck would have it, many of us were already getting together in Tokyo for the annual video game expo, Tokyo Game Show (look out for my writeup in next month's issue!). I could think of no better way to enjoy my birthday than with Chicago deep dish pizza and craft beers at the newly opened Hamamatsucho branch of Devilcraft, an incredible pizza restaurant in Tokyo!

As part of your national council, this month I was mainly responsible for the section of our biannual reports concerning the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. I was more than willing to take on the analysis and presentation of all the data you provided via the surveys, as I feel that the disasters in Tohoku were incredibly eye opening for the JET Programme, and I hope we can affect some positive change in terms of JET safety and emergency preparedness.

Of course, as always, I have been here at the helm of Connect magazine, doing my best to shine up and present the amazing content we receive in the best way possible. The Connect team is constantly working on new ideas to widen our connections and bring you engaging new features and writing. It's been really great to see everything as it comes in, and working with writers to make their work as good as it can be is one of my favorite things to do. Keep it coming, and email me anytime!



CULTURE

EDITORIAL Micro-Aggressions

14 Take a look at the comic to the right. If you don't find that funny, then you soon will. Teachers will stop at your desk to mention your skills with two little pieces of wood, Class after class will ask how long it took you to learn the difficult art of feeding yourself.

I freely admit. I seem to get unreasonably riled up over this. But I have a reason. I don't just own chopsticks; I own hand-carved wooden chopsticks...with my name ENGRAVED on them. I am in my second year, and I still get teachers miming a heart-attack as they see me whip out those beauties.

Some people have coined a term for this sort of event. They call it a 'micro-aggression'. They are small things that, at least on the surface, are fairly innocuous—comments, even compliments sometimes. However, some people believe that they really just separate foreigners from Japanese people. They say that whether intentional or not, they put up a wall between Japanese people and the rest of the world. Some common examples are, of course, the *conbini* teller complimenting your non-existent Japanese ability with a hearty '*Nihon-go jouzu!*' or practically everybody asking you to try some *natto*.

I generally disagree with this idea, but there is one that stands out for me as being offensive if experienced regularly, the word '*gaijin*'. *Gaijin* is a contraction of *gaigokujin*, which literally translates as 'outside-country person', a formal way of saying foreigner. It is natural that the younger generations would use the short version, but it's not just the younger generation using it.

I was recently in a shop, looking over some *omiyage* to send home. I must have looked a bit lost, since the shop assistant came over and asked if I needed some help. Nothing strange there, I

hear you say, but she prefaced her sentence with '*Sumimasen Gaijin-san*' or 'Excuse me, Mr. Foreigner'. Not particularly rude, but irritating as she was not treating me as a customer, but as a foreign customer.

Some people, especially if they experience things like this every day, tend to have quite a negative reaction and can even view Japan as being a racist country. I however, don't fully agree with this. Let me explain.

Racism, or xenophobia, is not unique to Japan. I have American friends who say that they would never go to university in Alabama, because they're black; or that they would never go on holiday to any African nation, because they would be robbed or murdered.

In every society, there will be some bad eggs, and Japan is no different. There may be some conservative xenophobes here, but it is important not to group these individuals with some fairly innocent people who may be acting in a slightly offensive manner due simply to their lack of interaction with non-nationals.

So, try not to focus on the occasional bad example, but instead to focus on the positive, and be a good example for non-nationals yourself. I am the only foreigner in my area, and thanks to me being normal and trying to fit in, I no longer get special treatment, or odd looks in my local store or bakery.

I do miss the free cakes though...

What do you think? Send your feedback and comments to connect.culture@ajet.net!

THIS MONTH IN CULTURE...

I have a fantastic line-up of articles for your perusal this month. Take the time to give these lovely little nuggets of culture a look. You won't regret it!

First up is my own editorial, saying not to sweat the little stuff and settle into life here, you're different, embrace it! Following that, we Spotlight an ALT who is doing great work showcasing American comics to a Japanese audience.

Then we delve into the spooky side of the month with a pair of stories about Halloween. I lift the lid on the Celtic roots of the holiday and the modern Japanese interpretation. If you are planning a Halloween-themed lesson, you can't miss this.

Then, gather round as Audrey Akcasu shares a few ghost stories that will have you avoiding the third-floor bathroom at school. Impress your students with your wicked knowledge of Japanese spirits... the ghosts, not *umeshuu*.

Finally, we have the next article in our series of Japanese current affairs. With the world now looking at Japan in the wake of the Olympic announcement, Dustin Henrich takes a closer look at the crisis at Fukushima, two years on.

So why are you still reading this? There has to be something here that tickles your fancy. So read on, and if you want to contribute to the section and make it even more awesome, let me know at connect.culture@ajet.net

Life After the B.O.E.

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



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

SPOTLIGHT



Zachary Johnson, Cross-Cultural Comic Aficionado

Zachary Johnson is an ALT in Kumamoto Prefecture, originally from Chicago, in the United States. He spent his college days getting a BA in Art History, and his love for comics is something to behold. In June 2013, he curated an exhibition showcasing the works of ten American comic artists. The exhibition was entitled "*American Mangaka*" and was held in the Amakusa Cultural Exchange Centre.

His stated goal was to "introduce a comic style, thought process, and lifestyle to a community unfamiliar with comics outside of Japan." The exhibition was well-received by Japanese people, and was covered by both the Asahi Newspaper and the Nishi Nihon Newspaper. The papers commented on the different humor, layout and styles used in American comics compared to Japanese comics.

Zachary also works as the content editor for *Sixty Inches from Center*, a small, non-profit, art-history magazine, which looks at the periphery of Chicago's visual culture.

Nominate someone you know for Spotlight at connect.editor@ajet.net!



THE HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN

By Matthew Jones, Nagasaki

This article was originally featured in the Nagazasshi, Nagasaki's biggest English-language magazine. For more stories like this, visit <http://nagazasshi.com>



16



Life After the B.O.E.

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



At the Japanese Ministry of Reinterpreting Foreign Festivals and Holidays.
-外国祝日解釈省-

Halloween has its roots in a Celtic festival called *Samhain* (pronounced sow-inn, from the old Irish word for the 1st of November). *Samhain* was a harvest festival, and a time to celebrate (and fear) the dead. Many historians conclude that it marked the end of the Celtic year, separating the 'light' and 'dark' halves of the year. It was around this time that the barrier between the worlds of the living and dead were said to be weak, and the dead could walk the earth.

Now, Irish ghosts are not something to be sniffed at. *An Fear Dubh* (The Black Man/Death), for example, was an entirely malevolent spirit who would stalk and kill people in forests. He had a whip made from the spines of people he had killed and would use it to tear out the eyes of anybody that looked at him. With spirits like that, as well as the *Bean Sidhe* (banshee), it is little wonder that the early Irish Celts wanted to protect themselves. To do this, they would dress up in costumes or cover themselves in blood to convince the spirits that they were actually dead, and hopefully escape their wrath.

Later, when Celtic people immigrated to the New World, they brought their holiday with them. There, it mixed with other harvest festivals, and became a more light-hearted affair. It became a night of celebration and debauchery, like a massive masquerade ball that the whole country takes part in. Unsurprisingly, it quickly became a staple holiday of the American calendar.

The biggest attraction of modern-day American Halloween is trick-or-treating. On Halloween night, kids in neighborhoods across the country don their scary, funny or cute costumes and go door-to-door, giving idle threats of "tricks"—pranks or other mischief—unless they receive "treats"—usually copious amounts of candy. Hence, the oft-heard cry "trick-or-treat!"

Adults also take part in Halloween, often decorating their homes as haunted houses or attending costume parties. It's a fun holiday for all ages.

So how did Halloween come to Japan? Well, over the past decade or so, Halloween has seen a dramatic increase in popularity, with Tokyo Disneyland, Universal Studios Japan and even smaller places like Huis Ten Bosch in Nagasaki putting on Halloween specials and making the holiday seem more family-friendly. Coming so close after the *Obon* period, Halloween is seen as more of an easygoing holiday. It is, after, all, hard to connect the holiday to its traditional roots when surrounded by Kitty-chan dolls dressed in pumpkin costumes. Many stores also run a "Halloween Festa", where Halloween-related products are put on sale.

Recently, and especially amongst foreigners and the younger generations of Japanese, Halloween has been adopted as something of a 'party holiday'. There have even been some problems on the Tokyo Yamanote subway line. The line, which circles the heart of the city, was swamped with overzealous revelers who took the opportunity to break Japan's strict train etiquette and hold lively Halloween parties in the train carriages. It is quite safe to say that Halloween in Japan is more of a consumer holiday, much like the American Halloween.

So whether this is your first Halloween away from home, or you're a seasoned JET, take the time to enjoy this quirky, offbeat holiday

Sources:

<http://www.japanprobe.com/2009/10/14/yamanote-halloween-train-2009/>
http://tsukuba.wikia.com/wiki/Yamanote_Halloween_Train



17



Audrey Akcasu, Nagasaki

OH, NO! ONRYO! A JAPANESE GHOST GUIDE



There is a ghost in my house. Well, my neighbor and I *think* we have a ghost. Long story short, there have been some strange, unexplained sounds and a possible sighting. Neither of us *wants* to believe in ghosts, but it's hard to explain otherwise. Because of this, I decided to take a look into the spooky subculture of spirits.

A brief survey of Japanese friends and coworkers showed that most of them either believe in ghosts or know someone who has seen, felt or experienced some sort of spiritual encounter. A store in my town is well known for its haunting, to the point that its bathroom is now off limits!

Japan has a long history with ghosts and spirits. In the Shinto religion, everyone and everything has a spirit, a *reikon* 霊魂. When a person dies, their spirit leaves the body, but stays in limbo between the physical world and the land of the ancestors. Once the proper burial rites are performed, the spirit can move on.

This is where ghosts, or *yūrei* 幽霊, come in. If, for some reason, the person died a physically or emotionally traumatic death—such as murder or suicide, or their body was never buried—they stay in purgatory to seek revenge, make amends and so on.

There are many words for ghosts in Japanese, the most common being *obake* お化け or *bakemono* 化け物, which translates to “thing that changes,” alluding to the change from the natural world to the supernatural. The appearance of the spirit also changes. In Japan, ghosts are often represented as wearing white, because in the Edo period deceased people were dressed in white *kimono*. Also stemming from the Edo period is the lack of feet and limp hands and unkempt black hair, originating in

ukiyo-e, wood block prints, and later portrayed on the *kabuki* stage.

While there is the stereotypical ghost appearance, all ghosts don't look the same and they definitely don't all act the same. In fact, there are many categories grouping the more common ghost types.

Onryo 怨霊 Perhaps the most common type of ghost portrayed in fiction, these vengeful (often female) ghosts, look to take revenge on lovers who abused or neglected them. Although powerless in life, their spirits are strong. Mean (but usually harmless) ghosts.

Goryo 御霊 These are the angry ones who stick around the living world in search of revenge or to correct some wrongdoing. It is thought that the more powerful you were in your life, the more powerful your spirit will be after death. So often times, these ghosts were once influential aristocrats who were martyred (notice the first *kanji* is the honorific “go”). They show their rage in the form of natural disasters, such as typhoons, earthquakes or destruction of crops. Mean ghosts.

Ubume 産女 These are ghosts of mothers who left a child in the living world, often due to death during childbirth. Because they aren't there to care for their offspring, they stay in purgatory to protect their children and sometimes leave them gifts. However, if the gifts are discovered to be from the supernatural, they instantly turn into dead leaves. Nice, but sad ghosts.

Zashiki-warashi 座敷童 These little guys are child-like ghosts that inhabit homes and play tricks and pranks, begging for attention. They get angry if you don't give them enough, or if you give them too much attention. It's best to care for them like your own child though, because they are thought to bring good fortune to the home. Playful and harmless, but bratty ghosts.

Funa-yūrei 船幽霊 Most of us won't have to worry about this one, but any ALTs with island schools might want to pay attention. These are ghosts of those who have died at sea, often appearing fish-like and scaly. They board ships and start ladling water into the boat until it sinks. One way to drive them away is to throw *onigiri* into the sea. (In Saga and Yamaguchi prefectures, they are known as *Ayakashi*.) Mean ghosts.

Although up for dispute, *yūrei* can haunt a person or a place. Those seeking revenge or guarding a loved one will often follow the person of interest, however, it's not uncommon for a vengeful ghost to inhabit a building. Take, for instance, the Prime Minister's Official Residence. In 1932 there was a vicious coup attempt that ended in death. For two decades following the incident prime ministers refused to live there. In 2000, Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori apparently claimed to have seen door handles move on their own and other supernatural occurrences. Earlier this year, the Japan Times suggested that maybe it was ghosts keeping Prime Minister Shinzo Abe from moving into the Official Residence, although his staff reassured the media it was simply due to comfort preferences. (Comfort of not living in a haunted house perhaps?)

The famous haunted buildings don't stop there though. Japanese TV often has shows about supernatural activity, haunted houses or amusement park rides (Greenland in Kumamoto). If you ask your coworkers or Japanese friends, they can probably tell you about haunted areas in your town. Students like to talk about the ghost who haunts school bathrooms, Hanako-chan. She's a WWII era ghost who appears if you knock three times on the third stall in the third-floor bathroom and call her name. Would you try it?

If you find yourself living with the supernatural, there are some measures you can take. First and foremost, make sure anyone recently deceased has been buried with the proper ceremonies and reverence. Still around? Try taking revenge on a deceased family member's slayer (or maybe try forgiveness?). If that doesn't work for you either, you can call a *yamabushi* 山伏, a hermit monk who practices a blend of Shinto, Taoism and Buddhism. These guys can perform what we would essentially call an exorcism. If there is an unfortunate or violent death, the spirit is sometimes deified to placate it before it starts causing trouble.

I can't say for sure if I have a ghost in my house, but the weirdness did hit its peak just around *Obon* in August, the time of year when the spiritual world is the most active. Maybe we just had a guest ghost for a couple weeks. Although summer is when many ghosts are active, they are around all year.

The separation between the spiritual world and the physical world is supposed to be at its thinnest between 2 and 3 AM,



allowing more ghostly activity to occur. So if you ever wake up in the night, unable to move in an unexplainable paralysis (a common sign of a supernatural presence), when you recover, check the time. It will probably be 3:30.

If I indeed do have a ghost, or if you have a ghost, I hope they are benevolent and cause no harm. One piece of advice, don't whistle at night—it attracts them!

Audrey Akcasu is a fourth-year in beautiful Omura, Nagasaki. She loves getting out and exploring other places in and outside of Japan—often taking her town mascot Omuran-chan with her. She loves being outside and doing anything active—when it's not winter. Winter is exclusively for eating mikan. Last year she ate over 400. How many will she eat this year?!

Sources

- <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/25/national/ghosts-keeping-abe-out-of-official-residence/#.UjM63GSSBgj>
- <http://www.asianart.com/articles/rubin/>
- <http://factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=1765>
- <http://www.tofugu.com/2011/10/29/super-ghouls-n-ghosts-from-japan/>
- <http://www.japan-talk.com/jt/new/6-kinds-of-japanese-ghost>
- <http://www.japanlinked.com/Japanese-Culture/japanese-ghosts.html>





ALLEYES ON FUKUSHIMA

Dustin Henrich, Osaka

TOKYO 2020 CANDIDATE CITY



With Tokyo set to host the 2020 Olympic Games, Fukushima and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's solution have fallen back into the international spotlight. Two and a half years have passed since the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant was damaged by a tsunami, but despite this, the plant's operators, the Tokyo Electric Power Company, are no closer to reaching a long term solution.

International commentators are remarking on TEPCO's seeming lack of progress, and the ramifications of the incident are still felt in the Pacific, with diluted radioactive material reaching nearby countries and approaching the west coast of the United States. While some fallout is unpreventable, and there appear to be no immediate health or food safety risks, the scale of the incident has led to condemnation and accusations of negligence. The Japanese government is stepping in to bring the matter to a resolution, and all eyes are on Japan, and Abe, to see how he plans to repair Japan's image in time for the Olympics.

TEPCO is still responsible for Fukushima

With the responsibility for Fukushima still in TEPCO's hands, old problems are remaining unsolved. Issues such as groundwater leaking into the basement of damaged turbine rooms and the leakage of more than 300-thousand tons of contaminated water are making headlines in Japan and abroad. Press statements indicate that most of the water that has been stored has been treated by removing contaminants; however, contaminated water that TEPCO has not been able to store is still entering the Pacific at a rate of hundreds of tons a day, and the overarching effects this may have are still unknown.

Based on current assessments, the Japanese Nuclear Regulation Authority has classed the leak as a level 3 out of 8 on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale. The accusations of negligence on TEPCO's part have led to the possibility of charges being raised against TEPCO executives and former Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

The charges allege that TEPCO executives and government officials did not take the correct preventative steps to protect Fukushima from the 2011 tsunami. Those charges were dropped after TEPCO released a statement saying that they could not have predicted an earthquake and tsunami of that magnitude. As for government officials, they are not legally responsible for their

post-earthquake response. However, local residents can appeal the court's decision, forcing the defendants to be tried, and many campaigners plan on seeing that through.

Government plans to step in

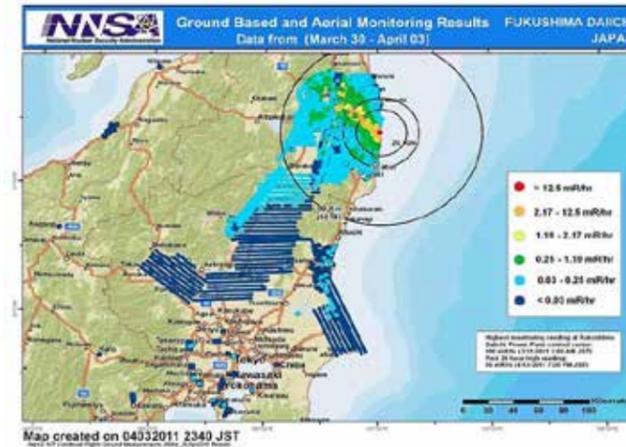
With the Olympics coming in 2020, the Abe administration is taking a more decisive role in the handling of Fukushima. Prime Minister Abe said the "government will step forward and implement all necessary policies" ⁴ to deal with the radioactive water from the plant. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters that "the government has stayed in the background while extending support [for TEPCO's] effort to tackle the problem of contaminated water." ⁴ The government intends on releasing a plan to have a more direct role in the process. Potential plans include the creation of a "decommissioning agency" to take over and completely decommission the Fukushima nuclear plant. ⁴

Decommissioning a nuclear plant is a complicated and long-term project, sometimes taking up to twenty or thirty years. According to a TEPCO official, senior executives are coming to the conclusion that it is time to hand over the decommissioning process to another party that is better equipped to operate nuclear reactors. The funds for the creation of this new government agency would come from a "portion of the 350 billion yen set aside in this year's budget to deal with the aftermath of all natural disasters." ⁶

Prime Minister Abe's recent statements that the plant is "under control" have been criticized. Abe told a news conference: "I would like to state clearly that there has not been, is not now and will not be any health problems whatsoever... Furthermore, the government has already decided a programme to make sure there is absolutely no problem, and we have already started." ²

Criticism has come from Koichi Nakano, a political science professor at Sophia University. He stated that telling the world "Fukushima is safely removed from Tokyo" while at the same time "campaigning nationally that we are one nation" is not honest to actual conditions in Fukushima. ² A Mainichi newspaper survey showed that more people in Fukushima are now likely to have died from "stress-related health issues due to nuclear evacuation than the 2011 quake and tsunami itself." ² With the rest of the world watching, international attention might force the government not just to deal with Fukushima, promptly, but correctly too.

Over two years have passed since the 2011 tsunami and only



1.6% of the victims living in temporary homes have been relocated to public housing. In terms of real figures, that is only 448 homes for 215,000 survivors, most of whom are still in less than ideal living conditions. ¹⁰ Not much has come from Japan's central government as to why progress has been slow with last year's 10-trillion-yen disaster rebuilding budget.

Will the cost of Olympics be a distraction or a boost?

With two decades of feeble growth, a spiraling debt crisis, an oncoming consumertaxhike, and Fukushima's meltdown to contend with, how will the Olympics affect Japan? Once again, positivity rang through Prime Minister Abe's speeches, declaring the 2020 Olympics would "be an explosive agent" for the national economy and Japan's stock exchange. However, not everybody is agreed. ¹⁰

Kazumasa Oguro, an associate professor of economics at Hosei University and former senior economist at the Ministry of Finance's Policy Research Institute, says the "moral boost is important," but that it could "seduce the populace." ¹⁰ A Lloyds Bank report which looked at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, estimated that the economic impact was only an increase of £16.5 billion to the U.K. economy. ¹⁰ This impact is similar to the figure Japan is expecting to receive, at only about 3 trillion yen. What these figures indicate is that the impact the Olympics have will be minor, and not the "explosive agent" that Abe is expecting.

The services and construction industry are estimated to receive the biggest impact at 650 billion yen and 470 billion yen respectively. Last month, we discussed Abe's "Three Arrow Plan" for economic recovery. As for the tourism industry, 8 million extra tourists are set to come in during the 28 days of the Olympics. According to Terri Lloyd, a Tokyo-based entrepreneur, "there are only 95,000 hotel rooms in Tokyo, so unless there is a sudden boom in hotel building, where are the extra tourists going to sleep?" ¹⁰ The additional worry is that since the tourists only stay for 28 days, the increased services and accommodations for them would go to waste once the Olympics are finished, leading to a further property crash.

Will the Olympics be a complete wash?

Morally, no. With problems coming left and right, Japan could use a distraction. Public debt is already double the GDP (and growing), international relations are strained over disputed islands, as well as the lingering Tohoku reconstruction and Fukushima problem. The Olympics are set to brighten the horizon for Japan and encourage unity, which is sorely needed to help the victims of the disasters in Fukushima.



