

AJET CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

DECEMBER 2015

INSIGHT INTO THE JAPANESE WINTER

ENTERTAINMENT FOR A COZY WINTER

A TALK WITH A FAMOUS FACE IN THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

A GREY CHRISTMAS IN THAILAND

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS: JAPANESE RUGBY AT ITS FINEST



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

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello! Welcome to the December Issue of the Connect magazine.

It's been 4 months since the new batch of JETs arrived, have many things changed about you? For others, how has the year treated you? Are you looking forward to the upcoming winter?

Keeping with the theme of winter, in this month's issue, we have an insight into the cold Japanese winter, a run down on the entertainment you can enjoy this cold season, a restaurant in the heart and hearts of the LGBTQ community, and then, in an attempt to warm us up, a childhood elephant fantasy becomes reality in the warmer regions of Thailand.

Recent media coverage has us focused on the atrocities that have happened in a particular country. However, I ask that if you so wish to use your kind thoughts and wishes, please use them for all those in need and who struggle on a regular basis, too. Struggles have many sources and forms, and although an individual may not be able to change the face of fear, knowledge of these events can begin the transition.

Once again, thank you to the whole Connect team and our wonderful contributors for all the hard work and great content this month.

I wish you all a great holiday season, whether you'll be in Japan, back home, or abroad hunting the treasures of the world. I hope you've reached the goals you set yourself this year, and I wish you all the luck with your aspirations for the next.

Rajeev Rahela
Head Editor
2nd-year Gifu ALT



NEWS & EVENTS

NEWS EDITOR

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Margaret Pickard

The news and winter can both often be quite dark. Light up the world and love one another!

EVENTS EDITOR

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Jennifer Sanchez

Here's to (finally) going home (in two years) for the holidays. Please don't kill me, mum XD

 Ashley Dorrell

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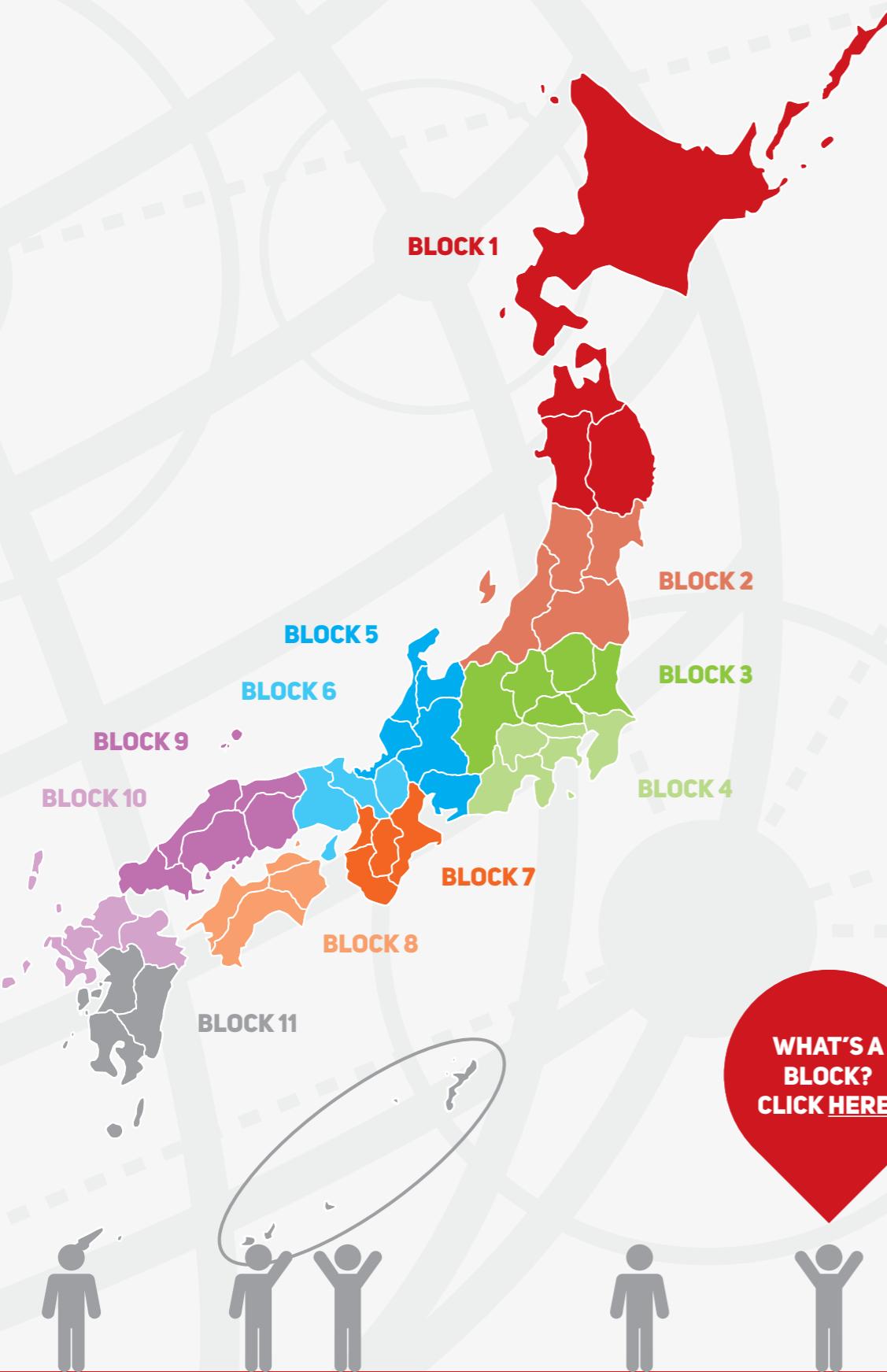
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EVENTS CALENDAR