Tokyo's city government has set aside 400 billion yen from tax payer revenues. ¹⁰ At first, this Olympic budget doesn't seem like it will add to the country's sky-scraping debts. Based on history though, Olympic budgets tend to increase to up to four times the original estimate. There is a danger that the pressure to put on an impressive display for the Games may weaken the drive to help the less fortunate and draw money away from the relief efforts. This would be a disaster, not only for Fukushima, but for Japan in general, it could damage the unity that the Olympics usually foster.

The possibility of a further economic downturn is worrying for the government; however, Japan's reputation is on the line. The international community is looking to Japan these days, and I for one, hope that the increased scrutiny will help get the relief efforts for Fukushima back on the right track.

Dustin is a second-year ALT in Nose-cho, Osaka Prefecture. He loves delicious healthy Mediterranean food, and spend his free time doing body weight-training. His goal is to do 8 full planche push-ups.

Sources



- 1 <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/high-radiation-detected-at-fukushima-monitoring-well>
- 2 <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/abes-claims-to-have-fukushima-under-control-criticized>
- 3 <http://www.japantoday.com/category/crime/view/charges-dropped-against-kan-tepco-execs>
- 4 <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/abes-pledges-speedy-comprehensive-steps-for-fukushima>
- 5 <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/radio/program/asia-pacific/japanese-government-turns-on-tepco-after-latest-fukushima-failures/1184991>
- 6 <http://www.dw.de/no-expertise-for-decommissioning-in-fukushima/a-17046441>
- 7 <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/Olympics-host-Tokyo-must-deal-with-nuclear-fiasco--30214926.html>
- 8 <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/10/sport/tokyo-2020-olympics-ioc/index.html>
- 9 <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/sportingscene/2013/09/tokyo-2020-a-perfect-olympic-vision.html>
- 10 <http://finance.fortune.cnn.com/2013/09/12/tokyo-olympics/>

ENTERTAINMENT

EDITORIAL Tom Reviews *Branded to Kill* (殺しの烙印)

In Japanese cinema, the yakuza film occupies a stylistic slot no less recognizable and well defined than the Hollywood western. The 1960s were a period of prolific release for the genre, and Japan's oldest studio¹, Nikkatsu, was not one to be left out of the action.

By 1967, Seijun Suzuki had already directed 39 films² for the company, so it was no surprise when Nikkatsu tasked him with putting together another by the numbers gangster flick. But, tired of directing pedestrian B-movies, he presented the studio with *Branded to Kill*, a heavily stylized, absurdist thriller that threw the genre on its head. The film stars Shishido Jô, who, despite his surgically augmented, chipmunk-like cheeks, manages to look implacably cool behind his black shades. He takes on the role of Hanada Goro, a hit-man with a fetish for the smell of boiling rice who ranks third amongst contract killers in the Japanese underground. Hanada becomes obsessed with a mysterious young woman named Misako, who harbours an obsession with death and butterflies. When he botches the nearly impossible contract she has assigned to him, he finds himself on the run from the yakuza and their infamous number-one-ranked assassin, Phantom.

While the plot is fairly straightforward, its execution is anything but; strange characters are introduced with nothing more than a single cryptic line and Suzuki's esoteric editing results in fast cuts and large jumps in time between scenes that seem to get wilder as Hanada's world becomes more unhinged. The film can admittedly be confusing at times, but what it lacks in substance it makes up for in style. Sweeping scenes of desolate cityscapes contrast with claustrophobic rooms and marvellous use of shadows to create a perfect noir ambiance. During one of the film's most intense scenes, cell animated white on black cut-outs are used to mimic birds and rain, making anyone with an eye for design drool.

Perhaps due to its unorthodoxy, *Branded to Kill* bombed at the box office. Nikkatsu promptly fired Suzuki for making films that were allegedly incomprehensible and completely unprofitable³, but history dictates that Suzuki got the last laugh. He went on to win several awards, including best director and best picture from the Japanese Academy for his 1981 ghost tale *Zigeunerweisen*⁴.

The Nikkatsu Corporation went in a decidedly different direction, hard times forcing them to refocus their efforts on releasing exploitation films and soft-core pornography, notably the classics *Bathhouse 911: Jellyfish Bliss* and *Sexy Pudding: Almost Addictive**

Despite its poor commercial success, *Branded to Kill* has earned its place as a highly influential cult classic. Its dark, effortless 1960s cool and expertly composed shots have gotten clear nods from directors like Quentin Tarantino, Park Chan Wook, and Jim Jarmusch. If you're after something visually stunning and don't mind being left asking a few questions, *Branded to Kill* is a brilliantly unique film that you won't forget anytime soon.

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

* Honorable mentions for best Nikkatsu porno title: *Sex Rider: Wet Highway and Melancholy* and *Flesh Business: Sensuous Zone*.

Sources

- ¹ <http://www.nikkatsu.com/en/about.html>
- ² <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0840671/>
- ³ Suzuki, Seijun (Interviewee) (1999). *Branded to Kill* interview (DVD). The Criterion Collection.
- ⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20061211020338/http://www.japan-academy-prize.jp/allprizes/1981/index.html>



THIS MONTH IN ENTERTAINMENT...

Another month has flown by, and with it comes a brand new edition of Connect's Entertainment section for you to pore over. This month, Tochigi JET Jonathan Cook gives us a creepy peek into an abandoned mining town and the world of *haikyo*, or urban exploration.

On a lighter note, I got a chance to sit down with Tokyo-based singer songwriter Nelson Babin-Coy. In the interview, he talks about his musical aspirations, his bad experiences with the Japanese music industry, and even gives some small tips for all you budding musicians out there.

I've also taken a moment to review *Branded to Kill*, the classic yakuza flick that got its director kicked right out of the Japanese film industry.

The JET spotlight this month shines on Maureen Leeds, a third-year JET in Hokkaido who has a passion for knitting and the unexpected violence that rears its head in international knit-offs.

Happy reading!



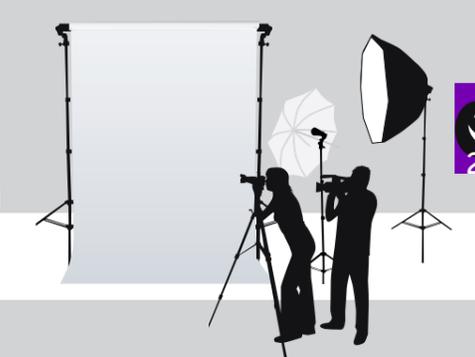
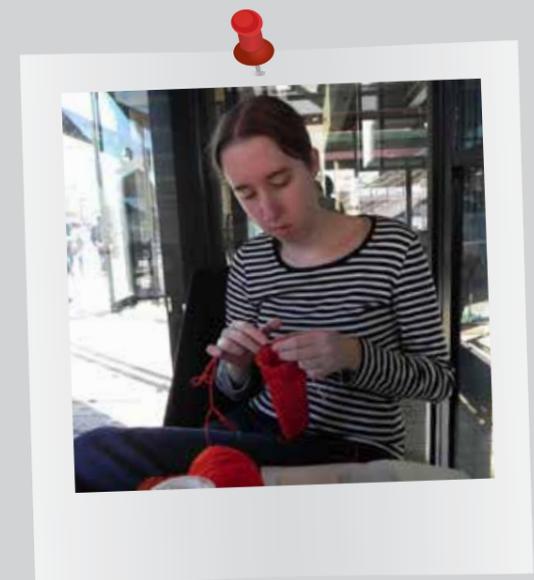
SPOTLIGHT

Maureen Leeds, Competitive Knitter

Maureen Leeds is a third-year ALT, currently based in Orobe, Hokkaido. She learned to knit as a child, but never got very into it until attending college in Minnesota, at which point she began churning out enough hats, mittens, scarves, and blankets to huddle under until April. In snowy northern Japan, she has found knitting to be a survival mechanism, a way to connect with the community through classes and cultural exhibitions, and a way to raise money for charity through groups found on the knitting/crocheting online Mecca, Ravelry.

Starting September 1st, over 100 knitters picked up their needles to raise money for Doctors Without Borders by taking each other out with hand knit socks, in a tournament dubbed 'Sock Sniper'. Once the socks have finished flying, Maureen hopes to get back to her other competitive knitting pursuit—finishing enough items for Orobe's cultural fair to avoid having the grannies suggest that she's slipping.

Nominate someone you know for Spotlight at connect.editor@ajet.net!



LET'S GO HAIKYO!

Jonathan Cook, Tochigi

URBAN EXPLORATION



After having lived in Japan for a while, I had slowly ticked off a significant number of things which I felt I'm supposed to see and do while here. You know, the usual fare—tea ceremonies, fireworks festivals, sumo wrestling, cherry blossom viewings, and so on. I thoroughly enjoyed a great number of these experiences, though some certainly more than others. Yet, there was a vague itch that these events failed to scratch, namely my desire to see something truly out of the ordinary, even for Japan. Something a little different, something which your average tourist would rarely happen upon, something a little weird or creepy even. In this regard I shamelessly admit that I am a seeker of hipstertainment, and earlier this year I found what I was looking for.

There is a subculture in Japan pertaining to a specific type of urban exploration, namely that of abandoned places. In Japanese they're called *haikyo* (廃墟) which means "ruins", and they come in a surprising variety of forms. Some are what you would probably call a ghost town, others are simply a single abandoned facility or building. Almost all of them would make ideal settings for an episode of Scooby Doo. They range in scale from something as minor as a derelict love hotel all the way up to an entire theme park, such as the apparent holy grail of *haikyo* that is Nara Dreamland. My personal experiences with *haikyo* have been limited to a handful of excursions thus far, and in this article I'd like to share with you an account of my most memorable encounter with a forgotten part of Japan.

Nichitsu Ghost Town

My first taste of *haikyo* was the deeply creepy abandoned copper mining town of Nichitsu, named after the company that used to operate there, located in the hills of Saitama prefecture. I honestly have no idea how my friends and I first heard about this place—it doesn't even appear to be officially listed anywhere. If you try throwing Nichitsu into Google maps you're going to get no results. We somehow hunted down the location and drove there for a day trip on a lovely spring weekend earlier this year. I would imagine that accessing Nichitsu would be pretty much impossible without a car, as even with wheels and a GPS, finding the place was a tad tricky. Entering the town required driving through a very narrow, unlit tunnel of several hundred meters. I'm pretty sure I heard the theme to Silent Hill playing in the background as we drove through it. Creepiness was off the charts and I loved it.

Coming out the other side the atmosphere adopted a decidedly more pastoral tone. An abandoned post office was the first building to greet us, surrounded by trees that were eagerly blossoming, as is customary at that time of year. The small road wound its way through a rather steep valley which had a little river running through the middle. Buildings in various states of decay presented themselves along the way, nonchalantly oblivious and ambivalent with regard to our intrusion.



We stopped occasionally to inspect sites that caught our eye. The local bathhouse and worker accommodation was extremely dilapidated and we feared it may all come tumbling down without warning, as such we tread lightly and soon abandoned our investigation of that area. Considering how run down it was, we were surprised that it was not barricaded and had no signs warning people not to enter. Our consternation was doubled when we attempted to enter what appeared to be an elementary school, which seemed to be in much better shape, only to find it was totally inaccessible and practically plastered with all manner of warning signs. An examination of one such sign revealed that, in addition to firmly declaring "No Entry", the sign also requested that members of the public call the police should they spot anyone entering the premises.

This would probably be a good point to mention that this is a common issue with *haikyo*. Obviously, the Japanese government or whoever is responsible aren't going to let people simply wander in and out of buildings that haven't been maintained for many years. If you do decide to go exploring, please make sure you're allowed to actually be there. While in some cases you might merely be asked to leave, I have read that in other places, such as Nara Dreamland, security personnel actually patrol the grounds and will take rather severe action against any trespassers they encounter. Furthermore, just because there is no sign telling you you're not allowed to be there, doesn't mean you can do as you please. The consensus among numerous *haikyo* bloggers is that many places that were once accessible to the public ended up being cordoned off due to vandalism and similar selfish behavior.

Having said that, Nichitsu was a little inconsistent about what we could and couldn't explore respectfully. What we assumed to be the local clinic or hospital was fair game as far as we could

tell. It was here that I found what makes *haikyo* so fascinating to me. I come from a country where millions of people live in abject poverty and as such anything that can be repurposed will generally find a new life in the hands of those less fortunate. Meanwhile, in the various rooms of buildings in Nichitsu, the sheer number of abandoned personal items was astounding. Books, shoes, futons, gas cookers, a giant Pikachu doll (seriously), a badly taxidermied bird, vases, dried flowers, a jar containing seemingly petrified *umeboshi*, cutlery, crockery, the list goes on and on, and the creepiness rises. It gave me the sense of being thrust into a post-apocalyptic scene where people clearly had no time other than to grab their bare essentials before fleeing some impending disaster. I guess that's the underlying psychological lure of *haikyo*. It's like a voyeuristic rollercoaster. You're provided the illusion of danger, the thrill of intruding upon a snapshot of the personal lives of strangers, discarded and seemingly frozen in time, at the mercy of the elements.

Final Thoughts

Firstly, an honorable mention must go to my second-favorite *haikyo* experience, the delightfully incongruous Okunoshima (大久野島) also known as Usagishima—literally Rabbit Island. The island, about an hour outside of Hiroshima and only accessible via ferry, is home to a large and friendly rabbit population, as well as the ruins of a military facility that was responsible for manufacturing poison gas during the Second World War. I went there this summer with a friend and had a pretty awesome time feeding the bunnies and exploring the dank remains of a long forgotten military base. The bizarre juxtaposition felt like some kind of karmic realignment at work.

Lastly, if you want to explore *haikyo* for yourself, there is a wealth of information available online, and a great place to start is www.haikyo.org—while some sites might offer more in-depth information on specific *haikyo*, that site has the most comprehensive listings. May the creepiness be with you.



Jonathan Cook is a third-year ALT in the ramentastic city of Sano in Tochigi Prefecture. When he isn't exploring abandoned places you can probably find him seeking out the weirder establishments Tokyo has to offer. Why not join him and find out how deep the rabbit hole goes? Just send an email to jonathan.william.cook@gmail.com if you're interested in seeing the sides of Tokyo you generally won't find listed in any brochure.





Thomas Morin-Robinson, Tochigi

MAKING MUSIC IN JAPAN:

AN INTERVIEW WITH NELSON BABIN-COY

A freelance translator, narrator, actor, radio personality and social media specialist, California-native-turned-Tokyoite Nelson Babin-Coy is a jack of all trades in the purest sense of the word. But, his many day jobs aside, his true passion lies in music. Forming one half of the rock band **nothing ever lasts**, and playing on his own as a singer-songwriter, he's aiming to cut a name out for himself in the Japanese music scene. I got a chance to catch up with Nelson just before his six-year Japanniversary. In this interview, he tells us how he got started in music, shares his thoughts on being a performer in Japan, and his bad experiences with the Japanese music industry.

Tom: What did you have in mind when you moved to Japan?

Nelson: I had no plans really. I got a job teaching English like everyone else. It was a means to an end; I just wanted to get to Japan. Long story short, when I was 15 years old I did an exchange for a few weeks. And that's when I fell in love with the country. Then, studying at Keio University for a year while on exchange from Berkeley confirmed that this was really where I wanted to be. I didn't really have any plans for work, I just needed to be in Japan, so I got a job with Berlitz and they sorted out my visa and that's how I got here.

T: How did you get into performing music?

N: I've always played and loved music. I played in bands in high school and did a little busking while at Berkeley singing Japanese songs to the Japanese tourists. It wasn't anything serious. I think of myself as pretty rational, so I never thought I had the chops to make a profession out of music.

T: Music is definitely a bit of a step out onto the tightrope. So what spurred you to take that step?

N: Youtube. Youtube happened. When I was at Keio, I was playing

on the street just for fun, I got scouted by an independent label. I was 19 at the time, and when you're 19, you're like "Oh wow, I'm gonna make it!" So I went over there, and the label guy said, "Play me one of your songs." I didn't even get 10 seconds in, and he was like, "You're a terrible guitar player, a terrible singer and a terrible Japanese speaker, but you know what, you look pretty good. Your looks could be profitable for us."

When you're 19, that's enough to tear your world down. So I went back to the States and back to school. What started things back up was that one of my Japanese friends was having a birthday party and wanted me to sing a Japanese song. It was a SMAP song, "Orenji" I think. I was practicing and recording myself on a cheap digital camera. So when I was checking that out, it just struck me: "I'm a white guy singing this SMAP song in fluent Japanese, this is just funny." So I put it on YouTube and it just kind of blew up. I'd never really thought of myself as a good singer but as I got into the YouTube stuff I was getting messages and comments from Japanese fans, saying that my voice really moved them. And when I got those kinds of messages, I felt, "This isn't so much what I should be doing; it's what I have to be doing."

T: In your songs you frequently jump between English and Japanese. How do you feel bilingualism affects your music?

N: It's really confusing. I work with a lot of different artists and producers and I get a lot of opinions from all over the place. I get some people telling me that I should only sing in Japanese because that's where my market is at, and others telling me that I should only sing in English because it's way cooler than Japanese. So I can't tell what's good or not, but I try not to think too much about what I'm doing, so when I put together a melody I just try to put some words to it. And sometimes that melody is very English and sometimes it's very Japanese.

T: Did you find it tough to get started played live houses here?

N: When I first started out in Japan, I started doing gigs with my band nothing ever lasts, we started out and things went really well, which was weird because we really sucked. The reason is that in Japan there are *miha*. The Japanese word *miha* sort of refers to people who like things everyone else likes. That lends itself to novelty. So my first year, we were getting 50-60 people a night and playing like three shows a month, which is great for Japan. And the better we got, the more artistic we got, the more things started going downhill. The novelty faded and people went another way. It's really hard to find a core fan base that's really into the music rather than people who are just there to see this white, blue-eyed American singing in Japanese.

T: How would you compare shows in America and Japan?

N: From my experience, in Southern California and the San Francisco area it's tough. You have to be good; you have to move the crowd or else they won't care about what you're doing. For me, that's a good thing; if no one's listening to you and no one's reacting, then you're not doing a good job. So it puts you through trials that you can really learn from. But in Japan, there's that culture of respect. So playing Japanese live houses, things tend to be quiet. You never really know whether the crowd is into you or not. Especially as a singer-songwriter doing mellower acoustic stuff, people listen and clap and tell you how great you were, but as a performer there's nothing that tunes you into that while you're on stage. People are taught to be quiet and polite, so it's tough to get a real feel of how they're enjoying themselves.

T: You started working with Bandcamp, YouTube, Twitter and a variety of other social media outlets very early on. What was your inspiration to start using those kinds of distribution methods?

N: The main thing for me was how much I'd been beaten down by the Japanese copyright industry. What I was doing with YouTube—covers and such—that was illegal in Japan. So the fact that I was singing these songs without getting permission from the labels was against the law. What happened was that I was featured on this Japanese show *HeyHeyHey*, which was a pretty major program. I got a call from one of the show's producers who'd seen me do a cover of Ken Hirai on YouTube and wanted me to come on the show and sing in front of Ken. That was during my first 6 months in Japan, and things were really picking up steam. So we filmed the episode and I was expecting good things. We're talking nationwide primetime TV.

But the night before it aired, I got an email from YouTube saying that my account had been permanently deleted for copyright infringement. Normally, YouTube has a three strike system for copyright issues, but I got nothing. What happened was that with the episode of *HeyHeyHey* about to air, people in the business caught wind of what I was doing and figured that it wasn't alright. So they just deleted my entire internet persona right before I was set to get all that exposure. So after the episode aired, if you searched my name, absolutely nothing came up. So after the independent label telling me that I had no talent, this



was the second time that the industry really crushed everything I was doing. Two months later, YouTube made a deal with JASRAC, which is the Japanese copyright enforcement company deciding that covers were ok.

If only I'd been on the show two months later that could have been my big break. That was really when I lost a lot of trust in the Japanese music and entertainment industry. Shortly after that, I did actually start getting offers from major labels, and I would meet with them, but they were only after cover songs. I knew that if I went down that path I'd hate myself within a year. Then once all these tools for artists to release their music independently started popping up it was a natural direction to take. There is still a bit of a mist in front of the Japanese industry right now, since no one here has really been successful with this kind of medium. It is tough and there's no sure-fire way to get there, but I'm hoping I can be one of the people who can make it and show people that you don't have to sign with a major label and sacrifice your craft or your heart for public exposure.

T: On that note, do you have any pointers for someone trying to get started playing music here in Japan?

N: Be honest with yourself; create music and make stuff that you enjoy. If you're coming to Japan, it's really important to make connections with the people who run the live houses. And build a community. One of the problems in Japan is that there's a huge lack of community between artists and bands. Bands tend to go in, play their show and leave, or fans come for the one band they want to see and then leave without seeing anyone else on the lineup. If you can connect with other artists in the Japanese music scene, that's really big. Build that trust between people and focus on your drive to make things happen.

If you've got any questions for Nelson about the music industry or Japan, feel free to send him an email at nelson@babincoy.com. Also be sure to like his page Nelson Babin-Coy on Facebook, to keep an eye on his Twitter @nelmusicjp and of course to go listen to some of his songs on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/nothingeverlasts>.

Photos used with permission from Nelson Babin-Coy's official Facebook page.



FASHION & BEAUTY



EDITORIAL Paris Fashion Week

September is all about Fashion Week, and S/S 14 looks to be chock full of deliciousness. Jenny Packham and Marchesa reliably offered sublime inspiration in New York, while Topshop Unique and Victoria Beckham sent models down London runways in fun, accessible, albeit pricey, pieces. All the marquee names (elegant Armani, playful Marni, all-powerful Prada) showed in Milan, although the best was saved for last. Paris Fashion Week was an embarrassment of riches, for over nine days we got to ooh and aah over what Tsumori Chisato, Issey Miyake, Isabel Marant, Vivienne Westwood, Andrew Gn, Gareth Pugh, Acne, Chanel and Lanvin have dreamt up for sakura season. If all that internet streaming has left you wanting more, check out Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week TOKYO, held from 14-19 October at various locations centred around Shibuya Hikarie and the Mercedes-Benz Connection in Roppongi.

Of course, it won't be spring for another six months, so if you're thinking of going shopping but aren't sure what to pick out, I'd recommend getting a nice coat. Go for a dramatic overcoat or quirky print if you can, but pastels or something furry (both readily available and popular in Japan) work great too. A cute beanie (for the genki factor) is a must, while plaid is comfortable and on-trend whether in vintage shops, Muji or Forever 21. Consider picking up a bag or pair of shoes in military-inspired khaki green or jewel-toned emerald green. For hair, low ponytails, fringes and dip dye remain popular. Make-up wise, dark brows à la Cara Delevigne and the Duchess of Cambridge are still in vogue, while

lipstick shades seem to revolve around plum, wine and berry.

You can still wear your cute summer clothing (cotton shorts, summery shirts, silk blouses, sheer dresses) by layering them with chunky knits, wool coats and leather pieces, or pairing them with dark jeans and opaque tights (Psst! For ideas on how to keep warm and look streamlined, check out our autumn/winter layering style guide next month!)

All this fashion talk aside, what recently made my day was an art exhibition called "Color-Hunting" at 21_21 DESIGN SIGHT (a wonderful space designed by Tadao Ando with Issey Miyake on its board of directors.) Everything in the urban and natural world has a distinct hue, and exhibition director Dai Fujiwara invited corporations, artisans and university professors to create hina dolls, short films and installation art using colour he had captured and collected from places as diverse as Serengeti National Park, Mt. Yatsugatake in Yamanashi and the lips of five volunteers. He asked fashion design students to create clothing lines for pairs of children, a scent company to distill colours and fragrances from common fruits and vegetables and the visitor to lose himself in the brilliantly-curated world of wonder. I've always felt that art and fashion should comprise interactive, imaginative, beautiful and accessible textures and colour, and Mr. Fujiwara's concept ticked all the boxes. I think the fickle fashion crowd would have applauded.

THIS MONTH IN FASHION AND BEAUTY...

Fashionistas around the world convened in New York, London, Milan and Paris for Fashion Month. We may not be part of the jet set/celebrity crowd, but we can still discuss favourites from the S/S 14 catwalks in this month's editorial. I also suggest autumn style trends that will give your look an instant update.

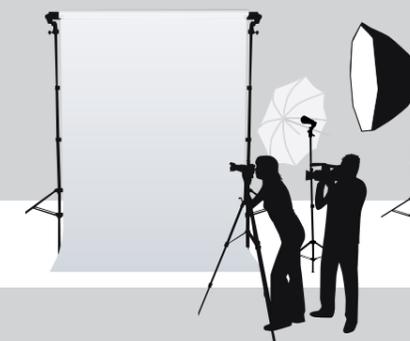
For JET Spotlight, all eyes are on the debonair Terry Kuo. Gentlemen, his practical yet stylish style advice may just provide the sartorial savvy that you are looking for.

Next, avid concertgoer Shihyeng Leong shares with us her dress-up ideas and insights. Part of the fun comes from putting together the right outfit, and her guide promises to be an informative read. I've yet to watch a Japanese band perform live, and her article makes me think I might be missing out.

Finally, with Halloween coming up at the end of October, we profile some folks who had a blast creating and partying in their fantastic costumes. Hopefully, their fabulously fun ideas will inspire you as you work on your own memorable get-up this year!



SPOTLIGHT



Terry Kuo, Gourmet Casual with Ease

This month, Connect chats with Terry Kuo, a 2nd-year CIR in Ishikawa. Terry's pals know he's always up for an adventure, although he also enjoys cooking, doodling and relaxing at *onsen*.

What is Refined Casual?

To use a food analogy, think gourmet pizzas. Drizzled with premium EVOO and topped with fine cheese, they're pretty upmarket. Yet they remain moreish, satisfying, and it's okay to eat with your hands. At work, I blur the lines between dressy and casual by throwing my favorite crew-neck sweater over a dress shirt paired with tapered chinos. When I'm out and about, I like simple tees with fitted cargo pants. Well-made leather shoes are always a good investment while socks in bright hues make for a fun and surprising pop of color.

You've had close to 10 years of retail experience ranging from leather accessories to designer clothing. Any styling advice for fellow JETs?

If you're not sure what suits you, I'd recommend that men consider the refined casual look—you'll look stylish and approachable. To clarify, it doesn't mean a blazer over your college hoodie (the horror!). Instead, layer sweaters over formal shirts and switch from ripped/distressed jeans to selvedge raw denims.

What are good places to look?

UNIQLO has a great collection of raw denim in various fits, while its little brother g.u. carries jeans starting at a suspiciously-low ¥990. For those looking to add a little backstory to their outfits, consider 2nd street, a vintage store with outlets all over Japan and Groovy, an American used clothing store based in Kanazawa that ships nationwide via www.rakuten.co.jp.





MUSIC MEETS FASHION: DRESSING UP FOR CONCERTS IN JAPAN

Shihyeng Leong, Shizuoka



First, decide which music sub-genre you are interested in. Next, think about your preferred colour palette. I recommend starting with a black canvas and adding layers, playing with colours and textures. Focus on one distinctive feature if you're concerned about looking over-the-top.

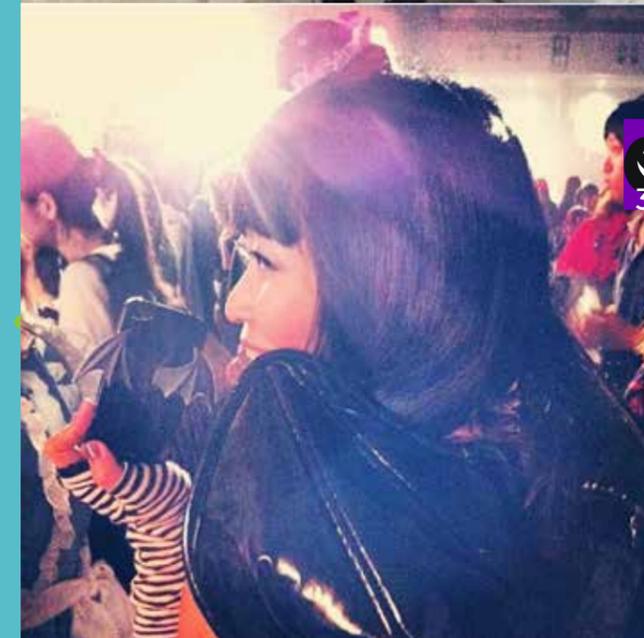
Second, my motto has always been to "Look the part on a budget." Don't break the bank by rushing out to purchase an entire outfit. Start by rifling through your closet and working with what you already own. Perfect the art of bin diving and rack browsing at bargain shops like your neighbourhood Shimamura. Recycle and thrift shops are a treasure trove for the budget-conscious fashionista. Check out specialty gothic-lolita punk recycle shops like Closet Child for discount designer pieces, or consider cheaper alternatives from Bodyline, which has an online store and reliable delivery service. Decide before making an expensive purchase if you will wear it again. Consider buying separates to stretch your fashion dollar. Many of the pieces I own (when paired with what would be considered regular clothing) work well for a fashionable day out in town.

Third, make-up, unique jewellery and hair accessories are a great way to add details and personality to your outfit. Learn to work eyeliner and mascara to perfect the classic smoky eye look—YouTubers are there to share their expertise. Buy tights, leggings, knee socks, thigh-high socks, necklaces, hats, hair bands and headdresses from—*zakkaya*—literally translated as "many things shop"—or sundry goods shops like Don Quixote, Bulldog, Tokyu Hands, Loft and your nearest 100-yen shops. Part of the fun comes from the thrill of the hunt. You can also save a lot of money if you make your own clothing or accessories. Magazines like the *Gothic, Lolita Bible* and *Cosmode* (which is dedicated to cosplay), include detailed sewing patterns.

Fourth, for inspiration when assembling an outfit, study magazines, people-watch, make use of the internet, scrutinise posters/photographs of your favourite bands, watch their music videos and copy their look/style to pay the ultimate homage to their awesomeness. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, no? Since you already love their music, why not dress like them!

To fit in with the visual kei crowd, think stripes, skulls, black, emo, goth, all with a touch of cute. Play up a different element for each band. For example, a hint of rococo elegance was perfect for the now-defunct Versailles. Opt for dark, decadent, glam goth to see The Gazette, dress in playful anime-style *kawaii* with splashes of hot pink and bright yellow to see An Cafe, channel your inner punk with a graphic tee and totally 80s neon scrunchy pants at Miyavi "LIVES" which are usually held at intimate underground venues. I'm actually still fangirling about the time I got to chat with Miyavi in-between sets at one of his shows.

Try cosplaying a high schooler at Gackt's annual *bunkasai* extravaganza. Gackt had a stipulated dress code for his "school festival" concerts. His website included pictures of acceptable uniforms and made it quite clear: "You are strongly advised to dress appropriately...or else!" Other interesting dress codes



I began listening to Japanese music when I started learning the language. It was a good way to pick up vocabulary and keep myself motivated. Coming to Japan has given me the opportunity to see some of my favourite singers and bands. What I discovered about the Japanese concert scene is that concertgoers take the effort—at times going to great expense—to dress up like their favourite idols. Music and fashion! It sounded like a perfect combination to me. Adopting a when-in-Rome attitude, I decided to join in the fun.

My concert get-ups tend to be quite eclectic, depending on the dress code and the character I'm getting into. Why wait for Halloween to play dress-up? Going to themed concerts is a brilliant excuse to experiment with different styles. Only in Japan can one get away with tulle, ruffles, lace, ribbons, feathers and tartan worn at the same time. In case you're wondering, I've done it before, venturing onto the streets and taking the train in such an outfit. No one batted an eyelid.

If your curiosity has been piqued, here's my little essay on how to put together outfits when attending visual kei concerts. You should, of course, feel free to adapt my advice to fit your own taste in fashion and music. Note too, that lolita street fashion is inextricably tied in with the visual kei subculture. (For a quick definition, check out the glossary at the end of this article! For a further look into visual kei, check out last month's Culture section!)





include *yukata* for a summer tour or swimwear for a pool party. Concertgoers do pay attention to these (some would say) draconian rules so as not to incur the wrath of their *idorus*. The upside is that they make for great photo-ops at concerts. Lucky fans may get pulled onstage to get up close and personal with the artiste(s) or win a chance to attend a meet-and-greet session.

Fifth, don't be afraid to bend the rules. Don't limit your options and decide even before you have tried something that you can't pull off a certain look. A concert is a lot like a fancy dress party. I've seen bonneted lolitas wearing pink, frilly/ruffled/laced/be-ribboned candy-print dresses (while holding onto cute stuffed bunnies) even when enjoying metal band DIR EN GREY. Gentlemen can join in the fun by working in elements of visual kei or getting in touch with their feminine side. There were grown men in wedding gowns at a Vamps concert I attended, and I have lost count of the number of *brolitas* I have chanced upon.

One final bit of advice—looking fashionable may be key but it is also important to dress comfortably so you can jump around while dancing the evening away. You *are* at a concert after all.

Shihyeng Leong now lives in a small town in Shizuoka, where a 3,776 metre-tall mountain is the only thing jutting out of an otherwise-flat landscape. Giving up a skyline dominated by skyscrapers has proved to be quite a challenge for this former resident of Singapore. For the record, she doesn't dress like a visual kei-concertgoer all the time. On days when she has to get into character as an ALT, she turns to K-fashion for inspiration.

Build your wardrobe with these essential items. Each offers numerous possibilities for mixing and matching.

- ☠♥ Band tee-shirt OR basic black/white tee with an interesting print
- ♥ Black gothic lolita high-collared blouse*
- ☠♥ Black tulle skirt
- ☠♥ Tartan skirt or pants in red and black/white
- ☠ Black ripped shorts or jeans**
- ☠♥ Black laced-up boots
- ☠♥ Patterned leggings/tights/knee-high socks (prints, stripes, skulls, fake tats—take your pick)
- ☠♥ Accessories add interest. Pile on the lace, feathers, studs, chains, crossbones and bling.
- ♥ Good for glam rock concerts, but not punk or metal.
- ☠ Good for punk and metal concerts, but not glam rock

Glossary

(adapted from the indispensable Wikipedia):

Visual kei is a movement among Japanese musicians characterised by the use of flamboyant costumes accompanied by elaborate hair styles and make-up, often coupled with androgynous aesthetics. Visual kei acts play various genres, including electronic, pop, punk rock and glam rock. Some sources, including members of the movement themselves, state that it is the fashion and participation in the related subculture that exemplifies the use of the term.

Lolita fashion is Japanese street fashion inspired by Victorian-era clothing. The original silhouette is of a knee-length skirt or dress with a "cupcake" shape assisted by petticoats has expanded to include corsets and floor-length skirts paired with knee high socks, stockings or headdresses. Lolita fashion has evolved into several different sub-styles, one of which is the gothic lolita. For a better understanding of the lolita way of life, this writer recommends *Kamikaze Girls*, a quirky movie about the challenges faced by a lolita living in the *inaka*.

FRIGHT NIGHT FASHION INSPIRATION

Anna Sears and Michael Mattson, Saitama

This creative duo are 3rd-year JETs who enjoy cats and horror movies.

Last Halloween we had a costumed get-together with friends at our apartment. We played spooky retro cartoons, blasted monster disco over the speakers and put up the cheapest, cheesiest decorations we could find. Our friends reciprocated by showing up in tons of great costumes. Because pumpkins cost about 5,000 yen at the local florist, we decided to carve a daikon. Everyone was amused by Jack-O-Daikon and Anna put together a John Waters (a bizarre filmmaker) costume using what she could find in her closet and at accessory shops.

Another year we dressed as Mei-chan and a *makkurokurosu* (soot ball) from the movie *My Neighbor Totoro*. It was pretty last-minute and inspired by students we saw at *bunkasai* that year.

We had been thinking about going as Ghibli characters and found supplies for those two costumes most easily. Mei's dress was a thrift shop find, her bloomers from an old Tokyo Disneyland Minnie Mouse pajama set, while the straw hat and purse came from an accessory shop. We customized the hat by adding a pink ribbon. The *makkurokurosu* body suit was from Don Quixote, as was the afro wig that was converted into a mask. We got the felt for the eyes at a 100 yen shop, which are great for getting cheap crafting supplies in small quantities.

We were stopped at the train station by a woman who wanted to take a picture of the Mei-chan costume. Then, the party we went to turned into an unexpected Studio Ghibli character gathering! Joining us were a No-Face, a Totoro, and a Princess Mononoke. It was definitely a positive experience.

We suggest taking advantage of 100-yen stores for cheap decorations and costume-making supplies! Check out Don Quixote for nicer stuff—you can get decorations, costumes, wigs, makeup, and such. If you really need a pumpkin, they can be purchased online, at flower shops, or sometimes at local farms and markets! Bear in mind that Japan is unforgiving of late holiday shopping; if you go to Daiso or Seria on 30 October, don't be surprised if all you find is Christmas stuff.



Type the phrases 'halloween make-up' or 'halloween costumes' into a search engine and a gamut of possibilities pops up. It's an understatement to say that there are a sizeable number of websites that purport to showcase the best, the most cost-effective or the handiest last-minute costuming ideas. Looking for gory special effects (open wounds and a broken finger, anyone?)? Want to transform into Ron Burgundy or Don Draper? Fancy some suitably-spooky hairstyles and gothic accessories? Maybe you're just toying with the idea of adorning your face with pretty cobwebs and Swarovski bling. Whatever your game plan, social media now allows everyone to see the cool stuff anyone has come up with (sometimes complete with step-by-step video tutorials).

With 31 October soon upon us, the Fashion & Beauty section has invited five creative individuals to share their groovy Halloween tips and tricks with you. Whether your costume is frightening or cutesy, funny, creative or simple, references your favourite comicbook hero/supervillain/movie character, was made months in advance or slapped on before the party, the key thing—as the guys and gals on these pages show—is to be bold, and to have heaps of fun. For those of you who celebrate Halloween, I hope you have a blast trick-or-treating, dispensing candy to your students or colleagues, dressing up yourself (and your apartment), and dancing/drinking/chatting Fright Night away. Remember to share your fabulous costume online...it may serve as inspiration for someone else next year!



Junko Kimura, Shizuoka

Junko was born and lives in Numazu, Shizuoka. She is friends with many JETs, and loves outdoor activities, traveling and drinking.

I was initially hoping to find an Elmo costume, since I am a big Elmo fan. Sadly, they were all sold out. I continued searching online and eventually found a Big Bird costume, which I thought was pretty funny and unique. The trend is for Japanese girls to wear sexy Halloween costumes—witches and pirates are very popular—but I wanted something cute and less common.

I used Rakuten Japan (*Fashion Ed's note: The product range is astounding, and Google Translate can help with product comparisons. Ordering is generally fuss-free and some sellers offer free shipping*). My costume was imported from America, so it was a little pricey at 7,000 yen. It didn't come with footwear, so I spray painted my white shoes orange to make Big Bird's feet.

I chose to debut my costume at Japan's biggest club, ageHa. It's one of my favorite places to party, and since I had missed their Halloween event in 2011 due to work, I was really excited in the days leading up to Halloween 2012. My friends and I took the train from Shibuya to Shin-Kiba station. We were the only ones wearing costumes on the train, and the pictures we took on the train were hilarious. Nobody could have imagined that Big Bird would take the train in Tokyo.

At the party, I didn't meet any costume-twins, which was fantastic. I heard "Big Bird!! So cute!!" many times that night. A tourist asked to take a picture with me because he wanted to send the photograph to his friend who loves Big Bird. In late October 2012, the US election campaign was in full swing, and Mitt Romney was thinking about cutting PBS's (the Public Broadcasting Service, an American non-profit TV network) budget, so people had been speculating whether that would lead to Big Bird getting fired. I had unwittingly turned up in a topical and memorable costume!

I had another big Halloween party in Numazu with my friends the day before my birthday. Everyone shouted "Happy Birthday, Big Bird!" It was really funny! I posed for pictures with a small

whiteboard referencing the PBS incident—"Looking for a Job".

When it comes to celebrating Halloween in Japan, my opinion is to head to Tokyo if you can afford the time and expense. ageHa, for example, holds a costume competition and the first prize is a million yen. There are outdoor parades during Halloween weekend, and really cool parties at many clubs. Everyone is dressed to kill and in the mood to party. I've seen unique and surprising costumes year after year.

If you can't make it to Tokyo, how about arranging a costume karaoke party with friends? It's always more fun to sing in a costume/while in character!

Alexandria (Lexie) Howe, Nagasaki

Lexie is a 3rd-year ALT living in Omura, Nagasaki with her fiancé and crazy cat. She enjoys cooking and crafting while attempting to blog at restlessliving.wordpress.com.

I get costume ideas from books, movies, comics or cartoons. I usually don't go for joke or pun costumes because they often don't translate well, especially here in Japan. The first year I came to Nagasaki, I went as Catwoman (from the comic *Gotham City Sirens*). The following year, I went as the March Hare (from *Alice in Wonderland*) in a group that included a cross-dressing Alice, the Queen of Hearts, the Cheshire Cat, and the Mad Hatter. This year, I will be going as Luffy (from *One Piece*) with my fiancé, who will be dressed as Zorro. I am also helping two friends with their costumes—one Loki (from the movie *Thor*), the other Sally (of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* fame).

The most important piece of advice I have is: be aware of the amount of time and skill you have. I've helped many friends who have gotten in way over their heads with overly ambitious costumes. Always have a backup plan in case your costuming isn't as successful as you had hoped.

It's also important to give yourself plenty of time to source for or create parts of your costume. I like to start thinking about Halloween costumes during the summer vacation, since the



teaching load is reduced and there's time for visits to secondhand or craft stores. They're invaluable for costuming since they allow you to get crafty and creative at rock-bottom prices. You can also browse websites for inspiration and do some research about how to adapt items to fit your needs (say, dyeing a synthetic wig a shade you desire).

If you choose a relatively recognizable character, you often don't need exact replicas of their costume. Something "in the spirit of" is usually adequate. For example, if you want to go as Mary Poppins, the essentials would be an umbrella and a red bow tie along with some classic clothing. If you're going as a lesser-known character, you could print a comic cover or movie screen shot ahead of time to keep in your pocket. That way if people ask, you can show them the picture to help jolt their memory. A site I like is the Disney Outfits Pinterest page (run mostly by the folks at Disneybound) <http://pinterest.com/samanthaperez/disney-outfits>

I make it a point to dress up for Halloween at school (of course taking care to check that my outfit is work-appropriate). There have been occasional objections, but if you keep in mind the spirit of Halloween, which I think is to have fun and embrace your inner child, most objections eventually melt away. I share funny masks, ears and wigs with my co-workers and help everyone enjoy themselves. Since Halloween is a holiday geared toward children, I think awakening our innate sense of wonder is always good for morale.

It's been heartening to receive lovely compliments on my costumes at the Halloween parties I attended. I think the most important thing about any costume is to have fun with it. Try to keep a sense of humor even if something falls off your elaborate creation. After all, the whole point of Halloween is for us to get into character and have a good time.



Carlos Quinn, Yamanashi

Carlos is a 3rd-year ALT whose diverse interests include movies, film and motion pictures.