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER



1

GERMAN CHRISTMAS MARKET

Until 24 December 2015
Odori Park 2-chome, Sapporo
City, Hokkaido
[Website](#)



2

HOROHADO MATSURI

04 December 2015
1861, Kubotamachi,
Yonezawa City, Yamagata
[Website](#)



3

ILLUMINATION ON EACH STATION ON WATARASE KEIKOKU RAILWAY

6 December 2015
Stationson Watarase Keikoku Railway, Midori City to Kiryu City, Gunma
[Website](#)

CHICHIBU NIGHT FESTIVAL

02-03 December 2015
Chichibu Shrine, Saitama
[Website](#)

HEIAN ERA ART EXHIBIT

13 December 2015
Oshu Archaeological Research Center, Oshu City, Iwate
[Website](#)

NAMAHAGE FESTIVAL

31 December 2015
Throughout Oga City, Akita
[Website](#)





GISHISAI

14 December 2015
Sengakuji, Minatoku, Tokyo
[Website](#)

AFRICA CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

24-25 December 2015
5-11-3, Sagamihara,
Chuo-ku, Sagamihara-shi,
Kanagawa 252-0231
[Website](#)

ATAMI FIREWORKS

6, 13, 23 December 2015
Atami, Shizuoka
[Website](#)



TOYAMA DISCO NIGHT

19 December 2015
3-3-22 Frangipani Building
2F, Sogawa, Toyama City,
Toyama
[Website](#)



OKERA MAIRI

31 December 2015
Yasakajinja, Kyoto
[Website](#)

ARASHIYAMA HANATORO

11-20 December 2015
Higashiyama District, Kyoto
[Website](#)

AKO GISHI

14 December 2015
Ako Castle, Hyogo Prefecture
[Website](#)

KOBE LUMINARIE

4-13 December 2015
From the Former Foreign
Settlement of Kobe to
Higashi Yuenchi Park,
Hyogo.
[Website](#)



RAMEN EXPO 2015

11-13, 18-20, 23-27
December 2015
565-0826, Senri EXPO Park,
Suita City, Osaka
[Website](#)

KASUGA WAKAMIYA FESTIVAL

15-18 December 2015
Kasuga Taishia Shrine, Nara
[Website](#)

SHIRARAHAMA ILLUMINATION "WHITE SAND PROMENADE"

01 December 2015 to 31
January 2016
Shirarahama Swiming Area,
Wakayama
[Website](#)



TAKAMATSU WINTER FESTIVAL

19-24 December 2015
Chuo Park, Takamatsu City,
Kagawa
[Website](#)



MOROTABUNE SHINJI RITUAL

3 December 2015
608 Mihonosekicho,
Mihonoseki, Matsue,
Shimane
[Website](#)

OHITAKI FESTIVAL

2nd Saturday and Sunday in
December
Saijo Inari Head Temple,
Okayama
[Website](#)

CHINKASAI FIRE FESTIVAL

31 December 2015
Miyajima, Hiroshima
[Website](#)

CHRISTMAS ILLUMINATION

01-31 December 2015
Kameyama Park,
Yamaguchi, Yamaguchi
[Website](#)





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FUKUOKA GENESIS: NAKOKU EXHIBITION

Until 13 December 2015
Fukuoka City Museum,
Fukuoka
[Website](#)

GC1 GRAND PRIX

6 December 2015
Shimanose Park,
Shianosecho, Sasebo City,
Nagasaki
[Website](#)

YANSA MATSURI

First Saturday in December
Ono Hachiman Shrine,
Nakatsu, Oita
[Website](#)



THE LIGHT PAGEANT IN KUMAMOTO

Until 31 December 2015
Chuo-ku, Kumamoto City,
Kumamoto
[Website](#)

KALAHAAI COUNTDOWN LIVE 2015-2016

31 December 2015
Kalahaaai, Chatan Town,
Okinawa
[Website](#)

IN THE NEWS OCTOBER - NOVEMBER

OCTOBER 15

A condominium complex is discovered to be “leaning” in Yokohama due to shoddy construction work. Attention was brought to the issue last year after a resident noticed a 2cm difference in handrail heights in a passage connecting two of the condominiums. The ensuing investigation has concluded that the foundation of one of the four buildings in the complex is not sunk firmly into the bedrock, an error that was hidden through falsification of records. Asahi Kasei Construction Materials, the company that built the condominium, has managed the construction of about 3,000 other buildings throughout the country.