I can't remember the last time I properly planned any Halloween costume. Halloween is one of my favourite festivals of the year, but every year I fail to take action until a Halloween party is imminent. My costumes tend to come together in frantic, last-minute moments of madness. Last year, it was a race against time to assemble a mummy costume. It goes without saying that 'mummy costume' isn't a proper idea at all. Some might say it's an admission of defeat... but I'll tell you why I ended up feeling pretty good about it.

Since I already felt like a failure for deciding to go dressed as a mummy, there was no way I was going to wrap myself in toilet paper. Instead, I opted for several rolls of sports tape, which resulted in superior mummification. As luck would have it, I had previously made a schlocky short horror film with friends and there were tubs of leftover liquid latex and fake blood in my apartment. I used what I had and borrowed make-up from my drag-queen neighbour.

Satisfied with my appearance, I headed to the only Halloween party in town, held at my local bar. I got a real kick out of the fact that some of my own friends didn't recognise me. They even approached me to politely introduce themselves. It's weird when someone you know looks at you as if you were a stranger. Considering I wasn't being modest when I said "oh, I just threw this together", I think my costume got more praise than it deserved. The only downside was that I kept sticking to *everything* (and, well, everything kept sticking to me too). The tape was adhesive and the blood was made from syrup, so those lucky/unlucky enough to lean in for a hug were in for a surprise.

As somebody who clearly has planning issues when it comes to Halloween costumes, I'm not sure I'm qualified to give much advice. That said, while a mummy costume is about as trite as it gets, I firmly believe that copious amounts of blood and latex will elevate just about anything. Personally, I love unashamedly gross and messy "old-school" costumes and wish I saw them more often. There's no room for vanity or self-consciousness. You just graciously accept compliments for the mess you've made and have a great time.

Have costume tips you'd like to share? Send them to us at connect.editor@ajet.net!



FOOD

EDITORIAL Cross-Cultural Musings



On a recent summer trip to Toronto, I spent a lot of time thinking about the cultural comparisons and contrasts between Canada and Japan. When the drastically more relaxed and skin-baring service industry employee attire wasn't bewildering me, I was noting differences in restaurant experiences.

For one thing, I thought I'd be ready for the larger portion sizes, having travelled between the two countries often. I remembered the numerous times I've been out with friends in Japan, ordered something to share such as a pizza, and literally burst out laughing at its minuscule size—often on par with a child's-sized personal pizza in North America. Nevertheless, the heaping piles of food that turned up on my plate even at 'healthier' vegetarian restaurants on my trip surprised me once again.

As I munched on my refreshing kale salad with Thai peanut sauce at a downtown Toronto bistro, I thought about how I've never noticed meal-sized salads that weren't made for sharing on restaurant menus in Japan, save for at some international chains like TGIF or Outback. This seemed somewhat strange to me for a country that is generally considered to be healthier than most, and is eager to catch on to food trends. This realization seemed less strange, however, when I thought of the many times I've brought a large salad—or any raw vegetables at all for that matter—to school for lunch, only to be met with gasps and looks of confusion akin to Will Smith and his family's facial expressions shown after Miley Cyrus' VMA performance.

by Ariane

My last meal of the trip was a Subway sandwich at the Toronto Pearson airport. Since special vegetarian options at chain restaurants are almost unheard of in Japan, I was looking forward to ordering their veggie patty sub with a sweet onion vinaigrette, one of their only vegan dressing options. What I was given was an only vaguely palatable smushed mound of food, the bread dry and the dressing sickeningly sweet. I found myself missing the more subdued and less artificial tastes of my usual Japanese Subway order: an avocado veggie sub with wasabi-soy sauce dressing.

Ultimately, these observances allow me to appreciate my surroundings and what is available at any given moment - whether that entails jamming with friends in a karaoke room somewhere, or simply enjoying an avocado veggie sub!

Tell us about your food experiences in Japan and abroad at connect.food@ajet.net!

THIS MONTH IN FOOD...

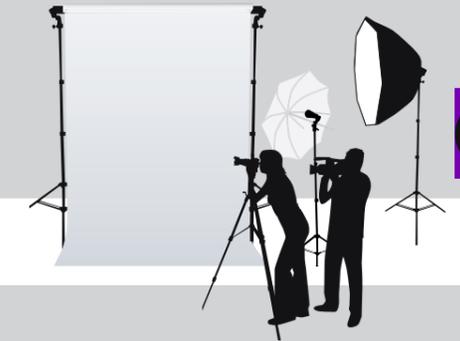
Halloween is here again! Time to bust out the seasonal displays, the monster flashcards, a trick or two, and of course, the treats! There's no time for leftover Halloween candy around here!

First up, Ariane walks us there and back again with some musings on cross-cultural food habits! No matter what side of the Pacific you're on, there's always something to think about! Spotlight gives us a peek into the exciting life of active Fukuoka foodie Laura Lou! Think you can whip up an Adzuki hummus like hers?

In the featured articles this month, we have six newbie JETs sharing their opines on the foods and drinks of Japan, and how they're coping! How's that natto coming along, guys? Finally, four star dessert curators show us how to stay warm as the temperature drops: sweet treat creation! Check it all out in the food section this month!



SPOTLIGHT



Laura Lou, Culinary Superwoman

Laura Lou, a second-year ALT living in Okagaki-machi, Fukuoka, never had the Japanese grocery store culture shock. On the contrary, Japanese food and ingredients were her way to adapt, grow, and learn about Japan in her own way. A consummate cook and passionate foodie, Laura took to Japanese ingredients like an artist suddenly discovering a new color in the spectrum, and started creating masterpiece after masterpiece.

Since moving to Japan, Laura has really gotten into making her own staples: she now makes her own pickles, yogurt, and cheese, grinds her own peanut butter, and has a jar of kombucha fermenting in the closet! Outside the home, Laura has organized an American Thanksgiving celebration party for the entire community, taught kid's and adult's cooking classes, and has weekly JET cooking parties, family dinner style! But wait: not content with organizing community cooking events, Laura is also the chair of her region's charity committee, an active taiko club member, and a constant food blogger! Her blog, "The Lazy Beggars' Guide to Cooking in Japan", is about eating well in Japan, saving cash, and doing it all on only two burners and a minifridge! Check it out at <http://lazybeggars.wordpress.com/> to get the latest tips!



FIRST IMPRESSIONS: FOOD EDITION



Whether you have lived in Japan before or have never left your country prior to JET, adjusting to new food in your area can be daunting. This month, we've gathered up six first-year JETs to tell us how it's gone so far. Read on to see how they've been faring!



38



Laura Welch, Sendai

I love food, I love Japanese food, and I love making friends through food. So what was I going to do when I found myself in a foreign country and wanted to meet local people? Find a man with a food stall and make friends with him of course! Like all the best places, I found it when I wasn't even looking, just going shopping down the road. I saw a small hut, like a roadside cafe with chairs and tables. Going over, I see and smell the most delicious muffins and scones. Every time I go back, I talk more and more with the owner. His passion for food shows in his wares, and luckily for me, he's interested in British sweets. I've already explained British flapjacks to him. I'm hoping we can bake together one day. I'm already planning to bribe him with mincemeat! I'd really recommend finding somewhere you like and making it your local spot. Small places really appreciate (and look after!) repeat customers. There's no better way to integrate into your community than with free tastes of waffles with cream and orange compote!

James Cowan, Oita

Oishii! Umai! These are the words I often hear whenever I turn on the television in my new home in Usa city in Oita prefecture. Friends back in the UK have warned me that Japanese television programmes can simply be categorized as 'food porn'. They could not have been more correct. Nonetheless, beyond TV, it seems even to my initial impression of living in Japan that food plays a particularly important role in this society (or at least more so than the places I have visited). I have noticed that the price of good food is much lower in Japan; therefore, the standard of food across a general spectrum of people seems to be much higher than other places around the world. This can only be a good thing, as my food experience so far here has not only been different, but absolutely yummy and mouth-watering everywhere I have been. Adding on, Usa City's speciality is *karaage!* You would not believe how many fried chicken shops there can be in such a small city. I look forward to munching through all the chicken in my city and definitely at the upcoming *karaage* festival in the neighbouring Nakatsu City.

Gabriela Romeu, Okinawa



I had an idea that adjusting to Japan in terms of food would be difficult as a pescetarian (not to be confused with Presbyterian!) who cooks vegetarian. My previous experience had shown me that Japan is not exactly friendly to those who have particular food needs. However, I was pleasantly surprised to hear that I

would be placed in Okinawa, which has an abundance of locally grown fruits and vegetables. It was official, I was not going to starve! I quickly bought a vegetarian cookbook, as I had this idea that I would be like Emeril yelling, "BAM!" and instantly creating tasty meals. Nevertheless, my experience with cooking, thus far, has been the exact opposite. Although I have an amazing large farmer's market in my town, I've had issues locating certain ingredients from my cookbook. I'll look up what I think would be a great recipe only to realize that cilantro sauce, fresh thyme, *salsa verde*, peanut oil, herb butter, etc., is impossible to find. I have to improvise the recipe or just scrap it altogether. Nevertheless, I have a handful of delicious and healthy meals in my arsenal, and I'll continue to develop my culinary skills.

Amanda Fink, Toyama



Before coming to Japan, I didn't have many experiences with Japanese cuisine. I'm a pescetarian, which means that I eat fish and seafood, but no meat. Most of the problems I encounter are when I'm explaining my diet to my coworkers. Many of them have not heard of pescetarianism, so they have many questions. "Do I eat egg?" Yes. "Can I drink milk?" Yes. Recently, I was even asked if I could eat bread! Keeping an open mind helps when I'm answering these questions. Going out for dinner is a little difficult. When I do go out, I have to be super diligent about the dishes I'm ordering, which can be frustrating. Thank goodness for my neighboring JETs. Although it's easier for me to cook most of my meals at home, I have had some delicious food in Japan. So far, my favorites are curry soup (I highly recommend the place in Uozu, Toyama) and a vegetarian curry at an Indian place down the street. I'll probably visit them too many times! Cooking at home has allowed me to try new vegetables that I've never seen before, so I've had many adventures in the kitchen—and the messes to prove it.

Isabelle Dansereau, Nagasaki



My first week in Japan. I'm out doing my groceries for the first time since arriving in rural Shimabara. At the supermarket, I don't bother trying to decipher the gazillion labels and signs, I just go for the easily recognizable, and hauling my heavy bags I start the inevitable 25-minute trek back up the hill to my house. The heat is intense and before long I am soaked in sweat and thirsty. As I stop midway at one of those convenient street vending machines—the purpose of which I will never doubt again—an old woman notices me standing there and starts speaking to me in heavily accented Japanese, never thinking that being the foreigner I obviously am, I might not understand a word that she is saying. She produces from her house two bumpy looking cucumbers which she promptly offers me. After further inquiry, I learn how to prepare what is in fact *goya*, a very bitter gourd often eaten in southern Japan in high summer. I don't know why that woman gave them to me and I haven't seen her again since, but I am grateful to her for introducing me to one of the local foods and, with the simple gift of *goya*, making me feel welcome in my new home.

Kat McCormick, Nara



Since arriving in Japan I've been able to try many exciting foods that I hadn't even heard of in the UK. The most interesting two are *natto* and *goya*. I must admit when I first saw (and smelled) the fermented soy beans, and sampled the bitter taste of the *goya*, I was very confused as to whether I liked them or not. But I tried them both again, and again, and I now use both ingredients regularly. It's always good as a vegan to mix things up a little and try something new. I think moving to Japan has really helped me to do just that. When I first moved here, I thought it would be so difficult and I'd really struggle to find vegan food, but I found that with perseverance and a willingness to try, it's actually not only achievable but enjoyable. My colleagues are sometimes baffled by my diet, but they do ask many questions, which to me is a great opportunity for cultural exchange. I previously thought that telling people here that I didn't eat fish might offend, but if you say that you like *natto* you automatically win mega brownie points.

Had some food adventures here in Japan? Want to share your favourite recipes and stories? Let us know at connect.food@ajet.net!



39

SWEET TREAT FALL FESTIVAL

Fall is following hot on the heels of summer, and the temperature is cooling fast! Know the best way to heat your home back up? Sweet treat creation extravaganza! Here's four fall recipes to warm you up on even your coldest, rainiest, typhooniest days!

Sweet Potato Soup

First up, sweet potato soup, or as contributor **Natalie Boon's** friends know it, *Love Soup!* Not creamy or savory, but a spicy-sweet dessert soup popular in Singapore and Hong Kong!



Ingredients:

- 500ml water
- 2-3 small sweet potatoes
- 20g sugar (rock sugar if available)
- Handful dried white fungus
- Thumb-sized piece of ginger
- Optional: 1-2 pandan leaves, for fragrance

Directions:

First, soak white fungus in a bowl of water for 10 minutes to reconstitute it. Then, peel the sweet potato, and cut into bite sized pieces. Cut ginger into slices, or crush into smaller pieces. Combine 500ml water, sweet potato pieces, sugar and ginger in a pot, and simmer at medium heat for 45-60 minutes. After 30 minutes has passed, add the reconstituted white fungus. If you have pandan leaves, add them in the last 15 minutes. Serve hot!

Additional Tips:

- ☞ Use a mix of purple, yellow, and orange sweet potatoes for colour!
- ☞ Having trouble finding dried white fungus? Look for it in the Chinese groceries section!
- ☞ White fungus really adds a nice chewy texture, but you can also use other Chinese dried goods such as red dates, wolfberries, ginko nuts, lotus seeds and/or dried longans, too! The sweetness will add up, though, so adjust the sugar and water levels according to your preference.
- ☞ For a spicier ginger kick, use more ginger, or older ginger!

Mexican Wedding Cake Cookies

Next, a quick recipe for some mega-tasty cookies! According

to contributor **Kira Conley**, these treats will literally melt in your mouth, so enjoy!

Ingredients:

- 225g of butter, melted
- 200g powdered sugar (confectioner's sugar)
- Dash of salt
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 475g of flour
- 120g chopped nuts (pecans work well)

Directions:

Heat oven to 200 degrees Celsius. Chop nuts and put on cooking pan to roast for about 5 minutes to bring out the flavor. Let cool. Turn oven down to 160 degrees Celsius.

Next, cream together melted butter and 60 grams of powdered sugar. Add the salt, vanilla, flour, and nuts, and mix well. Roll dough into small, 500-yen-coin-size balls, and place on a greased baking sheet (re-grease pan for every batch you place in the oven). Bake for 13-15 minutes.

After removing the cookies from the oven, carefully place them on a plate and completely submerge the cookies in the remaining powdered sugar. Allow the cookies to absorb the sugar, removing once cooled.

Chocolate Banana Pudding

Craving chocolate? Contributor **Nick Powers Maher** has you covered with a killer chocolate banana pudding, which, in addition to fulfilling all your sweet dreams, is also coincidentally gluten AND vegan-friendly!

Required: One 18-cm springform tart pan (tart pan with removable bottom) or equivalent.

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons cocoa powder
- 3 tablespoons rice or dango flour



- 5 tablespoons almond flour
- 3 tablespoons light brown sugar
- ¾ cup - 1 cup soy milk
- 1-2 bananas

Directions:

If using a conventional oven, preheat to 170 degrees Celsius. If using a toaster oven, you don't need to preheat (if it uses Watts, set it to 740 Watts, or whatever is closest.)

In a medium bowl, combine the cocoa powder, almond flour, rice flour, and sugar until thoroughly mixed. Fold in the milk, and blend until batter is smooth and consistent. Slice bananas, and stir into the batter.

Gently pour the batter into the tart pan, and place in the oven (heated conventional oven or unheated toaster oven.) Bake for 15-20 minutes, until the pudding doesn't jiggle in the pan. You may be able to smell it, and when it just starts to smell like it's burning, it's probably done. You can also use wooden toothpicks to test—stick the toothpick in the middle of the pudding, and if it comes out clean, it's definitely done. Remove from oven, and refrigerate.

The pudding is, honestly, best enjoyed cold the day after you make it. It's a kind of gelatinous baked pudding unlike anything I've ever had, and it holds its shape surprisingly well.

Variations:

- ☞ - Glutinous flour instead of almond flour if you don't need gluten-free.
- ☞ - Dairy milk instead of soy milk if you don't need vegan.
- ☞ - Other fruits. I'd like to try it with either rum or red wine in the batter, or something like mint, basil, or lavender instead of bananas.

(Recipe adapted by Nick Powers Maher from Anshin Sweets by Toshiko Okamura.)

Halloween Tombstone Cupcakes

Finally, have a Halloween party coming up? Need something fun and delicious to bring? Well, look no further! Contributor **Danielle Williams** has your back with an easy and fun recipe for any spooky event. Try them out at your next eikaiwa or JET community Halloween party!

Ingredients:

- Chocolate Cupcakes**
- 1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder



- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 1/2 cups white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup milk

Chocolate Frosting

(Makes about 1.5 cups frosting, which is enough to frost 12 cupcakes.)

- 2 ounces (4 tbsp / half stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 2-3 tablespoons milk or water
- 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Oreo "Dirt" and Decorative Tombstones

- 1 box of Oreo cookies
- 1 box of Milano or Coconut Sable cookies

Directions:

Preheat oven to 175 degrees Celsius. Line a muffin pan with paper or foil liners. Sift the flour, baking powder, baking soda, cocoa and salt together into a bowl. Set aside.

In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well with each addition, then stir in the vanilla. Add the flour mixture alternately with the milk; beat well. Pour mixture into the muffin cups until each liner is 3/4 full.

Bake for 15 to 17 minutes in the preheated oven, or until a wooden toothpick pushed into a cake comes out clean. Remove from oven, and let cool.

To make frosting, beat butter and cocoa powder until mixture is soft and well-combined. Add the confectioners' sugar, 2/3 of the milk, and vanilla. Beat until fluffy. Add the last of the milk if frosting is too stiff.

Take Oreo cookies and put them through a food processor until finely ground. Don't have a food processor? Put your cookies into a big Ziplock bag and choose pulverize them with your blunt object of choice! I've used a sauce pan before. Once the cookies are ground, place them in a bowl.

To decorate, frost the cooled cupcakes with the chocolate frosting, then dip them, top-down, into the cookie crumbs until you can no longer see the frosting. For the tombstones themselves, Milano cookies work best, but you can go to Daiso and buy Coconut Sable cookies which work just as well. Break cookies in half, and write RIP with frosting on the top (I used the decorating frosting tubes from Daiso for this.) Once finished, take a knife and make a cut in the top of the cupcakes where you will place the tombstones. Place tombstones in the cuts. Enjoy!

(Cupcake recipe from <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/chocolate-cupcakes/>, Frosting from <http://alpineberry.blogspot.jp/2008/10/tombstone-cupcakes.html>)



SPORTS

EDITORIAL The Message of Recovery behind the Tokyo Olympics

42 Given all the media coverage, I'm sure you're well aware of the decision to award Tokyo the right to host the 2020 Summer Olympics. The days before last month's announcement in Buenos Aires were tense. Tokyo's bid was believed that have been adversely affected by negative reports regarding the situation at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Despite these reports, the Tokyo 2020 campaign triumphed. In awarding the Games to Tokyo, the International Olympic Committee endorsed the campaign's pitch that presented the city as a 'safe pair of hands' and a place that could offer 'certainty in uncertain times'.

The reaction to the news from Japanese people whom I spoke to was overwhelmingly positive. Somebody even told me that an elderly relative had expressed a desire to live longer so that they would be able to witness Tokyo hosting the Olympics for a second time.

I believe that one of the great things about the campaign for Tokyo 2020 is that it managed to be successful despite, having a much smaller budget than the city's unsuccessful 2016 bid. The 2020 campaign's logo, a garland of blue, yellow, black, green, and red cherry blossoms, designed to have the same colour scheme as the symbol of the Olympic Games, has been clearly visible at major sporting events throughout Japan for nearly two years. I've been handed a variety of free merchandise emblazoned with the logo at every city marathon that I've been to in Japan since early 2012. On at least one occasion, I've also been asked to write a message of support for Tokyo's bid to host the games on a giant

poster. There's no doubting that that a tremendous amount of effort went into the campaign.

Lack of public support had been considered a key factor in Tokyo's failure to secure the right to host the 2016 Games, but things were different this time around. Last year saw a sudden rise in public support for the prospect of an Olympics held in Tokyo. The shift in public opinion was largely attributed to Japan's success at the Games in London last summer that resulted in 38 medals, the highest number since the country's Olympic debut in 1912. The belief that hosting the Olympic Games would benefit the Japanese economy is another reason thought to be behind the growth in support for the campaign. The official message that the staging of the Games would serve as a symbol of recovery, presenting the world with a 'devastation to revitalisation' story is also understood to have helped.

Personally, I'm extremely happy to see the 2020 Olympic Games awarded to Tokyo.

Japan has a history of staging well-organised sporting events, and I have no doubt that Tokyo 2020 will be another success story. The successful 2020 bid means that Tokyo will become the first city in Asia to host the Olympics for a second time.

Congratulations, Tokyo!!!

Do you have a story relating to the 2020 Olympics that you'd like to share? Please get in touch at connect.sports@ajet.net

THIS MONTH IN SPORTS...

This month's Sports section kicks off with a brief history of Tokyo's relationship with the Olympic movement. Austin Smith's article, written following the city's successful bid to host the 2020 Games, reflects on the vast urban improvements that the previous Tokyo Olympics in 1967 brought to post-war Japan and highlights the broader cultural significance of the successful 2020 bid.

If you're considering traveling over to Shikoku, you should check out Claire Usmar's article about cycling from Honshu to Shikoku via a series of bridges between islands in the Seto Inland Sea. The article's a great resource for anyone looking to make the journey. It includes useful information about the different courses that you can follow depending on your cycling ability. The article also features tips on what to look out for en route, and the foods you should try when you decide to take a break from cycling.