[\(Source\)](#)

OCTOBER 31

South Korean President Park Geun-hye and Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hold bilateral talks, the first time in years the heads of the two countries have met. The meeting comes on the heels of the end of negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, of which Japan is a key member. Being a key competitor with Japan in many industries, South Korea wishes to join the 12 countries included in the agreement, which accounts for 40 percent of the global economy. President Park reiterates her hope they can also reach a resolution regarding the history of “comfort women,” a euphemism used for the women involuntarily forced into the Japanese Imperial Army’s war zone brothels. The talks come as a relief for the US, which for years has urged its two main allies in the Pacific region to mend ties.

[\(Source\)](#) [\(Source\)](#) [\(Source\)](#)

NOVEMBER 11

The Mitsubishi Regional Jet (MRJ) completes its debut flight in Nagoya, hailed by Japanese trade minister as “the beginning of a new era for Japan’s aircraft industry.” The plane is the first domestically produced passenger jet in

50 years. With over 400 orders received and the first delivery to be made to ANA in 2017, the smaller sized jet is expected to be used in many regional routes across the country and ease down costs of flights. The plane was developed to rival Canada’s Bombardier and Brazil’s Embraer.

[\(Source\)](#)

NOVEMBER 12

Japan announces plans to become the fourth country to conduct an unmanned lunar landing, following China, the U.S., and the former Soviet Union. According to an updated schedule of Japan’s space exploration program, the launch is set for 2019 with development on the lander scheduled to begin next year. Facial recognition technology will be implemented, helping the lander to land within 100 meters of its initial mark, such precision, which previous lunar landings have failed to achieve.

[\(Source\)](#)

NOVEMBER 13

A first-year high school student in Kyoto is arrested for marijuana possession after his 12-year old brother admits to having smoked it to a teacher. Officials at the younger brother’s elementary school were tipped off that he and his friends had been seen smoking cigarettes. When questioned, the boy admitted to having smoked tobacco and marijuana he found in his older brother’s room. As criminal punishments against minors under 14 years old are prohibited in Japan, the younger boy may be sent to a child consultation center. The older brother’s case will be sent to the Kyoto District Public Prosecutors Office.

[\(Source\)](#)

 Sterling Diesel

WORLD'S BIGGEST FREE TRADE DEAL

THE PROS AND CONS

MARGARET PICKARD (HOKKAIDO)

TPP: Three initials that spell a huge deal for a dozen countries. With the full text of the agreement only just released in early November, many are still wondering: What is it and what exactly does it mean for Japan?

WHAT IS TPP?

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a free trade agreement between 12 countries of the Pacific Rim: the U.S., Japan, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. The aim of the agreement is to “break down barriers to commerce and investment,” such as reducing or eliminating tariffs on protected products (1). Japan will remove tariffs on 95.1 percent of imported products, with other members eventually abolishing close to 100 percent of their tariffs (1).

PROS

In general, the agreement will allow Japanese companies to export more and increase their investments overseas (4).

The Japanese auto industry stands to benefit greatly from the TPP. The US tariff, currently 2.5 percent, will be eliminated completely

in 25 years. In addition, the 80 percent of tariffs the US imposes on imported Japanese auto parts will be removed (2).

Several participating countries will be required to relax visa rules as per the TPP agreement. Mexico, where a number of Japanese automaker plants are located, will extend its maximum

visa time period for business visitors from 30 days to 180 days (1).

Although in general the TPP is feared to be harmful to domestic farmers, Japanese economist Nakagawa Junji of the University of Tokyo theorizes that TPP could force reform in the crumbling agricultural sector and potentially save it (5).

MAY 2006

The TPSEP, a free trade agreement between Brunei, Chile, Singapore, and New Zealand agreed upon in 2005, comes into effect.

JANUARY 2008

The United States expresses interest in entering talks with the countries of the TPSEP. In September, the US confirms it would be the first country outside of the original four to enter negotiations, officially marking the beginning of TPP talks.

JUNE 2012

Canada and Mexico, the US's partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), respond positively to the US's invitation to join TPP negotiations. Upon the completion of consultations by other members, the two countries are formally accepted as members.

CONS

The allowance of tariff-free rice imported from the US and Australia will be increased by 24,000 tons over 13 years, a potential blow for pre-TPP protected domestic rice farmers (2). The government has promised to offset this and prevent a drop in prices by buying the difference for “stockpiling” (6).

Livestock farmers have reason to worry as Japanese tariffs on imported beef, previously as high as 35 percent, will be slashed to 9 percent. However, Japan enjoys a “snapback” protection in which tariffs may be raised back up to 38.5 percent if exports exceed a certain amount (6).

Copyright protection of works would extend from 50 years to 70 years after the creator's death, with abolition of the requirement that a complaint must be lodged before there action is taken in a copyright

JULY 2013

Japan joins TPP talks, becoming the last of the twelve countries to enter into negotiations. The announcement of Japan's participation is complementary to the “Abenomics” economic plan to stimulate the economy.

infringement case. Some say this will harm the culture of derivative *doujinshi* (self-published) comics, negatively affecting the entire manga industry (7).