If you're looking for an even more physically demanding experience, have a look at Alys Turner's article on the Aso Caldera Super Marathon, one of the most popular ultramarathons in Japan. The article captures the atmosphere of the race, and includes an interview with two competitors who have some great advice for people interested in long-distance running in Japan.



SPOTLIGHT

Akiyo Horiguchi, Relaxed Rural Runner

PE was one of Akiyo's least favorite classes growing up, but one autumn day in 2008, she went on a run in beautiful Forest Park in Portland, Oregon. That was it; she just kept running. Before she knew it, she was both a dedicated follower and occasional race recap contributor to the Run Oregon blog. Since coming to Japan as a CIR, she has continued running and participating in races. While she sometimes enters large events, like the 2012 Tokyo Marathon, she prefers the small races that most people never hear about.

Akiyo has run several half-marathons and a relay race within her home prefecture of Toyama (in the cities of Toyama, Kurobe, Uozu, and Namerikawa), as well as small-town races in Nagano, Shizuoka, Niigata, and Fukui. She enjoys the quiet, laid-back energy and the rural scenery of a small-town race, and having an excuse to visit a place she may not have otherwise been to. Through running in Japan, she feels a sense of continuity with her pre-JET life, while at the same time being able to see Japan from a different perspective.

Nominate someone you know for Spotlight at connect.editor@ajet.net!



A SHORT HISTORY OF OLYMPIC TOKYO

Austin Smith, Tokushima

On September 7th 2013, Tokyo was awarded the right to host the Olympic Games for the third time in its history. As well as famously hosting the 1964 Summer Olympics, Tokyo was awarded the right to host the 1940 Olympic Games, an honour which was later relinquished. The decision to award the 2020 Games to Tokyo has provided an opportunity to reflect on this Olympic history and to build upon the city's rich Olympic heritage. My personal interest in the Japanese Olympic movement stems from Tokyo's failed bid to host the 2016 Olympic Games—the stimulus for my MA research into the city's Olympic history.

The fact that Japanese cities have now been awarded the right to host Olympics more times than any Western country, with the exception of the United States, demonstrates how well they have represented themselves to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In the case of Tokyo, these ambitions were first expressed to the IOC in 1932. It was hoped that the event could be held in 1940 to commemorate the 2,600th anniversary of the foundation of imperial Japan. The event would have showcased the remarkable recovery of the metropolis, which had been devastated by the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, in which approximately 140,000 people died.

Regrettably, the ongoing war in China depleted national resources and an international boycott had been threatened. Ironically, but by no coincidence, the desire to host an international event to demonstrate modernity along Western lines had been extinguished by colonial expansion intended to promote 'mutual prosperity' in East Asia.

The pre-war history of Olympic Tokyo has been whitewashed from the history of the Japanese Olympic Movement presented by the Tokyo 2020 team through their official website—even a short biography of Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo who worked to bring the Games to Tokyo until his death, fails to mention these efforts. However, Tokyo's successful bid for the 1964 Olympic Games did refer to the issue of 1940. The Governor of Tokyo wrote that,



‘Tokyo was once elected as the host city of the 1940 Games which, however, was later cancelled due to the unfortunate circumstances... consequently, Tokyo was already recognized by the IOC as being fully qualified and entitled for holding the Games. Personally, I am hoping that a great majority of the members of the IOC will be so sympathetic as to give another chance to Tokyo.’

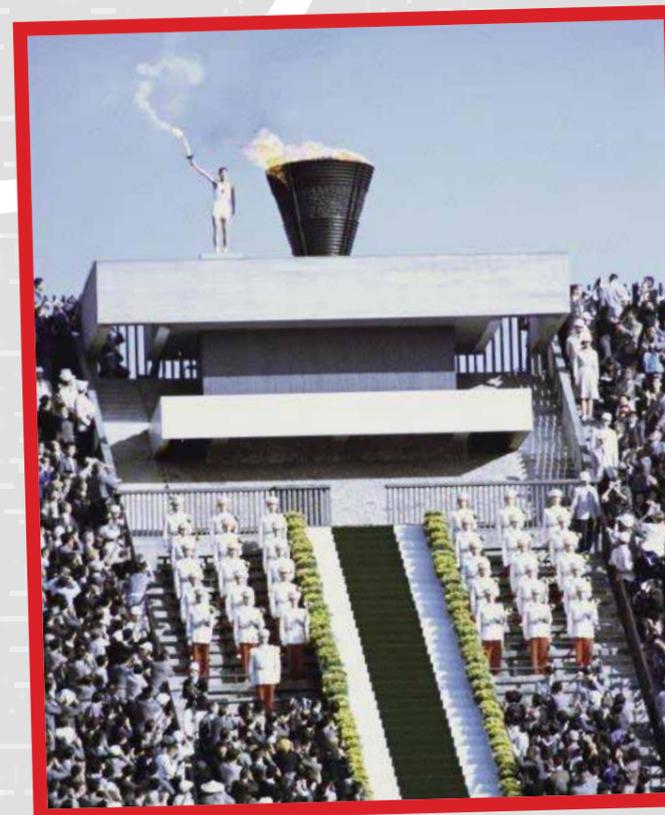
By describing Tokyo as a victim of 'unfortunate circumstances', the issue of war responsibility is sidestepped. The 1940 Games were said to have been 'cancelled' rather than relinquished, leaving the responsibility for this cancellation open to interpretation. The fact that the city that was awarded the Olympics for 1940 was mostly destroyed by 1945 is also ignored. In awarding the Olympics to Tokyo, the IOC accepted Emperor Hirohito, the figurehead of wartime Japan, as the patron of an event which ostensibly promotes world peace. This decision was part of a 'rehabilitation' of Axis powers, Rome hosted the Olympics in 1960 and Munich followed in 1972.

The desire to harness the heritage and history of 1964 is clear from the Tokyo 2020 bid material. A 'Heritage Zone' containing imperial sites surrounded by renovated Olympic venues featured prominently in the successful 2020 bid. The 1964 Olympic Stadium is being redeveloped at a cost of \$1 billion to host the

2019 Rugby World Cup and, now, the 2020 Olympic Games. The venue, symbolically, stands on the site of the former Meiji Shrine Outer Gardens—the favoured site for the 1940 Olympic Stadium.

The Yoyogi National Stadium and the Nippon Budokan are two further symbols of 1964 that remain prominent landmarks of Tokyo, fifty years on. These multi-purpose buildings were designed to fuse Japanese and Western architectural styles and, their continued use, hosting a variety of national and international events, is a fantastic advert for Olympic legacy and testament to the vision of the architects.

The awarding of the 1964 Olympic Games to Tokyo was a trigger for vast urban improvements by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. A ten-year development plan for Tokyo was fast-tracked to improve the city's poor infrastructure in time for the Games. The Tokaido Shinkansen service between Osaka and Tokyo commenced on October 1st 1964, just nine days before the Olympic Games began. This rail service is still regarded as one of the safest, fastest and most efficient in the world. These developments were internationally recognised as symbols of



Japan's revival and post-war industrial growth and, in popular memory, they are directly associated with the 1964 Olympics.

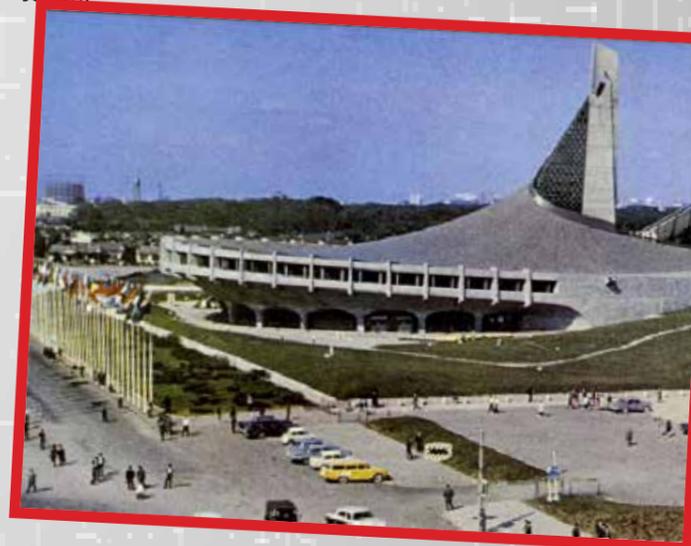
Eighty-five percent of the Japanese population watched the 1964 Olympic opening ceremony on television, in what was seen as the start of a new era for Japan. Sakai Yoshinori was chosen to carry the sacred flame into the stadium and light the Olympic fire. Sakai was born on August 6th 1945, the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, 17km from ground zero. Sakai has been described since as a 'beautiful body', a symbol of Japan's 'complete recovery' following war defeat. Like all Japanese

participants in the torch relay, Sakai represented a revitalized post-war generation, yet, he was also a reference to Japan's position as the world's first atomic victim. The opening ceremony linked Olympic symbols of peace with a not so peaceful history and broadcast them to an international audience. The Japanese flag, national anthem and imperial family were offered for reacceptance, globally, as symbols of modern Japan.

As well as shaping international perceptions of the city and transforming the urban fabric, the success of the 1964 Olympics galvanised subsequent Japanese Olympic bids. Sapporo and Nagano would go on to become Winter Olympic host cities in 1972 and 1996 respectively. Unsuccessful bids from Nagoya, for 1988, Osaka, for 2008, and Tokyo, for 2016, were also launched. Whatever your opinion of the Olympic Movement, it is important to view the case of Tokyo 2020 from a Tokyo perspective. The chance to reflect on, revisit and restore the remarkable Olympic legacy of 1964 is something to celebrate. Tokyo has demonstrated in the past that it is capable of delivering a well-run event and creating a lasting urban legacy, there is no reason to begrudge the capital the chance to do so again.

Tokyo 2020 will hope to demonstrate a historic narrative of Olympic Tokyo to the world—the theme of recovery. The Great East Japan Earthquake struck on March 11th 2011, generating a tsunami of unprecedented scale. Tens of thousands of lives were lost, people's homes were destroyed and vital infrastructure was severely damaged. 100,000 people remain displaced by the resulting crisis at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant almost three years on. While the incident is not an immediate threat to the people of Tokyo, it is important that the nation demonstrates a complete recovery to an international audience once again.

Austin Smith is a 3rd-year ALT based in Tokushima-shi, Shikoku. Prior to joining JET, he completed an MA in East Asian History at Newcastle University. He researched the history of Tokyo and the Japanese Olympic Movement for his dissertation. He has written a series of articles on the city's Olympic history for Gaijin Pot and his own blog site [https://austinsmithjp.wordpress.com/] that he hopes will promote Tokyo 2020 and raise awareness of the history of Olympic Japan.



ISLAND CRUISING: CYCLING ACROSS THE SEA, FROM HONSHU TO SHIKOKU

Claire Usmar, Mie



Life in Japan almost inevitably means life on a bike. If you're not averse to pedalling, why not ditch dodging obasans in narrow city streets and ride across a sea?

The Shimanami Kaido, literally 'line of islands sea route', is a 76km cycling route that links Honshu and Shikoku via a series of bridges between islands in the Seto Inland Sea. Opened in 1999, the route from Onomichi Station, on Honshu, and Imabari Station, on Shikoku, is considered one of the best cycling routes in Japan. The route meanders through little fishing ports, past almost tropical seaside scenery, complete with palm trees and golden beaches.

Whether you're a novice or a cycling pro at heart, the route can be tailored to suit your level. There are actually three courses you can follow. You can choose the one that's best suited to your level, depending on how much hill climb punishment you want to endure. If you're not keen on riding 76km in one day, there is enough to stop and explore en-route to warrant breaking the journey into a two-day trip by staying at one of the hostels on the islands.

The old stone-paved alleyways that snake up towards Senko Temple on the mountain above Onomichi, your starting destination, alone are worth taking half a day to explore. The view in the morning across the city and towards Mukaishima, will inspire your legs ahead of your journey. On the islands themselves, the intriguing attractions continue. On Innoshima, there's the Innoshima Flower Center plus Suigun Castle, the 'pirate castle', which displays weapons and armour once favoured by privateers who were active during the Muromachi and Sengoku eras. Kosan Temple and Museum on Ikuchishima is perhaps the most intriguing destination, being full of replicas of other famous Japanese architectural wonders, like the Yomeimon Gate from Nikko Shrine. The complex also features Miraishin no Oka, 'Hill of Hope', a modern sculptural landscape carved out of white Italian marble by an internationally renowned Japanese sculptor. Then further towards Imabari you can make a more spiritual side trip to Oyamazumi Shrine



on Omishima, where cyclists can purchase a special *omamori* (traditional charm) to keep them safe on all their journeys.

Since my friends and I are into cycling, we brought our own bikes with us by train, dismantled and packed in bike bags as per the rules for taking your bike on a train in Japan, all the way from Mie Prefecture. Bike bags are relatively inexpensive, starting from around 4,000 yen, but unless you own a road bike and are particularly attached to it, it's far easier to rent a bike at one of the bike stations along the route. They rent everything from folding bikes up to decent hybrid and mountain bikes that would handle the journey very well.

Once you've purchased your 500-yen booklet of prepaid toll tickets for the bridges at Onomichi Station, your journey begins with a short ferry ride to the first island, Mukaishima, where a blue line painted on the road will be your faithful companion for the rest of your journey should you stay on the basic course. Intermediate and advanced courses (orange and red lines on the map) break off from this course, rejoining it at each main bridge. The blue line course has distance and direction markers every kilometre to help you pace your journey. Be sure to pick up the free route map from the Onomichi Tourist Centre at the train station.

About three hours of riding, including frequent stops to snap photos of the stunning views, should bring you to Tataro Shimanami Park on Inokuchi Island. This park marks the halfway point and it's an opportune spot to try a local speciality. With much of the route across the first three islands lined by citrus orchards, it's no surprise that the local food specialities are all things *mikan* flavoured, including mikan ice cream. Considering that you'll face quite a few hills in the second half of the ride towards Imabari, maybe cram in a second ice cream for extra fuel. It's a perfectly logical excuse to try the other local flavour, salty vanilla.

That sugary boost will come in handy because by then you'll have crossed three bridges with another three architecturally stunning ones to follow. All six bridges have decent climbs up to them but

the best view and biggest challenge is reserved for the last push into Imabari across the Kurushima Kaikyo Bridge. At over 4km long, this behemoth stretching from Ohshima Island to mainland Shikoku is actually three consecutive suspension bridges.

The wind was insane crossing it, and a delightful *kaze* will undoubtedly befriend you for more than a little of your journey along the Shimanami Kaido. At times it felt like we'd have more luck swimming through the whirlpools which the Seto Inland Sea is famous for. If you ride past at the right time, you can see these remarkable eddies from your saddle. Thanks to strong tides and the narrow channels between the islands, whirlpools form in many places and you'll see little tourist boats zipping out towards them. In some sections the ocean looks more like a shallow white-water river as it swirls and fights itself.

Riding into Imabari you'll be keen to hop off your bike. But don't stop just yet. Hop on a train to Matsuyama, an hour away, and revive your weary limbs in the famed waters of the Dogo Onsen. Said to have been the inspiration behind Yubaba's bathhouse of the spirits in Miyazaki's animated classic *Spirited Away*, the healing qualities of the waters are so revered that the Emperor has his own private bathing room there. A dip in these waters is the ideal 'only in Japan' way to end your adventure. Your muscles will surely thank you.

See www.go-shimanami.jp/global/english for more nuts and bolts information about the route.

Claire Usmar is a 5th-year ALT from Tsu City, the 'big country town' prefectural capital of Mie. An Australian from Brisbane, she has come to find herself quite at home among rice fields as opposed to gum trees (eucalyptus) and spends most of her free time either cycling, hiking or running in Mie's picturesque countryside with her camera never far from hand.



'CAN I GET A MEDAL, TOO?'

ULTRA MARATHON RUNNING

IN SOUTHERN JAPAN



Alys Turner, Kumamoto



latter.

In order to complete the course in daylight it starts early, at 5am, with registration taking place even earlier, between 3.30am to 4.30am. I think that alone is enough to put me off ever competing. As the race is in the mountains, access is pretty impossible without a car and although there are shuttle buses to the start points from the car parks I would recommend having a nice friend drive you instead. I was showing my support at the 40km, the 65km and 85km marks, so we set off from my town at 4.45am stopping only for some much needed coffee. It was so quiet when we arrived at our first stop, the highest point on the course and 900m above sea level, that it was hard to believe hundreds of runners were streaming through the mountains somewhere. The first competitor arrived just before 8am. Despite more than a few steep inclines and having almost run a marathon, he was fast and still going strong. Less than a minute later another runner, looking just as effortless, chased after him before everything went still again and we set off for our next stop.

The 50km race starts at 11am, at the same place that marks the halfway point for the 100km race. By the time we got to the 65km mark competitors from the 50km race had already begun to overtake runners in the 100km race. It started raining and the constant drizzle made it impossible to avoid getting soaked. In comparison to the runners though, I felt pretty cosy. Some had come prepared with plastic sacks to wear but the majority of them looked like they'd had a shower in their clothes and everyone seemed pretty miserable. As the race is so long there are never more than a few dozen people cheering at any one point and vast stretches of no supporters at all which is why I designated myself *Genki* Cheerleader Number 1 and got really into it.

Back in the car, we drove past the runners and I saw first hand how tough the race was, with steep inclines stretching out in front of us. I was a little surprised to see many of the competitors walking, but my friend told me that it was necessary to preserve some stamina at this point, and that these competitors could still finish within 10 hours. "People finish this in 10 hours?" I asked. That's sustaining a pretty amazing pace. Just completing the course at all seemed like a big enough challenge. One member of my running group actually sent me a text message after the race to thank me for my support and to apologise for the fact that he dropped out after 'only' running 78km.

At our last stop, 85km, we managed to take shelter under a bridge, and I put my all into feverishly screaming "*ganbare, faito*".

This near to the finish line I'd expected to see an army of dazed and stumbling zombies, but everyone was running again and morale seemed pretty high. Presumably the remaining 15km, all downhill, felt like a comparatively short distance.

I was exhausted by the time we reached the finish line in the early afternoon and felt pretty emotional watching people at the finish line. I think that if anything could convince me to run an ultramarathon then that was it. The race has time limits of 13.5 and 7.5 hours respectively. The winner of the 100km race managed to finish under the cut-off time for both courses, in an almost unbelievable 7 hours and 28 minutes.

So, whilst it's definitely not for everyone, it was one of the most interesting experiences I've had in Japan. If, by any chance, you feel up to the challenge please let me know as I'll be more than happy to come and cheer you on.

My colleague and running buddy Kimiyo Ozaka is from Kumamoto and started running 6 years ago after her children went to university. Emiko Matsumoto is originally from Oita and started running in 2006 to lose weight. They are both passionate about long-distance running and regularly travel all over Japan to take part in races. I interviewed them both about their Aso Caldera experiences.



How many times have you taken part in the Aso Caldera race?

KO: I've been in the Aso Caldera 50km race twice, in 2011 and in 2012.

EM: I've run it 5 times now, one of those was the 50km, the rest were the 100km course.

Why did you decide to try an Ultramarathon?

KO: The other members of my running group were all looking forward to the summer season and especially the Aso Caldera race. They talked about it so much that I thought it must be really good and so I decided to enter myself.

EM: Because everyone else enters. They were so excited about the race it rubbed off on me and I thought I'd try it out too.

How did you train for the race and do you

have any tips for other runners?

KO: As well as regular training, we set up a specific group for the members participating in the 50km race and trained together. My advice would be to make sure you drink enough water and not to run too fast. You have to keep in mind that it's not a normal marathon and you can't run it in the same way.

EM: If you run 50km twice you'll get the confidence that you can run 100km. I also did a few 30km and 40km runs. I'd recommend climbing mountains (you don't have to run) and just training your body to move for long periods of time. If your full marathon time is over 4 hours, I think it'll be difficult to finish the race.

Could you tell us briefly about your Aso Caldera race experiences?

KO: I remember the first time I ran it, it was so tough. You can't really enjoy it. My upper half was ready and willing but my legs just wouldn't go. However when you finish it's really worth it and so much fun.

EM: The ups and downs are intense but the scenery is really nice. It's so tough that when you're running it you think, "I'll never do this again", but there's nothing else like the feeling of achievement when you reach the goal.

Finally, what's your favourite race in Japan? Are there any that you would recommend to JETs?

KO: The Aoshima Marathon (December, Miyazaki Prefecture) is great but I would also really recommend the Ibusuki Nanohana Marathon (January, Kagoshima Prefecture) because the time limit is generous and I hear that there are a lot of freebies and good snacks.

EM: The Shimonoseki Kaikyo Marathon (Yamaguchi Prefecture) in November has nice scenery and lots of supporters. The Ibusuki Nanohana has a lot of ups and downs but also lots of private aid stations that give out luxury snacks and a lot of people wear fancy dress, so it's fun. Also, it's a really small competition but, the Hitoyoshi Spring Breeze Marathon (February, Kumamoto Prefecture) has a lot of support and people call out your name so you really try your best.

Alys Turner is a 2nd-year ALT in Kashima Town, which is also home to Kyushu's biggest shopping mall. Originally from London, she loves the quietness and beautiful surroundings of her small Japanese town but still can't quite get used to the friendliness of strangers. She spends her free time hanging out at the mall, running with her crazy running group, and dreaming about a good cup of English tea.



TRAVEL

EDITORIAL Where is Japan's Focus?

The same weekend I watched in horror as Australia elected a Class-A clown as its newest Prime Minister, it was announced that Tokyo had won the right to host the 2020 Olympic Games. However, while bid organisers were jubilant, widespread reaction to the news has been mixed, with critics suggesting Japan should instead be focusing on fixing the Fukushima problem. The 'problem' being a nuclear plant located just 230 kilometers from the Japanese capital that has been spewing hundreds of tonnes of radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean each day for the past two-and-a-half-years.

Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, used a news conference after the Olympics announcement as a PR opportunity to reassure everyone the issues plaguing the crippled plant were under control. "I would like to state clearly that there has not been, is not now and will not be any health problems whatsoever," he said, adding that he was determined to showcase a Japan that "accomplishes a remarkable reconstruction from disaster and stands once again at the forefront of the world".

In the months that followed the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, it came to light that the damage was far worse than the government had previously admitted, casting skepticism over the legitimacy of information being fed to the people of Japan. Then the world media got hold of a story that 2.28 billion yen (\$23 million USD) of the money set aside for rebuilding had been gifted to Japan's whaling expeditions. The revelation that this much-needed money had been diverted to a dying industry that brazenly flouts international conventions made people mad. Very mad. But that wasn't all.

Last October, it was reported that 1.2 trillion yen (\$12 billion USD) of the disaster reconstruction budget had been spent on unrelated projects, including building roads in Okinawa, renovations of government offices in Tokyo and a contact lens

factory in central Japan. Another 30 million yen (\$303,000 USD) went to promoting the Tokyo Sky Tree. Meanwhile, 325,000 people evacuated from the disaster zone were still homeless and piles of debris still littered the east coast.

"It is true that the government has not done enough...We must listen to those who say the reconstruction should be the first priority," former Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said at the time. So what's with splurging on a huge party seven years from now? "I can't understand Japan's attitude putting bids for the Olympics before all other issues," said one foreigner living in Japan, "I think it's irresponsible for a country so heavily in debt, and with such a bad spending track record, to host a multi-billion yen event in their richest city."

The Japanese government has predicted the Olympics will create 150,000 new jobs and bring 3 trillion yen (\$30 billion USD) in economic benefits, but these projections are of cold comfort to the hundreds of thousands of displaced residents still living in temporary housing, or the farmers and fisherman still without a livelihood—or indeed any of us still enduring sweltering summers without *aircon* and freezing winters without heating due to ongoing power cuts. Should Japan be focusing on fixing the Fukushima problem or will *kawaii* mascot merchandise and new sporting complexes be a worthwhile investment in the long run?

Tell us what you think: connect.travel@ajet.net



THIS MONTH IN TRAVEL...

Wow! How quickly did that month go by? One minute we were in the midst of a sweltering summer, now suddenly the days are getting shorter, the nights are getting cooler and Halloween decorations are adorning the stores. Also, did someone say "pumpkin-flavoured Kit Kats"?

This month in Travel, Oita JET, Adam Douglas, leads us on a spooky tour of haunted Tokyo and Kagawa's own Thomas Simmons honorably takes this month's bragging rights, having just completed his three-year mission to visit all of Japan's 47 prefectures.

From Yamagata we have Jessie Giddens reliving her childhood at Tokyo Disneyland and we Spotlight Jon Ivan Pinsan, giving us a rundown on his whirlwind trip covering Tohoku's major summer festivals.

Meanwhile, I take a closer look at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games controversy in my editorial. Regardless of how you spent it, I hope you've all made the most of your summer and stockpiled the Vitamin D for the colder months ahead! Enjoy the issue!



SPOTLIGHT

Jon Ivan Pinsan's All-Tohoku Festival Tour

After finally getting accustomed to it being really hot and humid during summer, I decided to do something I haven't done before in Japan—attend as many summer festivals as possible. I'd only ever been to the Hanagasa parade in Yamagata City—its traditional folk song having inspired me throughout my life in Japan. As the festival season was approaching this year, we had been experiencing many rainy days, but still I packed my bags and my camera and headed off for the six big festivals in Tohoku: Morioka's Sansa Odori, Fukushima's Waraji, Akita's Kanto, Aomori's Nebuta, Sendai's Tanabata, and finally, back to Yamagata for Hanagasa. Over eight days, I saw a lot of dancing drummers, huge straw slippers hung up high, performers balancing 60kg poles topped with paper lanterns, huge lit-up floats adorned with artwork, colourful streamers and wishes written on pieces of paper. At the end of it all I got the chance to dance happily with a Hanagasa flower hat. This summer made me fall in love with Tohoku even more. The festivals are so distinct and I feel they really represent the place where they are celebrated. This diversity makes Japan a lot more fascinating!

Nominate someone you know for Spotlight at connect.editor@ajet.net!



HAUNTED TOKYO

Adam Douglas, Oita

It's that time of year when beasties, ghosts and *yokai* come out to play. However, despite not celebrating Halloween with the same gusto as the UK or America, Japan's love of all things scary is unsurpassed, with J-horror films spawning everything nightmares are made of. It's not surprising then, that Japan's culture is steeped in stories that will make your hair stand on end. From vengeful ghosts to flying severed heads, the streets of Tokyo conceal all sorts of terrifying tragedies. If you are a gore connoisseur, then take a chilling day tour of some of Tokyo's most famous haunted places...if you dare.

Kappa Temple

Start the day in Taito-ku with a visit to Sogen Temple in the backstreets of Kappabashi, the restaurant supply district halfway between Ueno and Asakusa. Sogen-ji may look like just another neighborhood Buddhist temple from the street, but it has a very unique feature: a *kappa* shrine. *Kappa*, one of the most famous of the Japanese *yokai* (mythical creatures), are water imps with turtle-like shells on their backs and a dish of water on the top of their heads. They are mischievous creatures that have been known to drown fishermen and children—but they also sometimes help humans. Kappabashi itself is supposedly named after a group of benevolent kappa that lived in the area. The shrine contains pictures of *kappa* and even a mummified kappa hand, but the building is locked and only viewable by

appointment. However, many items can be seen through the glass door of the shrine. After visiting the temple, take a look around the shops in Kappabashi. Along with all the cooking utensils and plastic food, there are a number of shops that sell *kappa* figurines and even *kappa*-shaped sweets. www.sogenji.jp/

The Grave of Taira No Masakado

Hidden between two tall buildings in the financial district of Marunouchi sits a grave. Although it occupies some of the most expensive real estate in all of Japan, it remains untouched. This is the grave of Taira No Masakado, known as the first samurai and something of a protector of Tokyo. In the Heian Period, Masakado declared himself the new emperor of Japan and went to war with the Imperial government. He was roundly defeated and decapitated, and his head brought to the capital of Kyoto as a prize for the emperor. But, as decapitated heads sometimes do, it flew back to Tokyo (then known as Edo) in search of its body. The head landed where the grave sits today and was reverently washed and buried by some villagers. Those who have tried to move Masakado's grave or otherwise mess with his final resting place have met with untimely ends, with fires, unexplained deaths and illnesses. A freak US military bulldozer accident was also once attributed to the restless head. In order to appease the appendage, offerings of water and sake are left daily. www.mackinnon.org/masakado-home.html



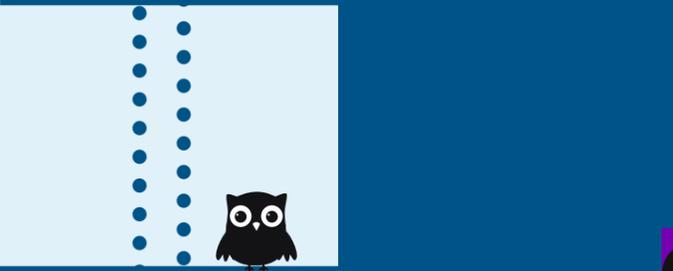
Oiwa Tamiya Inari Shrine

Oiwa-san is the quintessential vengeful ghost, the inspiration for Sadako of the *Ring* films and countless others. Oiwa-san was made famous (or possibly infamous) by the kabuki play *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan*, which has also been made into films. Although loyal to her husband Iyemon, a *ronin*, Oiwa found herself cast aside when the conniving Iyemon decided to remarry to raise his status. Disfigured by poison and distraught from the betrayal, Oiwa-san killed herself. Iyemon nailed her body to a door then dumped it in a river. As with Sadako, Oiwa became an *onryo*, a vengeful ghost, and returned to haunt her husband, who was driven mad. Oiwa is still restless, indiscriminately haunting those who are involved in kabuki and film productions of her story. Priests at the Tamiya Inari Shrine, located on the former grounds of her family home in the upscale Yotsuya district of Tokyo, have been known to perform exorcisms to placate her still very angry ghost. www.mustlovejapan.com/subject/oiwa_shrine/



Sunshine City Mall

What better way to beat the last of Tokyo's humidity than with a little indoor shopping? The Sunshine City mall in Ikebukuro has it all: shops, restaurants, and an indoor amusement park. Oh, and it's also haunted. The Sunshine 60 building, which houses the mall, was built on top of one of Japan's most notorious prisons, which housed political prisoners in the 1930s and P.O.W.s in the 1940s, and was the site of war crimes executions after the US won World War II. The prison was torn down and a modern building put up on top of it. During the day the most unsettling thing you might see is a live J-pop concert, but at night after closing, the empty halls are known to reverberate with phantom footfalls and pained faces are said to stare out from behind glass doors and windows. www.sunshinecity.co.jp/english/index.html



Yuurei Izakaya

After a long day of ghost hunting, there's no better way to relax than with dinner and drinks at Yuurei, a ghost-and-*yokai*-themed izakaya in Kichijoji. Waitresses in traditional funeral dress greet you with condolences for your passing and encourage you to toast your recently departed selves with "*Namu*," the first word of the Nembutsu prayer. The food is nothing special, but the atmosphere is phantasmagorical, with *yokai* murals on the walls, hyperactive toy spiders continuously dropping from the ceiling and Buddhist prayer bells replacing the usual table call buttons. It's extremely popular so reservations are recommended. www.yurei.jp



Adam Douglas is a second-year JET in Oita Prefecture. When not watching classic Japanese samurai and horror films, you can usually find him in the Oita countryside seeking out shrines.

The places listed here are just the tip of the haunted iceberg. Other spots include Chindogo, a temple for *tanuki* (shape-shifting raccoon dogs) located at Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa; the Honjo area of Sumida, which is famous for its Seven Wonders, locations of appearances of ghosts and goblins in the Edo Period; and Mount Takao, a mountain in the far west of Tokyo that is said to be the stomping ground for *tengu*, long-nosed *yokai*.



All photos taken by Summer Shetenhelm and used with her permission.



ONE MAN'S MISSION

Thomas Simmons, Kagawa



The alpha male's fur stands up. It brandishes its razor-sharp teeth and hisses as a dozen other monkeys quietly surround us. The ground is too uneven, the branches too unstable, the rocks below too sharp. Arran is surely a goner.

It all seemed like a good idea 30 minutes ago when we started out. We should have taken the foreboding white-on-red Japanese sign near the starting point more seriously.

"Unknown kanji, unknown kanji, 'do not go,' something, something."

Gaijin smash? We hop the barrier and begin our trek. Arran takes the helm, I settle in the middle and Ryan brings up the rear. The terrain is treacherous, but we are young lads with a sense of adventure. Not long after starting out, I notice something in my peripheral vision. After focussing for a bit, I see that we are being silently watched by a group of wild monkeys about 50m up the slope. I stop and point to them, but they are too well camouflaged to be spotted right away. Ryan finally sees them and picks up a rock, which he grips tightly.

"This is not good. We should go back."

"But we've made it so far!"

We make a compromise that we get to the next vantage point to gauge how far we are from the end of the trail and turn back if it's not five minutes away. Ryan and I hop on a boulder at the bottom of a slope. Arran is almost at the vantage point already. He looks back to us.

"We're almost there, boys!"

"Arran. Do *not* move. There is a giant monkey right in front of you."

Arran slowly turns around. He is about 2 meters away from the biggest monkey we've ever seen.

"It's okay, it's okay," he says, as he begins to slowly back away.

That's when we get the fur-teeth-hiss indicator that we really shouldn't be there.

"RUUUUUUUUNNNN!" I yell in panic.

Ryan and I dart back and Arran slides down the slope, cutting up his hands trying to grip something. The monkeys swing branch to branch and pursue us. Adrenaline gushes through my body and my legs seem to move on their own. I incur several cuts and scrapes in my scurry, though I don't feel them in the slightest. I make a giant leap to a boulder below and bloody-up my knee, almost falling directly on Ryan. I look back and the monkeys are trying to swipe at Arran. "He's gone...we're all gone," I think to myself, panicking. We can't fight a dozen monkeys on uneven ground. We're gonna be *those* JETs.

Fortunately, we all get away far enough that the monkeys are satisfied and go back up the slope. We jog on, eager to put more distance between us and our would-be killers while the feeling returns to our bodies. It took us half an hour to get to there and only five minutes to get back. It was that day on Yakushima that I learned that you can't gaijin smash death.

My other experiences in Japan have, on the whole, been much more enjoyable than this. None have been as exciting (read: life-threatening) but that's something I can live with. However, everything's been much livelier than anything I experienced in



Went directly to a tourist information office after arriving at Kofu Station and asked them where I can eat some of the famous Yamanashi grapes. 10 minutes later, I was eating and picking my own grapes!

my 24 years in Canada.

You see, I was never interested in travelling before I came to Japan. Though my friends would go on about their amazing Eurotrips and getaways to the Caribbean, I scoffed in secret, deploring such wastes of money. Seeing the world just didn't seem worth it, and the whole cult of 'investing in experience' was a first class ticket to financial woe in my mind.

However, after completing my masters and realizing a life of academia wasn't for me, I needed some sort of radical change. That is how I ended up in Japan. In short, it has blown my mind. Flooded by the euphoria of living in a different country for the first time, I *stage-oned* harder than any JET I knew. However, when I was asked to share information about Canada, I was at a loss.

"Uh... *Toronto* is cool." (i.e. it's the only thing I've ever known).

The constant grasping-in-the-dark feeling when confronted with this question was not something I wanted to repeat in Japan so, soon after arriving three years ago as a JET, I made a personal goal to see every prefecture. I decided that in the future, when I say "I lived in Japan," I am really going to mean it. I am going to be able to tell you all about it. I am going to be able to recommend loads of sites to visit, places to eat and things to do. I am *really* going to have lived here. And I am I happy to say that exactly three years later, on August 1, 2013, I arrived in Yamanashi Prefecture, my 47th and final prefecture in Japan.

This three-year journey has been an unforgettable one. It involved enough adventure and confusion to fill a book, and I loved it all. In fact, the experience was so inspiring that a few days after I completed my circuit, I decided that I'm going to do it again!

The requirements for my quest were simple: stay at least one night in each prefecture, try to see a few famous sites (or experience a local festival) and eat the local cuisine if I could. Some prefectures were much easier to fill up schedule than others, but I did manage to feel the special charm of each place I visited.

Practically-speaking, I usually opted to save time over money, and often used the *shinkansen* and express trains. I would make up the money I spent on transport by staying for free using couchsurfing(.org) or hostels where I could. However, in general, my philosophy was "money replenishes quicker than *nenkyuu*" and no matter how bad the situation, my mantra was "travelling always works out".



I picked up some sort of figure-like memento from each prefecture I went to. Here is my collection of 47. Can you recognize where any of them came from?

I also did many areas in clusters and either linked vacation days up with national holidays or strung them together over long periods (like seasonal breaks). For example, I did the entirety of Kansai one winter break, Kyushu in a spring break, Tohoku in the summer etc. I quickly found out that the ideal travel situation for me was with one partner, so I usually dragged a buddy along for each regional adventure.

The biggest piece of general advice I could give to anyone wanting to complete a similar journey is simply to stick to your goal. Be consistent. You will most likely not be able to do everything you want in one go, but consistently getting out there is paramount to finishing your quest. One strategy I adopted in this regard was to get out of my own prefecture at least once a month. This sub-goal forced me to keep my overall goal in constant focus and kept the spirit of travel alive and well in me.

Three other top three tips I have are:

1. Do your research

I cannot stress this enough. Knowing what kinds of things you want to see will affect where you might want to find accommodation (some prefectures are quite big). Deciding what special events you might want to jump on will affect when you go a particular place. Finding out which train lines and bus routes run between each prefecture will affect how you will get around. You don't have to set a concrete itinerary, but just having sketched out a basic plan will save you a lot of time and stress.

2. Absolutely use tourist information offices

So you have a rough idea of what you want to do and see but don't know much about how to do it? Tourist information offices are your friend. They are generally amazing in Japan, and they often have English-capable staff to help you out. Not only will they bombard you with useful brochures, they will also give you up-to-date information about the local surroundings that you may not have known of before. This is almost always the first place I visit when I get off the train in a new city.



3. Set-up accommodation beforehand

Though technically a part of 'Do your research', this merits its own heading. Trudging around a city for somewhere to stay can add to the sense of adventure, sure, but not always in a good way. If you search ahead of time, you can compare several places to stay as well as read reviews and get special offers. If you are looking to couchsurf (which I highly recommend), then send out *personalized* requests several weeks ahead of time (months if you're looking at a peak season).

And while we're on the topic of 'top 3's,' I can give you a few more highlights from my journeys:

Top 3 local dishes:

1. Aomori-shi's miso-milk-curry-butter ramen
2. Kagawa-ken's Sanuki udon (I'm a bit biased!)
3. Iwate-ken's wanko soba (though this is more of an experience)

Top 3 festivals:

1. Tokushima's Awa Odori (hand's down)
2. Aomori's Nebuta Matsuri
3. Okayama's Naked Man Festival

Top 3 cities of Japan:

1. Kanazawa, Ishikawa
2. Fukuoka, Fukuoka
3. Aomori, Aomori

Of course, this is based on my own experience, and I haven't eaten every local dish nor been to every festival or city. This is the reason why I am so excited to do Japan again!



In Kyoto, I couchsurfed at Masashi's, a 69-year old Japanese man who passed his plastics business onto his son. We got to meet his family and hang out with his grandkids.

"Wherever you go, there you are."

No matter where you choose to venture to in Japan, your experience completely depends on *you*. Although particular places and venues can maximize your odds for having a great experience, it's only you that can make it the best time of your life. You have to say 'yes.'

Saying 'yes' has led me to wonderful things in Japan, from doing sake shot-for-shot with retired Japanese *ojiichans* in Hokkaido, swinging off jungle ropes into waterfalls in Okinawa and hurling giant shrines into the air in Kagawa, to befriending and travelling around with a Japanese rapper in Tokyo, staying with a rural Japanese family that spoke no English in Yamaguchi and dancing onstage at a Michael Jackson tribute concert for two hours in Osaka. These kinds of experience are waiting for you if you're open to them.

So go for it. Unless there's a big red sign that tells you not to. Then, go back.

Thomas Simmons is a fourth-year ALT who lives beside a bunch of rice fields in Kagawa Prefecture. He loves meeting new people and, as he is planning to visit every prefecture again, he might be coming your way in the near future! If you happen to find yourself with an inexplicable urge to eat a bowl of the eminently famous 'Sanuki udon' in Kagawa or feel like giving him a warm welcome to your prefecture—or if you have any questions about his trip visiting all of Japan's 47 prefectures—drop him a line at td.simmons@gmail.com and he'll be happy to meet up with you.

THE HAPPIEST PLACE IN JAPAN

Jessie Giddens, Yamagata

This year, Tokyo Disneyland is celebrating its 30th anniversary, affectionately dubbed 'The Happiness Year'. Predictably, when Disney celebrates, it does so in style, beginning with a golden wardrobe change for Mickey and Minnie, limited-edition merchandise, and anniversary balloons adorning the gilded entrance, castle and flowerbeds.

The first Disney theme park built outside the United States, it is still the third-most popular theme park in the world, with nearly 15 million people visiting last year alone. I recently joined the throng and was thrilled to discover that, as part of the festivities, a special version of Disney's famous parade is being performed. The 45-minute extravaganza is called 'Happiness is Here' (are you noticing a theme?) and features costumed and animatronic characters on 13 colorful floats that process through the streets of Disneyland. Along with the thousands of other visitors, I laid out my blue sheet, bought an ice cream and soaked up the spectacle.

There is no doubt Tokyo Disneyland is overflowing with happiness this year, but what I found most surprising was its accessibility for non-Japanese speakers. Most staff spoke a bit of English, and menus and maps were all available in many other languages. Even at some of the live shows, where Japanese was spoken, staff kindly offered translation headphones or subtitle devices.

Disney Fastpass tickets are also printed out bilingually. This no-cost service is the ultimate way to get through attraction rides swiftly, by allowing visitors to queue virtually and thus skipping much of the long waiting times. At Tokyo Disneyland, the log-flume coaster, Splash Mountain, is one of the main attractions, with wait times sometimes exceeding 100 minutes. Knowing this, my first stop was to the ride's Fastpass dispenser. The machine requires you to scan your initial park entrance ticket, then spits out a Fastpass with a time period to return. Stacking Fastpasses is the best way to ensure you can ride the most attractions in one day.

Of course, the happiness doesn't stop when the sun goes down. Tokyo Disneyland is well known for its evening fireworks display and this nighttime event has also been given an overhaul for its year of celebration. Synched with the lit-up Cinderella castle and the colorful 'booms' and 'crackles' is a new 30th Anniversary song. In case you hadn't already caught onto the theme, the first line of the song encourages visitors to "Come on, let's go! Happiness is here!"

Enjoy Disneyland's 30th anniversary until March 20, 2014.

Jessie Giddens is a fourth-year ALT from Yamagata Prefecture. She claims to have memorised the entirety of Disney's 'Beauty and the Beast' though no one has the patience or interest in testing her. Like Belle, Jessie enjoys being a guest, and recommends that you too be a guest at Disneyland's 30th anniversary.



Need to know:

- Tickets and park info can be found at <http://www.tokyodisneyresort.co.jp/en/index.html> (English).