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that the terms of TPP have, after years of negotiation, finally been decided on, the agreement faces ratification in each of the twelve countries. In Japan, both the Lower and Upper Houses of the Diet must ratify the agreement; with the majority of both houses being members of Abe's political party, it is forecasted to be granted approval. Last week, Japan's head of TPP talks Akira Amari rejected the notion of any renegotiation of the deal (4).

LATE SEPTEMBER 2015

Negotiations come to an end as terms are agreed upon in a meeting between chief negotiators in Atlanta, Georgia.

EARLY NOVEMBER 2015

The text of the TPP Agreement is made available publicly for the first time, shedding light on the details decided upon in the secretive meetings.

SOURCES

- (1) [TPP Text Released](#)
- (2) [How Tariffs Will Change](#)
- (3) [TPP Wikipedia](#)
- (4) [Don't Hold Your Breath](#)
- (5) [Japanese View on TPP](#)
- (6) [TPP's Impact on Agriculture](#)
- (7) [What TPP Means for Internet Users](#)



CHECK OUT THE TPP TIMELINE (2)
(3)



ARTS & CULTURE

CULTURE EDITORS

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Rayna Healy

Wild horses, traditional Japanese wigs, and 25 people straight from America to the tiny rural Oki Islands are all things that will make my wedding chaotic and memorable. Can't wait to say "I do!"

Joyce Wan

Planning to have a nice traditional Christmas eating tropical fruits on the beaches of Bali.

FASHION EDITORS

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Elena Galindo

Erica Grainger

A frosty winter means it's kotatsu hibernation time for me, with warm layers of cashmere and wool.

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

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Timothy Saar

How do you write the sound a kotatsu makes? Just, like, figure that out and put it in for my quote.

Sabrina Zirakzadeh

All I need is hot cocoa with mini-marshmallows and I'm ready for reading and winter movie marathons!

Thea Felmore



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MERCEDES-BENZ FASHION WEEK CONNECT AWARDS

ELENA GALINDO (SHIZUOKA), ERICA GRAINGER (FUKUSHIMA)

Skipping into the bright lights of Tokyo, Connect's own fashion editors attended the Mercedes-Benz Tokyo Fashion Week (MBTFW) in October. The Spring Summer 2016 collections were unveiled in and around Shibuya, and over 50 shows were hungrily devoured by stylish attendees in six hectic days of fashion. Featured in this section are highlights from MBTFW.

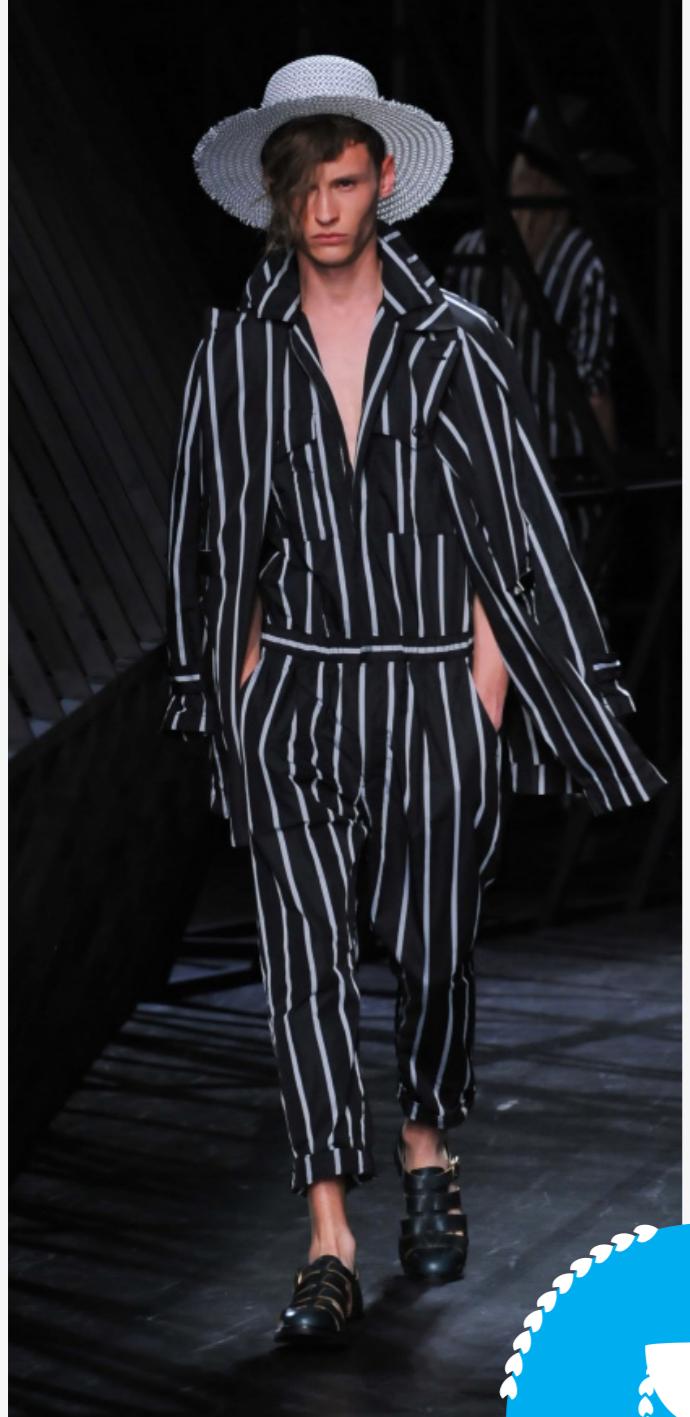
© Elena Galindo, Erica Grainger, Japan Fashion Week Organization