- It is recommended you purchase tickets in advance to save time at the gates. Tickets purchased online can be printed out or delivered to your door at a specified time. Protip: check both the English and Japanese sites, as prices may differ!

- Getting to Tokyo is easy by train or night bus. From Tokyo Station, take either the JR Keiyo or Musashino Lines to Maihama Station. From there, follow the crowds. Some night bus companies, such as Willer Express, offer morning drop off directly to the resort.

- Food is delicious and plentiful at Disneyland, but be prepared for queues. Some restaurants offer 'Priority Seating' which is like the Fastpass in that diners can return to the restaurant at a later time for faster service. For vegetarians that want a full meal rather than snacks, the Eastside Café offers pasta, salads, and a full course menu for non-meat eaters.

- Disney offers an omiyage home delivery service near the main entrance. Even chocolate can be sent in a refrigerated truck!

VOLUNTEERING

EDITORIAL Out of the Box and Without a Trail

Looking for competition and adventure? I could be your teammate and travel buddy if you so desire! On September 14th, I made the journey from Shimane Prefecture to Nagasaki Prefecture to take part in a scavenger hunt. Keep in mind I have never driven this distance alone and I was making a quick pit stop in Tagawa City in Fukuoka to pick up a man, Malcolm, who I had only Skyped with online in regards to him wanting a ride to the same event. The reason the event went over so well with me and the other challengers in the competition is that it catered to people who had been to Nagasaki, but wanted to see the sights that most people skip over and or do not know about. The Block 10 Road Trip Challenge and BBQ event was organized by Audrey Akcasu and Penny Fox.

Why it worked

The event worked because after you checked in and paid for the event, you were given a booklet that listed the recommended places to see (Power Spots), and side trips that you could take in between each Power Spot on the way to driving to the final destination in the city of Unzen, Nagasaki. Armed with where to go, I left with Team Purple to see a massive playground before eating the famed Sasebo Burger. Next we were off to a peacock farm before getting to a waterfall where most people got in by swinging off a rope. There were several helpers along the way who would have snacks and drinks set up for the challengers to have at the Power Spots. The goal of the trip for me was to make friends and to have a unique experience. The team I was on didn't complete all the Power Spots, but we had a blast! Once our team had arrived at the campsite and cabins we were treated



to a wonderful BBQ and listened to DJ and fellow Nagasaki ALT, Ray Arcega.

I cannot recommend enough that you take it upon yourself to travel outside your prefecture and to meet up with other people to share the beauty that is Japan.

How can you replicate this event?

First, think of two points in your prefecture that have several cool things to check out in between the start and finish. Do you have a cat café in your prefecture? A great place with an ocean view? How about a local delicacy? Consider how people will finish the event. Do you want the competitors to have a shared dinner and or spend the night at a campsite? This makes for a great way to socialize and not just for the competitors, but for other people who might not be able to take part in the challenge during the day.

THIS MONTH IN VOLUNTEERING...

For the October volunteering section the focus is on prefectural AJET chapters. The prefectural AJET chapters organize social events to bring together JETs and the Japanese community. Even when I travel to other prefectures, I can look forward to these social events. AJET chapters put on more than socials, they engage in grass-roots internationalization.

First, we have Sarah Jane Blenkhorn who works in Shimane Prefecture. The Shimane AJET chapter that she volunteers for has been fundraising money to help send students abroad to study English.

Next we have Sarah Hiscock from Hiroshima writing about the second annual charity art show that was organized to help raise money for Funakoshi, a small fishing village in Miyagi Prefecture that was torn apart by the tsunami.

Have an interesting story you want to share? Email me at michelle.castro@ajet.net and share it!



SPOTLIGHT



Sarah Hiscock, Tips for Hosting a Charity Art Show

Sarah Hiscock, scooter-riding volunteering crusader of Hiroshima prefecture recently helped organize a successful charity event in her community. She's got some great tips for following in their footsteps!

"Plan well in advance. Start by emailing people who want to display their work. Decide upon a charity, so you can sell the cause to people. People will be more willing to work to help you if they are aware of the cause you are supporting.

Consider opening up to more than just the JET community.

If enough interest is shown, book a venue a few months before your intended date. This will give volunteers enough time to prepare pieces for the show.

To help raise money, ask volunteers if they'd allow their pieces to be auctioned to guests.

Find a cheap venue. The less money paid for venue, the more money goes charity.

Why not try a bar, so people can buy their own refreshments? Not having to pay for refreshments would also add to the total raised. Bars may offer the venue for free, if you are bringing customers to them.

Good publicity will bring in the crowds. Hand out flyers, create

Facebook events, put up posters in schools.

Don't be shy with the ticket price. People are willing to pay money for a charitable cause."



SHIMANE AJET SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn, Shimane



The Shimane AJET Scholarship Fund is a financial aid program that provides students with a monetary grant to be used towards a study-abroad experience. Over the past seven years, the fund has been successful in helping senior and junior school students achieve their ambitions of studying English in a foreign country.

In the past year, Shimane AJET awarded three 200,000-yen scholarships to students, all from junior high school. The students, all girls, went to different countries: Australia, England and America. The scholarship was used for airfare and study-abroad programs checked and approved by Shimane AJET (the money is paid directly to the company organizing the program). The programs were all-inclusive and, including airfare, cost about 300,000 yen.

Shimane AJET's fundraising for the Scholarship Fund takes many forms. At the Shimane ALT Skill Development Conference in November, ALTs are asked to 'Man Up'—that is, to donate 10,000 yen to the fund. AJET also raises funds at events throughout the year, including the annual Summer Luau and more modest events such as Halloween bake sales and a book sale. This year, money was raised through sales of '1 <3 Shimane' t-shirts as well.

In late October of last year, information packages were sent out to ALTs in almost all of the all junior and senior high schools in Shimane. The detailed packages included: information about the Scholarship Fund in English and Japanese, for both ALTs and JTEs; promotional posters; a short promotional DVD to be shown in class; a lesson activity plan for introducing the fund during class; application forms; clippings from local newspapers showcasing past winners; tips for working with JTEs to encourage students to apply; and instructions on how to make a kairan, or office circular, to introduce the Scholarship Fund to all of the school staff.

Students who were interested had about two months before the mid-January deadline to talk to their parents about wanting to study abroad, find an English speaking country and study abroad program that suited them best, discuss the Scholarship with their teachers, and fill out the application form. This year, due to the

efforts of the Shimane ALTs to promote the Fund, approximately 24 students applied for the scholarship.

Interviews were held in two different cities in Shimane on a weekend in early February. Each student had a 15-minute interview. The interviewers included a junior high school ALT, a senior high school ALT and a neutral, non school-affiliated Japanese community member. The interviews were divided into three sections. The first section included set questions for which the students had prepared answers, such as what their goals were for studying abroad, and what kind of problems or challenges they anticipated. The second section was a free conversation, in which students talked with the interviewers on a variety of topics, such as hobbies, and interviewers could evaluate their communication skills in natural conversation. In the final section, students were given a picture and asked to describe it.

Winners were announced in early March, and a small award ceremony was held in May.

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn lives in Shimane Prefecture, the '47 most popular prefecture', where she is an ALT in high school. In her free time, she enjoys writing, taking pictures, composing haiku for fun, and dabbling in sports and Japanese cultural events.



BRIGHTER THAN TOMORROW: HIROSHIMA AJET'S CHARITY ART FESTIVAL

Sarah Hiscock, Hiroshima



Here in Hiroshima, we have a fantastically active and creative bunch of JETs. Every month the cultural grapevine is brimming with excitement ready to reveal news of the next DJ slot, taiko performance, or piece of art someone is working on. As an AJET representative during the 2011-2012 JET year, with influence from our predecessors the year before, I and the rest of the Hiroshima AJET team felt it important to recognise this creative flare and embrace it by working an event around it. Cue the first Hiroshima AJET Charity Art Bonanza.

11th March 2011 is a date etched into Japanese history; a day where Mother Nature erupted. Too many souls, lives and towns were destroyed by the events of that day. One such town was Funakoshi, a small fishing community in Miyagi prefecture. Estelle Herbert, then a second-year ALT in Hiroshima City, is a very talented documentary maker. Estelle stumbled upon Funakoshi during a volunteer trip to the disaster stricken Tohoku region in July 2011. Inspired by the determination, fight and positive attitudes of the fishermen despite the hardships that faced them, Estelle wanted to share the story of Funakoshi whilst helping the town get back on its feet. *Brighter Than Tomorrow* is both a fund raising campaign for Funakoshi and a work-in-progress documentary. We teamed up with Estelle to help raise money for her fantastic cause.

Held in Hiroshima City on 19th May 2012, approximately 50 visitors came to appreciate the works of nine talented JETs from across Hiroshima prefecture. Works varied from photos to embroidery, from fashion to paintings and even caricatures were available to purchase. A fee of 1,500 yen was charged for entry, and a variety of refreshments were on offer. An auction was held for some pieces of the exhibition, with all proceeds going towards the charity. All visitors were blown away by the artistic flair shown by our very own JETs. Estelle presented a trailer for her forthcoming documentary, providing an insight how the money raised would help. In total, approximately 90,000 yen was raised for *Brighter Than Tomorrow*.

The Hiroshima AJET team and Estelle hosted another successful fundraising art show this year, raising a further 48,000 yen for

Funakoshi, bringing the total from the two events to approximately 138,000 yen. A fantastic achievement for all teams involved. The art show is being planned again by the current AJET team, and we're hoping for this to become an ongoing annual event in the Hiroshima AJET calendar.

Find out more about Estelle's Funakoshi project at www.brighterthantomorrow.com



Sarah Hiscock is a 4th-year JET living in the small city of Fuchu, Hiroshima Prefecture. Most of her time is spent trying to decipher the near indecipherable Bingo Ben which is enthusiastically chatted to (at) her. Escapism comes in the form of heading up children's home volunteer visits in Onomichi (email kokorohiroshima@gmail.com if interested in joining us). Her favourite pastime is island hopping across the Seto Inland Sea on her Honda Vino 50cc, bringing a dose of Quadrophenia to Chugoku.

EVENTS

EDITORIAL What the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Mean

In the early morning hours of Sunday, September 8th, people all over Japan stayed up to watch the International Olympic Committee vote for the city to host the 2020 Summer Games. Wherever they were, at bars in Shibuya or watch-parties at a friend's home, they celebrated with glee.

That wasn't me, though. I learned about the nomination from social media when I woke up late that Sunday morning. Facebook friends were shouting their congratulations and yippies, while the journalists I follow on Twitter took the news with a few grains of salt and offered measured responses, running the wide spectrum of opinion and nuanced news.

Watching the news unfold from inside Japan has been an advantage, of course. Japanese friends have said in conversation that they are concerned about the image of Japan, that maybe people are afraid to visit because of nuclear safety issues. Some are hopeful the Olympics will have a positive effect on the economy, and some are very distrustful of TEPCO and the Japanese government, especially after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told the IOC that the Fukushima Daiichi plant disaster "has never done and will never do any damage to Tokyo."

"How insulting," one friend said. "Does he think we and the world are stupid?"

That Tokyo will be seeing Olympic action has personal significance to me, even though I most likely will not be living in Japan seven years from now. I work and live at the center of the Kanto plain, locked deep in Tokyo suburbia. I can see from my high

school's shokuin shitsu, about a kilometer away, Saitama Stadium 2002, which was built to host the 2002 FIFA World Cup. A few times a year the stadium hosts national soccer games, and sometimes my school's superb soccer team gets the chance to play in the stadium, usually in prefectural playoff games. (Also, my school gave rise to Eiji Kawashima, Japan national team's goalkeeper. We take our soccer seriously.)

Saitama Stadium will be a venue during the 2020 Olympic games. I consider the students who will be at my school that year and the pride they will have. Not only professional Japanese soccer teams and World Cup teams will have played there, but Olympians from all over the world will run the same field that those students do. Such inspiration is infectious, and, for me, that is the biggest highlight of the 2020 Olympics.

2020 is a long time off, though, and there are plenty of unknowns that should be addressed before then. Here's hoping that while venues are being built and renovated, the still-recovering communities in tsunami-ravaged Tohoku will receive the government aid promised to them, and that Tokyo continues to be the safe hands that Prime Minister Abe sold to the IOC.

What was your response to the announcement? What impact do you think the Games will have on Japan? Let us know at connect.events@ajet.net.

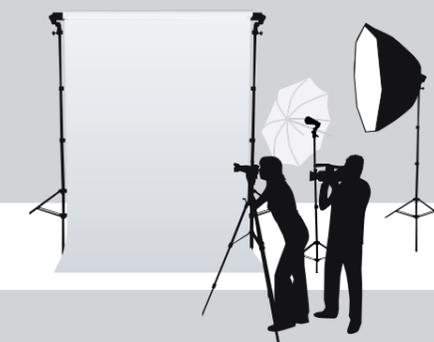
THIS MONTH IN EVENTS...

This month's Events section is an embarrassment of riches, including three great articles and an events calendar painstakingly curated by yours truly.

First, former JET Margaret Smith sets the scene for a unique contemporary art festival in her self-described second home, Nakanojo-machi in Gunma. Emma Tome, an ALT in Okinawa, delves into cultural binaries in her reflection of a popular Okinawa event, the *Otsuna hiki*. And last, but never least, Saitama CIR Eden Aquino gives us some insight into one of Japan's less-traveled locales, Gifu, and one of its most important cultural events. His travelogue recounts his *Obon* holiday spent with fellow Brazilian JETs and the fun they had together at the Gujo Odori.

The Events section's mainstay calendar features interesting events from all over Japan, so check it out and try something new in your neck of the woods. October is also the advent of *kouyou* season, when people flock to the mountains to take in scenes of multi-hued leaves. If you find yourself in Hokkaido or Tohoku this month, I hope you remember this month's "5 Places" list, and take a detour to see some of the very best nature Japan has.

As always, send any thoughts, questions, or miscellany to connect.events@ajet.net.



SPOTLIGHT

5 Places for Great Kouyou, Eastern Edition

What sakura and hanami are to spring, *kouyou*, or leaf viewing, is to autumn. Fall colors rightfully receive their fair share of fanfare in Japan. While late September ushers in the first fall foliage in the coolest parts of Japan, Hokkaido and Tohoku spend October blanketed in vibrant greens, oranges, reds, and yellows. Treat yourself to this seasonal event and travel!

1. Daisetsuzan – Hokkaido's largest national park, bigger than some prefectures, is pristine. Native wildlife, such as Ezo deer and Hokkaido brown bear, wander the deep gorges, lakes, rivers, and valleys.
<http://www.daisetsuzan.or.jp/english.html>

2. Lake Towada & Oirase Stream – On this large caldera lake in Aomori, hop on a sightseeing boat and enjoy the (largely) unspoiled nature. Oirase is busier, but just as brilliant. *Kouyou*-goers can walk along the stream for miles.
<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3778.html>

3. Hachimantai – This plateau spanning Iwate and Akita offers a different kind of botanic appreciation with its rich volcanic soil, multi-colored marshes and lakes, alpine views, and an abundance of hot springs.
<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3651.html>

4. Karuizawa – The most centrally accessible place on this list—about an hour by Shinkansen from Tokyo to Nagano — and certainly the most posh. Rent a bicycle and spin past ponds, parks, and modern architecture while admiring the momiji.

<http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/destinations/karuizawa.html>

5. Subaru Line – If you're feeling road trippy, take your time traveling this toll road through Shizuoka and Yamanashi's forests and open air, with clear views of Mt. Fuji and its Five Lakes.

Share your favorite *kouyou* spot with us at connect.events@ajet.net.



OKINAWA'S TSUNA-HIKI: THE TUG OF WAR

Emma Tome, Okinawa



and that my lack of language ability kept me from helping much at all. I saw one young man blatantly ignoring the coordinators. He tried to start his own rhythm, in a gradually quickening pace. For a while, the crowd also accelerated their pulling and yelling before relenting, exhausted.

The contest had nothing to do with strength, I thought, yet these guys were so interested in putting theirs on display. How could your bench press ever matter amidst a crowd of thousands? Otsuna Hiki means "rope pull", but the sport is known to Americans as a tug of war. Perhaps something is lost in translation. Less about which side might emerge victorious, the Otsuna Hiki is a celebration of community, a test of collective consciousness.

After about twenty minutes of pulling, my side lost.

I brought my pocketknife, hearing that win or lose, participants can cut off a piece of the rope and bring it home for good luck. I sliced and pocketed some short sections; offered one to the guy standing beside me, who politely declined. I saw my compatriots walking about Naha that night, some with huge leg-width sections of the rope draped around their shoulders like graduation cords.

Some of my ALT friends in Naha shared heartening stories about feisty Okinawan grandmothers latching onto the rope with garden gloves, gleefully yelling and rallying their sections in time. From my corner of the rope-pull, I came away feeling especially frustrated with the military here. I saw a level of insensitivity and machismo that I wanted nothing to do with. I felt embarrassed.

Was I being hypocritical? I, too, had elbowed my way through the crowds to grab a chunk of the rope. My two months' tenure in Naha hardly gave me more claim to this ritual than any of the other Americans standing next to me. I found myself clinging to the fact that my father is Okinawan—yet also realizing how little this, and how I could or couldn't "pass" as Okinawan, really meant.

Still, there was nothing inauthentic about that day. It was irrefutably a celebration of Okinawa, with all its tensions and contradictions. There had to be the iPhone-wielding bros crowding the view of the obasans behind them. The rope itself, made by hand of straw in the old Ryukyu style on the Naha air base, is draped along the US-built highway that traces the old train route destroyed in World War II. Okinawa serves as the



borderland between the US and Japan. In a sense, where the east and west sides of the city meet, so too do the East and West sides of the world. On the ground, you smell and feel the sticky sweat from the person beside you. From above, it's all cheers and the sway of the crowd, here to pull in another year of good luck.

Emma Tome is a 2nd-year high school ALT in Naha, Okinawa. She will terribly miss the goya from her landlord's terrace when she has to move back to California.

This year's Naha Otsuna Hiki will be October 13. For more information, visit <http://www.naha-otsunahiki.org/en/>. Do you have any stories or opinions to share? Let us know at connect.events@ajet.net.



I arrived at the intersection of Highway 58 and Kumoji Dori for the Naha Otsuna Hiki. I searched the clogged sidewalks for my fellow first-year ALTs, excited to take part in the largest tug of war in the world. Now a yearly October contest between the East and West sides of the city, the Otsuna Hiki was originally conducted only on auspicious political occasions to bring luck, health, and a good harvest. Most cities and villages in Okinawa have an Otsuna Hiki, but Naha's, drawing over two hundred fifty thousand participants and spectators, is by far the largest and best known.

Expecting a crowd that looked like the sea of black hair at my school assemblies, I thought it would be easy to spot my friends from a distance. Instead, about half the people around me had the telltale buzz-cuts, muscle-tight t-shirts, and tattoos worn by American soldiers. I was hearing more English than I had since arriving in Japan. Two girls chatted beside me.

"I wish America had festivals like this."

"Well, I mean, we kind of do."

"Like what?"

"I mean, we have fairs..."

"But no, I mean like look at all these samurai dudes. America doesn't have anything this...."

"Retarded?"

In my search for authenticity, I had company. The "samurai dudes" were actors playing Ryukyu Kingdom monarchs, who stage a sword fight, followed by karate demonstrations, before the contest begins. I tried to imagine what the first Naha Otsuna Hiki in 1701 looked like. A dusty road, a small handmade rope, a crowd perhaps in the hundreds, real stoic kings, not actors, presiding. Today, about 15,000 people pull on a rope 200 meters long, 40 tons heavy, and at least a meter wide, but still painstakingly handmade.

Before the contest begins, the two halves of the rope must be pulled to the middle of the intersection and joined together by a huge tree-trunk-sized wooden post. The East side went first. A team of enthusiastic leaders, representing the fourteen wards of the city, stood on top of the central rope, and blowing whistles and waving flags to coordinate our pulls.

After minutes of tugging disjointedly against the huge weight of the rope, it budged. A giddy wave of recognition overtook us. The following pulls felt effortless. Watching this enormous mass gliding along the road beside us simply did not equate with the lack of individual effort. It was the small miracle of thousands of people managing to work together at once.

When it was the West side's turn to pull their rope to the center, the East team misinterpreted the calls intended for the West, and pulled the east rope back. It crushed one of the caller's feet, leaving a small puddle of blood on the pavement as he was helped away.

I was embarrassed by the way some Americans participating seemed to feel so put upon by the Japanese instruction,

"I WISH
AMERICA
HAD
FESTIVALS
LIKE THIS."



GIFU'S GUJO ODORI

Eden Aquino, Saitama

What comes to your mind when someone asks for some hints about sightseeing in Japan? Probably Tokyo, with its mega famous spots like Asakusa, Harajuku, Shibuya, Shinjuku, Ginza, or other places like Kyoto, Nara and Osaka. Those places are amazing, but this time I'd like to write about a prefecture that most tourists (and even Japanese residents) don't visit: Gifu.

Gifu is located in the central region of Japan (chubu chihou), sharing borders with seven other prefectures. Because it is in the middle of Honshu, Gifu has been important as the crossroads connecting east and west Japan. It has been the site of many decisive battles throughout Japan's history. During the Sengoku period (1478–1605), people said that if you control Gifu Prefecture, you control Japan.

My Brazilian friends and I decided to have fun around Gifu Prefecture for three reasons. First, since we were going to travel in a group of 5 and we live far away from each other (Hyogo, Shiga, Gifu, and me in Saitama), we decided to meet in a central place. Second, Gifu has many festivals and historical places, including a very famous UNESCO World Heritage site. Finally, one friend from the group invited us to stay at his place, which means no lodging expenses.



Day 1

The adventure started on a Thursday morning, when we met in the famous World Heritage site of Gifu Prefecture: the Traditional Housing in Shirakawa-go. Since Shirakawa-go is a remote region in the mountains of Gifu, access is not easy. There are no trains around the region, so the best way to get there is to take a bus. After arriving in Shirakawa-go, you will find the information center, where there are maps in many languages, restrooms, and lockers.

From the information center, the observatory is a 42-minute walk. That walk is a good chance to enjoy the atmosphere of the village. At the top is the best panoramic view of Shirakawa-go. There are some staff who can speak in different languages (they welcomed us in Portuguese!). They will take photos of you or your group (with your camera, of course), or you can pay for the professional picture they will take of you. When going back, if you are tired of walking, take the microbus back to the bottom of the mountain for 200 yen.

Shirakawa-go is great every time of the year; every season has its own particular scenery. We went during summer, and the vivid blue sky and the beautiful green fields were breathtaking! During autumn you can see the orange, yellow, and red colors of the leaves, and in the winter you can enjoy the traditional houses covered in snow.

Our day trip ended when we took the three-hour bus ride back to Gifu City, going through Gujo Hachiman. On the trip back to Gifu, prepare your camera for the beautiful lakes, forests and mountains.

Day 2

Now it was time for some Brazilian barbecue! The Nagara River is near my friend's place. We biked to the river, prepared the food (meat, salad, and handmade *onigiri*), drinks, and tools to make the fire and the grill. It was really hot, so we decided to stay below the bridge, right next to the river.

Barbecuing won't cost you much since you're doing it with your friends and can share the expenses. Even though our Brazilian JET family is not that big (15 members spread all over Japan), we are close and always try to meet somehow, whether it is traveling together, or exchanging weekly emails to check how everybody is doing at work and at home.

After eating a lot of Brazilian-style BBQ, it was time to go home and get ready for the next adventure of the day: the *Gujo Odori* Dance Festival! Gujo Odori takes place in Gujo City, northeast of Gifu City. The Gujo Odori Dance Festival started more than 400 years ago and continues today during the four days of *Obon* holiday in mid-August. This year it was held from August 14-17.

People from all ages participate in this dance festival by dancing around the stage from 20:00 to 4:00 the next morning! That may sound crazy, but the event is crowded and really fun. The people inside the stage keep singing and playing, and we dance, moving around the street. They sing the same four songs all night long, and even if you don't know the dance steps, you can get inside the circle and imitate people around you. The main point is have fun dancing and listening to their traditional songs. You will see people dressed in everything from traditional summer clothes like *yukata* and *jinbei*, to *karate* or *judo* boys, to cosplays of random characters.

Some hints about the festival: Take some money with you to buy drinks and food. There are lots of vending machines and food carts. Bring your camera to take photos or record videos. Since Gujo is located in a high valley, even in summer the weather is pleasant. Access to and from this city is not that easy, especially if you stay to the end of the event. There is only one train station (Gujo Hachiman) with a special train operating during the event (the three times are 1:30, 3:30, and 4:55 am). Take one of those trains if you are planning to go back before the event is over. Or





you can wait until the morning and take the first bus back to Gifu City, around 6:00 am.

Gujo is a small, traditional castle town. During the all-night-long dance festival, you can see the illuminated castle tower on top of the mountain and listen to the river while walking down the narrow streets. Old-style houses, restaurants and souvenir shops abound, making this city a beautiful and pleasant place for those who like the traditional Japanese atmosphere.

Day 3

Our last day in Gifu started as we were still dancing in the Gujo Odori! This time we stayed until 2:30 am and walked to the station to take the 3:30 train home. It takes time from Gujo to Gifu by train because you have to transfer to some other lines, but, since you are really tired after dancing all night long, you can take this opportunity to sleep. Decide amongst your friends who will sleep and who will pay attention to what station you must transfer at. If you are the one who is going to be awake, don't worry! You will get the chance to photograph your friends' faces while they are sleeping like a dead person. Believe me, it's really fun!

Arriving back at Gifu City at around 7:00 am, it was time to get a good sleep! It was Saturday and we still had lots of places to visit and things to do around Gifu. After waking up and having lunch together, we decided to go to a haunted house! Have you guys heard about the *Kuchisake-onna* (Slit-mouthed Woman)? It's said that she is a woman who was mutilated by a jealous husband and returns as a malicious spirit. According to Japanese legend, she kidnaps and kills children who are walking alone at night. Now, think about going to a house filled with this woman's spirit. That was my first experience in a place like this, and I must confess I had a lot of fun (despite the fact that I ran away screaming, leaving my friends alone in the house). Now I know how I will behave when something terrifying appears in front of me.

There are other places I must visit and experience around Gifu, but in only three days we had fun taking in a World Heritage site, barbecuing together, dancing in a traditional Japanese festival, and going to a haunted house. Invite some friends and plan a trip together. It doesn't matter if it's going to be in a rural area, and it doesn't even need to be a sightseeing spot. We can make any place a good and pleasant environment to strengthen bonds with friends while discovering new places.

Eden Aquino is a 3rd-year CIR from Brazil living in Saitama. He really loves ice cream, photography, Japanese horror movies, and catching up with friends all over Japan.

Want to share your experiences in Japan? Send them to connect.events@ajet.net! We'd love to hear from you.



GUNMA'S NAKANOJO BIENIALE

Margaret Smith, Gunma



On a sunny Japanese summer day in 2009, I left the comfort of my supervisor's air-conditioned car and found myself in Nakanojo, a small town in the mountains of northwestern Gunma Prefecture. This small rural town is like many in Japan, surrounded by breathtaking nature, and filled with warm-hearted people proud and protective of their unique history. And like many other rural communities, Nakanojo has seen a steady decline in population leaving the town with schools, offices, and factories no longer needed. Nakanojo seemed to me a sad skeleton of what rural Japan once was...until I looked a little closer.

Long before my arrival on the scene, the film *Nemuru Otoko* was filmed in Nakanojo, awakening the town's interest in modern art. The town searched for a way to highlight Nakanojo's unique artistic flavor, and, as a result, the Biennale Art Festival was born. When it was first held in 2007, Biennale welcomed 48,000 visitors during its 23-day run. Since then, it has grown considerably, welcoming over 3,520,000 visitors to the 2011 Biennale!

There are many aspects of Biennale that set it apart from other similar art festivals. The most obvious is the number and variation of styles and mediums represented. Many art shows choose one medium such as watercolor or photography, or a specific artist to feature. Biennale however features everything from sculpting, oil painting, performance art, photography, and woodcarving created by artists from all over Japan.

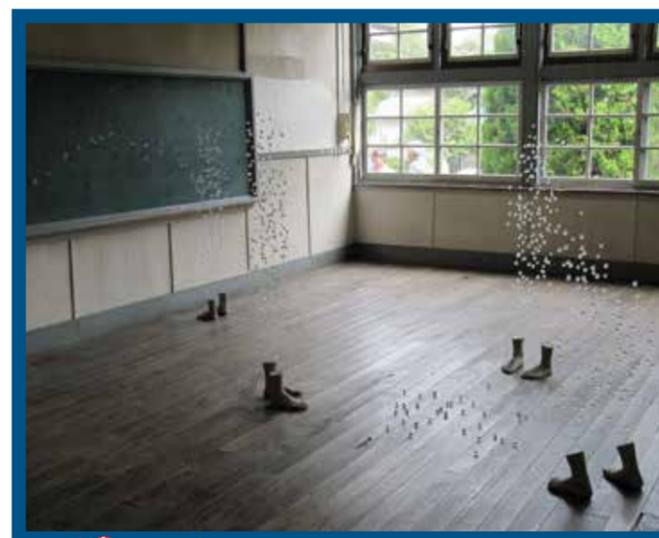
Biennale's choice of venues also sets it apart from your average art show. As the town's population has gradually declined, the number of vacant schools, factories, and public buildings has increased. Biennale has chosen to house exhibits in these forgotten landmarks, blending modern art with the town's history and connecting Japan's past to its future.

I attended the art festival first in 2009 with few expectations, and left impressed by the way Nakanojo had taken pieces of its history, and blended them seamlessly with the art of today, revitalizing and reinventing itself. Biennale, for me, was a window into the heart and soul of the unique little town of Nakanojo.

Nakanojo once again opens its doors for the fourth Biennale art festival from September 13 to October 14, 2013. The event hosts 113 artists' work in 37 venues throughout the town. Additional ticket, transportation, and scheduling information can be found on the event's website: nakanojo-biennale.com (Japanese), nakanojo-biennale.com/english (English).

Margaret Smith was an ALT in Gunma Prefecture from 2009-2013. Though she is currently seeking new adventures elsewhere, she hopes to continue to be a voice for the unique charms of her second home, Gunma. Get other travel ideas for Gunma from her blog titled *Jomo Karuta-The Tour* (<http://jmomargo.blogspot.jp/>)

Send us your questions, comments, and feedback at connect.events@ajet.net!



EVENTS CALENDAR: OCTOBER

Remember: every link in Connect is clickable!

BLOCK 1

38th Sapporo Marathon Oct. 6

Sapporo, Hokkaido
Put on your running shoes and head to this citizens' marathon. There is a course for everyone, from a 2-km, all-ages run; to a 5-km wheelchair course; to a half marathon.
<http://www.shsf.jp/satumara/>

BLOCK 2

Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival Oct. 10–17

Yamagata, Yamagata
This biennial film fest is the first in Asia to feature documentaries. Films are screened in the International Competition, and the New Asian Currents competition introduces young filmmakers from all over Asia. The documentary film *Live Your Dream* will be screened. *Live Your Dream* is about Miyagi JET Taylor Anderson, who was lost in the events of the March 11th disasters, and honors her life and work in Japan.
<http://www.yidff.jp/home-e.html>

Marimo Matsuri Oct. 8–10 Kushiro, Hokkaido

What Sapporo's *Yuki Matsuri* is to Western Hokkaido, *Marimo Matsuri* is to Eastern Hokkaido. Since 1950, Hokkaido's native Ainu have led a 3-day celebration in appreciation of Lake Akan's rare, round ball of algae, the *marimo*.
<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/marimo.html>

Ooma Maguro Matsuri Oct. 26–27 Ooma, Aomori

This isolated town on Honshu's northernmost peninsula is famous for its large *hon maguro*, or true tuna, which fetches handsome prices at Tokyo's Tsukiji market. In October the fish are revered at a fest full of grilled seafood stalls and *enka*, Japanese folk songs.
<http://oma-wide.net/event.html>

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.

BLOCK 3

Tsuchiura All-Japan Fireworks Competition Oct. 5

Tsuchiura, Ibaraki
One of Japan's best *hanabi taikai*—and the last of the season—with more than 20,000 fireworks. Many blooms are prototypes for next year's fireworks festivals.
<http://www.ibarakiguide.jp/en/season/autumn.html>

Iizaka Kenka Matsuri Oct. 4–6 Fukushima, Fukushima

One of Japan's "big 3" *kenka*, or fighting, festivals. Iizaka does its tribute to Hachiman—the Japanese god of war—right, with dueling *mikoshi* and fast *taikoto* keep the festival's pulse racing.
<http://japan-attractions.jp/festivals/iizaka-kenka-fes2013/>

Echigo Kenshin Sake Festival 2013 Oct. 26–27 Joetsu, Niigata

Niigata is known for its excellent sake, and this event features 18 local sake breweries, as well as wine and beer.
<http://kenshinsake.com/>

Nikko Toshogu Grand Autumn Festival Oct. 16–17 Nikko, Tochigi

If you're into samurai culture, make your way to Nikko for this historic festival. Hundreds of men dress as samurai warriors, some battle in *Yabusame*, or archery on horseback. The event is also a reenactment of Ieyasu Tokugawa's funeral.
<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/shukitaisai.html>

Saitama Criterium Oct. 26 Saitama City

The Tour de France comes to the Kanto area in this first-ever cycling event. 60 riders—30 Japanese, 30 international—will race along a 2.7-km circuit in the city center, while spectators can enjoy cycle-themed activities.
<http://saitama-criterium.jp/>

Shiojiri Winery Festa Oct. 26–27 Shiojiri, Nagano

Enjoy some of Japan's oldest viticulture by touring Kikyogahara's hillside vineyards with original lacquer wine glasses. Winery trip is 10:00 – 16:00, 3000 yen; Nouveau party is 18:00 – 20:00 (Sat. only), 4000 yen.
<http://www.city.shiojiri.nagano.jp/event/kanko/winefes.html>

*The block colours are coordinated to the map.

BLOCK 4

CEATEC JAPAN 2013

Oct. 1–5

Chiba, Chiba

The Combined Exhibition of Advanced Technologies descends upon Makuhari Messe with this year's theme of "Smart Innovation: Technology for Future Society and Lifestyles."

<http://www.ceatec.com/2013/en/>

Japan Scottish Highland Games

Oct. 6

Chiba, Chiba

Yes! A legit Scottish event on the green fields of Chiba, complete with traditional foods, beers and whiskeys for sample and sale, and all those crazy games you've heard about. Entrance is 1500 yen for adults, children are free.

<http://www.st-andrews-society.com/highlandgames2013>

The non-profit IVG is looking for volunteers to spend an hour or two playing games with kids at the Scottish Highland Games on Sun. Oct. 6 (AJET Block 4, Chiba). Games include water relays, sack races, three-legged races, tug of war, and a water balloon catch, among others. For more information, email jennifermarkham@hotmail.com

BLOCK 7

2013 F1 Japanese Grand Prix

Oct. 11–13

Suzuka, Mie

Speed fiends can get their racing fix this month. Formula 1 racing is not cheap, but diehards may find some decently priced grandstand seats. Bonus: Motopia, a racing-theme amusement park, is adjacent to the track.

<http://www.suzukacircuit.jp/f1/>

Kishiwada Danjiri Matsuri

Oct. 12–13

Kishiwada, Osaka

More than 40 *danjiri*, large wooden carts, carry teams of people and race through the streets of Kishiwada. *Danjiri* races are famous from their recklessness; home and personal injuries are common after a *danjiri* crash.

<http://www.city.kishiwada.osaka.jp/site/danjiri/>

BLOCK 8

Konpira Shrine Reisai

Oct. 10

Kotohira, Kagawa

This shrine's main annual *matsuri* is a spectacular sight: hundreds of people escort the goddess of the sea down more than 1,300 steps by torchlight.

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/shritemp/kotohiragu.html>

Yokohama Jazz Promenade

Oct. 12–13

Yokohama, Kanagawa

Japan's largest jazz festival celebrates 20 years. More than 2,000 musicians and 100,000 jazz lovers come to Yokohama for this event. Performances are in concert halls, famous Yokohama landmarks, and even on the streets.

<http://jazzpro.jp/en.php>

Yokohama Oktoberfest

Oct. 4–20

Yokohama, Kanagawa

The Big One! Japan's largest beer festival since its start in 2002, it offers more than 70 kinds of beer, from authentic German Oktoberfest beers to local brews. Chow down on sauerkraut and sausages and listen to live German music.

<http://www.okt-fest.jp/okt-ykhm2013-2.html>

Tokyo International Film Festival

Oct. 17–25

Roppongi, Tokyo

TIFF enters its 26th year as one of Asia's biggest and best film fests, featuring films in a variety of genres.

Tickets are for sale online from Oct. 5. <http://tiff.yahoo.co.jp/2013/en/>

BLOCK 9

Tottori Burger Festa

Oct. 13–14

Tottori, Tottori

Japan's biggest burger fest is back for a third year. Competitors from all over Japan come together to prove their burger skills, but only one will leave a winner. If you're into creative burgers with local flair, this is the place to be.

<http://www.tottori-bf.jp/>

Hiroshima Food Festival

Oct. 26–27

Hiroshima, Hiroshima

Put on your stretch pants and enjoy one of Chugoku's biggest food fests. The grounds of Hiroshima Castle and Chuo Park host vendors from all 23 cities and towns in Hiroshima-ken. The fest includes a market, dance performances, and live musical acts.

<http://www.rcc.net/event/foodfestival/2013/>

Setouchi Triennale

Oct. 5–Nov. 4

Various islands of the Seto Inland Sea

This art festival spans several islands, includes many artists and volunteer opportunities, and aims to return "vitality to the islands of the Setouchi Area, where nature and people harmonize together."

<http://www.setouchi-artfest.jp/en/>

BLOCK 5

Gifu Nobunaga Festival

Oct. 5–6

Gifu, Gifu

Participants of one of downtown Gifu City's most important festivals, honoring the shogun Oda Nobunaga, can enjoy parades and processions, a carnival, a flea market, and even a little firearm action.

http://www.gifucvb.or.jp/en/02_event/02_06.html

Nagoya Matsuri

Oct. 19–20

Nagoya, Aichi

The biggest autumn event in Nagoya: a festival honoring Japan unification with the Parade of Three Heroes: Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu.

<http://www.nagoya-festival.jp/>

Tokyo Designers Week 2013

Oct. 26–Nov. 4

Shinjuku, Tokyo

The 28th annual arts and design festival returns to showcase international talent in architecture, interior design, product design, and graphic design, among other categories. Adult tickets are 2500 yen.

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

BLOCK 10

Saga International Balloon Festival

Oct. 31–Nov. 4

Saga, Saga

Head to the Kase riverside for this (free!) sporting event, considered one of the world's best ballooning competitions.

<http://www.sibf.jp/e/>

Nagasaki Kunchi Festival

Oct. 7–9

Nagasaki, Nagasaki

An old, exotic fest with true international flair: *odoricho* parade with their unique *kasaboko*, and participants do the Chinese dragon dance and Dutch *Oranda Manzai*.

<http://www.at-nagasaki.jp/foreign/english/kunchi/>

Champon Festival

Oct. 20

Kitakyushu, Fukuoka

This event's motto is No Champon, No Life! If you're a fan of this Kyushu delicacy, or even if you aren't, skip breakfast and indulge.

<http://japan-attractions.jp/food/champon-festival-in-tobata2013/>

BLOCK 6

All Japan Ninja Championship vol. 30

Oct. 13

Koka, Shiga

For ¥1000 you can spend your afternoon following the fancy ninja moves of male and female aspiring ninjas (who also dress the part).

<http://koka.ninpou.jp/contest/top.html>

Kyoto Sake Summit 2013

Oct. 12

Kyoto, Kyoto

Nihonshu brewers and lovers come to Kyoto for an event of exhibitions, presentations, limitless tasting, and traditional Kyoto-area food and handicraft vendors. Adv. Ticket purchase required: 2200 yen for 2 hours.

<http://www.kyoto-sake.com/event/1349>

Jidai Matsuri

Oct. 22

Kyoto, Kyoto

Also known as the Festival of Eras, this event commemorates the founding of Kyoto as capital city in 794. More than 2,000 people parade in groups, dressed in costumes representing different eras of the city's long history.

<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3960.html>

Country Gold

Oct. 16

Minamiaso, Kumamoto

If you love country music, or just want to see Japanese folks dress like country stars and line dance, visit the world's largest outdoor music venue, Aspecta, at the foot of Mt Aso. Advance tickets are 7,000 yen, and 8,000 yen the day of.

<http://www.countrygold.net/>

Iheya Moonlight Marathon

Oct. 19

Iheya and Noho, Okinawa

1,200 people race in the only official night marathon in Japan!

<http://www.vill.ihaya.okinawa.jp/index.jsp>

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 every month who's doing something interesting or praiseworthy. From fashionistas to volunteering superheros to master chefs, tell us about them and what they do! Can't pick just one JET to Spotlight? Tell us about a group, a town, or an event! As long as JETs 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 and feature them on online for the JET community to vote on. The highest-voted photo will be the cover for all to see! Email all photo submissions to contest@ajet.net. September's theme will be "Beginnings," so start thinking and start sending!

HAIKU CONTEST

Each month Connect will feature a haiku from one of 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 your haiku to contest@ajet.net.

CONNECT HAIKU AND PHOTO CONTESTS

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

You've already seen Adam Carter's winning photo this month. Here are all the fantastic submissions we received!



"Untitled" – Daniel Brooks, Yamagata



"Untitled 2" – Daniel Brooks, Yamagata



"Ash Sunday in Kagoshima" – Adam Carter, Kagoshima



* Best Photo
with Too Low
a Resolution

"Full Moon Makes the Rice Bloom" – Jeff Cheney, Aichi



"Nagasaki Chinatown" – Scott Kawaguchi, Oita

GET
INVOLVED
WITH
CONNECT

HAIKU

Washiki toilet
In times of desperation
Ultimate sadness
☞ Daniel Brooks, Yamagata

Trampled, blood and grey
Ochre, pitch, and primal clay
Sun dark spears in sway.
☞ Giuseppe di Martino, Yamagata

I wrote a haiku
Though, if it does get published
Please don't print my name
☞ Elie Vogel, Fukushima





¥1,000 Discounts for A Jets!



STA TRAVEL

is the world's largest travel company for all people who love to travel. Of course, we are here in Japan to supply a unique travel experience personalized just for AJETs members!!

Ikebukuro Branch Head Office

wp@statravel.co.jp

or 03-5391-2922

Global Centre

Takadanobaba Branch

tbb@statravel.co.jp

or 03-5287-3543

en.statravel.co.jp



Early Bird Special during the Christmas Holidays!

Happy Christmas in Hometown!



>>> London

Return from JPY 43,000~

>>> L.A.

Return from JPY 38,000~

>>> Sydney

Return from JPY 52,000~

>>> New York

Return from JPY 50,000~

>>> Vancouver

Return from JPY 40,000~

>>> Bangkok

Return from JPY 39,000~

* The above flights will depart at Narita Airport. Please ask us depart from except Narita Airport.

* Tax & fuel surcharges are not included in the above prices. * The above fare will be changed subject to departure date and availability.

AJET

CONNECT

magazine