CLICK THE
IMAGES IN THIS
ARTICLE TO VIEW
THE ENTIRE
COLLECTION.



motohiro tanji

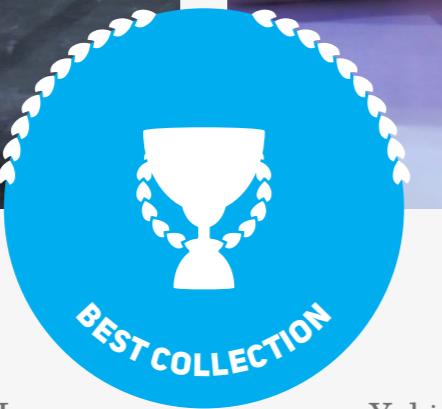


5351 POUR LE HOMMES

KAZUHISA KOMURA
MENSWEAR

Powerhouse brand, 5351 Pour Le Hommes has been a household name in Japanese menswear for decades now, and SS2016 served up some seriously cool looks. Wide brim hats, pinstripes, and a variety of eclectic silhouettes? Check, check, and double check.

Elena



YUKI TORII INTERNATIONAL

YUKI TORII
WOMENSWEAR

Yuki Torii launched in 1975 and has since balanced femininity with style and comfort in a combination of bold colours and pretty floral prints. Think, "ladylike," but not oppressively old-fashioned. This collection contains free flowing colourful silk dresses, skirts, lace, and elegant fitted suits using a Parasian café backdrop. Yuki Torii for Christmas please, Santa!

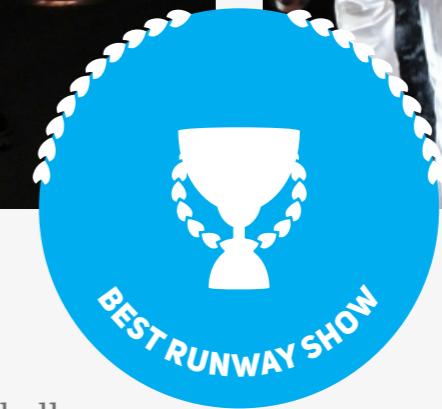
Erica

PATCHY CAKE EATER

SHIGEKI MORINO
MENSWEAR

You're in a dimly lit pool hall. Smoke rises from cigarette stubs and a whirlwind of bebop jazz reverberates from the walls. Is this a 1940's noir film? Not quite; it's the setting for the sleek, absolutely one-of-a-kind Patchy Cake Eater runway show—no, runway *performance*—where models coolly played pool in impeccably tailored blazers.

Elena



BEST IN SHOW

PETIT BETEAU × JEAN-CHARLES
DE CASTELBAJAC
CHILDREN, WOMEN & MENSWEAR

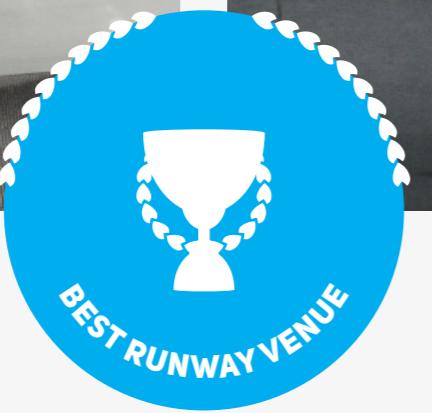
Since 1893, Petit Bateau has mastered the art of French casual wear. The classic nautical theme was vibrant and colourful, combining a series of spontaneous elements: Jean-Charles de Castelbajac sketching a mural based on the new collection, and models playfully interacting with the audience created a cheerfully cheeky atmosphere.

Erica



**MODE GAKUEN COCOON
TOWER (FACTOTUM)**

KOJI UDO
MENSWEAR



Menswear brand, FACTOTUM chose the 50th floor of the chrysalis-like Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower as their show venue, which provided a stunning backdrop, a 360 degree aerial view of Tokyo. The show's timing coincided with sunset, offering guests a preview of the sprawling, lit-up metropolis before they scattered off for more fashion fun in the city.

Elena

**BALLROOM 2, GRAND HYATT
HOTEL (TAE ASHIDA)**

TAE ASHIDA
WOMENSWEAR

Sitting front row at Tae Ashida surrounded by diplomats and ambassadors at the Grand Hyatt in Tokyo was luxurious and surreal. The reception had mini cupcakes, champagne and chamomile tea with adorable show bags containing designer beauty products and a Tae Ashida bag. Ashida's show was sophisticated, elegant and an amazing experience.

Erica



SOMARTA

TAMAE HIROKAWA
WEB INSTALLATION
WOMENSWEAR



"Body Genealogy" was SOMARTA web installation theme, featuring accessories and clothing inspired by the beautiful forms we carry in our very bodies- the patterns present in our bones and tissues. SOMARTA blurs the line separating art, fashion, and science in unprecedented ways.

Elena



BOO PALA

BOO
WEB INSTALLATION
WOMENSWEAR

Summer has arrived for Boo Pala! This Turkish label uses a rainbow color palette with modern cuts draped loosely, signalling an effortless freedom to run and play. As the web show suggests, why not lounge about and prance dreamily in a children's playground, posing with oranges and lazily catnapping... it's Pala playtime!

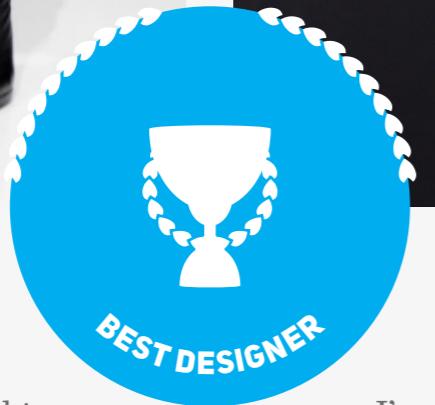
Erica



YOSHIKI
YOSHIKIMONO DESIGNER
WOMEN'S KIMONO

YOSHIKIMONO's designer, Yoshiki, is the relentless drummer of legendary rock band, X Japan, and a renowned master pianist. It's no surprise, then, that Yoshiki's penchant for imbuing the rock-n-roll spirit into the classically beautiful, carried over into his kimono designs, featuring kimono in both traditional and modern prints, styled with wild, punk rock hair and fishnets.

Elena



haori de TiiTii



HAORI DE TITI
TAZUKO YAMAKI
WOMENSWEAR

I've met Tazuko Yamaki twice and am always enchanted by her collections and presence. She's warm, charming and seriously stylish! During installations, she talks individually to everyone explaining concepts behind her newest collection. This season's inspiration was Ancient Rome, featuring elegant silk suits in black and white with eye-catching laurel wreaths that dazzle.

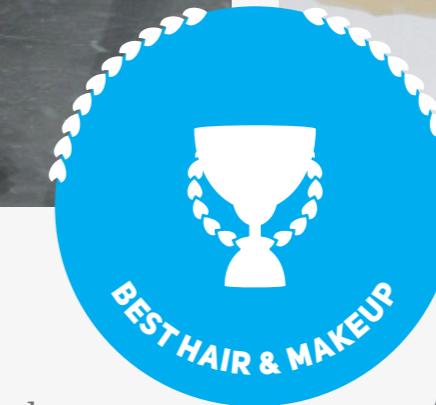
Erica



CHRISTIAN DADA
MASANORI MORIKAWA
WOMENSWEAR

The Christian Dada runway show told a story of a lovesick woman: she has been beaten and battered, but she remains resilient despite the pain. Her hair is tousled, with slight, un-brushed waves, and her makeup minimal, but the image conveyed was ethereal, beautiful and powerful.

Elena



HIROKO KOSHINO
HIROKO KOSHINO
WOMENSWEAR

A grand performance occurs during Koshino shows, from the clothing to the set designs! The hair and makeup completed the show, with heavy black theatrical masks and elaborate hairstyles. Picture huge curls and French twists creating a sleek, polished look. Was it masquerade or fashion show? Both! Koshino's dramatic, whimsical flair never fails.

Erica

BEAUTY & FEAR IN JAPAN'S FROZEN NORTH

JOYCE WAN (HOKKAIDO)

The morning sun casts a pale ethereal light over everything it touches. You give the dwindling charcoal fire a quick stoke before crawling back under the comfort of your warm, thick kotatsu futon. Outside, the snow descends in fluffy flakes, cloaking the fields in a soft white blanket. Earth and sky are merged in a vision of pure white. In the distance, a single red-crowned crane balances perfectly on one delicate leg.

This is the classic image of winter in Japan. Popularized by various forms of cultural media, this aestheticized vision is familiar both domestically and abroad. It aligns with other familiar seasonal symbols entrenched in Japan's culture. The country's reverence for the seasons is a defining national trait, but is such stark elegance really reflective of winter across the country? Take, for instance, the haiku on the following page by Matsuo Basho:

If you've been in Japan long enough to cycle through each season, do you remember your first snow here? For those living in the north, or along the coast facing the Sea of Japan and the nearby mountainous regions, it was

probably something like mine: piling higher and higher by the second, plunging down in such a flurry that you couldn't see a few metres in front of your face. Soon enough, there were mounds of snow heaped higher than your head. Those daffodils were long dead, buried, and some old man was telling tall tales of their forgotten existence.

Where, in the pure and ideal world of gently drifting snow, resilient pines and plum blossoms, and translucent moons, is the extremity of northern Japan's winters? Absent is the striking awe of the powerful drift ice in Hokkaido; the alien landscape of Yamagata's engulfed "snow monster" trees; the imposing fortresses of the snow corridors in the Japanese Alps. The pastoral scenes of haiku don't seem to include raging blizzards, icicles that hang from rooftops like swords in an armory, days where you blink and miss the appearance of the sun. Missing too is a sense of the deadliness that still claims lives in Japan each year.

There's a reason these idyllic winter scenes aren't reflective of the true breadth of the season. In "Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature,

and the Arts," writer Haruo Shirane traces the history of the representations of seasons in Japanese culture across different eras and art forms, to reveal the deliberate way in which the culture of the seasons was constructed. Depictions of the seasons gained significance in traditional *waka* poetry of the aristocratic courts of the Heian period. In these influential poems, nature was not depicted simply as it was, but in an idealized form. High value was placed on poems that portrayed nature with elegance, feeling, and unity. As it was depicted in poetry, the harmony of the four seasons grew to represent the harmony of the nation.

Spring and autumn were prized as the most beautiful seasons, and the lion's share of seasonal *waka* focused on them. Summer and winter were treated as short transitional periods, despite the opposite being true climactically. In the *Kokinshū*, the first Japanese imperial anthology of poetry, winter receives the least amount of dedicated poems out of all the seasons. And given that the Heian court was located in Nara and Kyoto where winters are generally mild, the resulting winter poems were predictably gentle.



*The first snow
Just enough to bend
The leaves of the
daffodils*

Books of seasonal words known as *kigo*, by which the culture of the seasons was tightly controlled and reproduced, list relatively tranquil words associated with winter: “frost,” “snow,” “waterfowl,” “remaining chrysanthemums,” “winter morning” (1). Traditional *waka* poetry continued to influence Japanese art and culture up through the Edo period, and still shapes the modern Japanese view of nature.

It casts aside the realities of so-called snow country in Japan’s north and along the side of Honshu near the Sea of Japan, where winter has a deeper bond to the psyche than the elegance, purity, and melancholy of *waka*. The season is not a transitional period between autumn and spring, but a way of life that can last nearly half the year.

Rural farmers, who bore the burden of nature’s severity, lived in a different world from the peaceful *waka* of the aristocratic court. Shirane notes that a divergent, more practical view of nature emerged in non-aristocratic *setsuwa* (anecdotes and folktales). One such folktale, thought to be an ancient legend originating from the heart of snow country in Tohoku and the regions around the Japanese Alps, offers a very different perspective on winter: a dangerous wilderness concealing the vicious Yuki Onna.

There are many variations on the Yuki Onna story, but, essentially, she is a *yurei*, or ghost, in the form of a

beautiful woman, with white skin and long black hair, wearing a thin white kimono. She appears with heavy snowfall, and in the snow she takes her victims to their deaths. The ways in which she kills vary. From Aomori,

to Pokémon. She makes appearances in various anime, video games, and even some non-Japanese media. The lasting power of the legend indicates how deeply the Yuki Onna story has resonated here. Yuki

THE YUKI ONNA LEGEND IS SO POPULAR THAT SHE CONTINUES TO INSPIRE CHARACTERS IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE CULTURE. HER INFLUENCE SHOWS UP IN MEDIA RANGING FROM AKIRA KUROSAWA FILMS TO POKÉMON. SHE MAKES APPEARANCES IN VARIOUS ANIME, VIDEO GAMES, AND EVEN SOME NON-JAPANESE MEDIA.

Niigata and Miyagi comes the story of the vampiric Yuki Onna, who freezes people and sucks their souls out through their mouths for energy (2). Sometimes she simply leads them deeper into the snow, where they die of exposure. Other versions are even able to enter victims’ houses and kill them where they think they’re safe (3). She is a treacherous foe, as cruel and unforgiving as the winters known to Japan’s north. The most well-known version of the story, published by Lafcadio Hearn in 1904 and summarized [here](#), does tell of a more humane Yuki Onna who frees a beautiful man and later even returns to marry him; but she too is uncontrollable, leaving in a rage when he breaks his promise to keep her secret, and threatening him with death if he mistreats their children.

The Yuki Onna legend is so popular that she continues to inspire characters in contemporary Japanese culture. Her influence shows up in media ranging from Akira Kurosawa films

Onna captures the danger and terror that gives winter’s cold beauty its depth. In the land where the snow rages on, winter’s beauty can’t be separated from its reminder of mortality.

SOURCES

- (1) *Shirane Haruo, “Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, and the Arts.”*
- (2) *[Yuki Onna – The Snow Woman](#)*
- (3) *[Yuki-onna – Wikipedia](#)*

• Joyce Wan

IKEMESO

RAYNA HEALY (SHIMANE)

Ladies, listen up. Who hasn’t felt stressed in the workplace recently? And who hasn’t thought to themselves, “I wish a handsome man would turn up, show me sad YouTube videos, and then wipe away the subsequent tears with their perfect fingers or perhaps a toothbrush?” Thanks to Hiroki Terai, there is now a service in Japan that will provide exactly this for you frazzled working women. The new company, Ikemeso, rents out dashing gentlemen to workplaces. The word ikemeso is a combination of “ikemen (hot guy)” and ‘mesomeso (crying),’ so you know exactly what your 7,900 yen is paying for,” according to RocketNews (1).

According to Hiroki Terai, “Japanese women are under tremendous stress at the office here in Tokyo, which often ends in tears... More and more women are trying to hold down professional jobs these days, but the male-dominated, workaholic workforce makes it hard for them. We want such put-upon women to have a good cry and feel better when they feel targeted” (2). In other words, women can’t be expected to make it through the high pressure work day without a little man candy to provide them comfort.

The seven men whom you can rent are more than just a pretty face; they’ve got the brains to back them up. They are licensed in “therapeutic crying.” You don’t want just any hot guy off the street to wipe away your tears as you cry. You want someone who knows what they are doing, of course. Your chosen man will

show up to your workplace and induce some therapeutic crying. Said man will then deftly use a cloth to wipe away all the tears he creates. The company insists that “seeing everyone together in such a ‘natural and honest’ state will improve communication and lead to better morale overall” (1).

when it comes to comforting us and our coworkers. There is the “little brother type” if you are one of the lucky few who has a hot little brother who usually wipes away your tears; the “Showa Era type” for that hot older guy charm; the “therapeutic Mr. Tokyo,” who we can only assume is quite posh; the “intellectual type”; the “bad boy type”; or the “sweet dentist type” (1). The dentist seems keen to use a toothbrush for whatever sweet crying fantasy you and your fellow coworkers have in mind.

Thankfully, us working women can finally breathe easy knowing that this service became available on September 24th. Buckle up ladies, it’s time to unleash the tears.

SOURCES

- (1) [“Only in Japan: Rent a Hot Guy to Make You Cry Then Wipe Your Tears Away.”](#)
- (2) [“Stressed Japanese Women Can Now Rent Handsome Men to Wipe Away Their Tears at the Office | Oddity Central - Collecting Oddities.”](#)



BUYING TICKETS IN JAPAN

SABRINA ZIRAKZADEH (OKAYAMA)

Ever wanted to see a show or concert in Japan, but weren't sure how to get tickets? Here's a short guide to where and how to buy tickets in Japan!

ONLINE TICKETING

All online ticketing websites in Japan are only in Japanese. The two main websites are Ticket-Pia and ePlus. Some venues have their own sites as well, but not all.

1. Search for the name of the show, artist, or event.
2. Select the date, price tier, and number of tickets desired. *You will not be able to select the exact seats when purchasing tickets, only the price tier.*
3. Create an account (required on Ticket-Pia and EPlus).
4. Select a payment method: credit card or konbini. Some concerts require Japanese credit cards, but not all. ePlus tickets usually only have a Family Mart konbini option, while Ticket-Pia uses 7-Eleven. The site l-like.com can be used for purchases paid for at Lawson's.

5. Select a delivery method: by post, email with credit card purchase, or konbini when you pay for your tickets.

KONBINI KIOSKS

The widest variety of tickets, including concerts, sports, theater, museum entry, and movie tickets, can be bought at konbini kiosks. The Loppi machine at Lawson's has the most options, including exclusive ticket rights to certain shows and venues.

If you reserved tickets online and chose to pay via konbini kiosk:

1. Select the option to enter a number directly, and enter your confirmation number to go straight to your tickets.
2. Enter your name and the phone number registered to your online ticketing account.
3. Confirm your ticket information is correct, and you will receive a receipt to take to the cashier, where you will pay and receive your tickets.
4. Select the location of the event. If you have the option of selecting the month of the event, do so, but not all kiosks or event types offer this option.

ANY GUIDES ON USING THESE CRAZY MACHINES?

YEP! ONE FOR LOPPI HERE AND TICKET-PIA HERE.

The steps for purchasing from the kiosk directly are more complicated:

1. *If you are at a Loppi machine, you may enter the event code to go directly to the tickets you wish to purchase. Due to the number of tickets sold on Loppi machines, it can take ages to scroll through them all to find what you need, so check to see if your event has a direct code that you can use to save you searching.*
2. Enter your phone number and name, and confirm that your ticket details are correct. At this point, the machine will print you a receipt to take to the cashier, where you will pay for and receive your tickets.

ADVANCED MOVIE TICKETS

Advance tickets bought at konbinis are vouchers, and not for specific show times. You can specify the movie when buying the voucher, then take it to the theater the day of the movie to exchange it for actual tickets. These vouchers run about 400 yen below the average ticket price, but if you want to get in to a specific show, be at the theater well in advance.

3. Scroll through the results to select your event.

6. Select the date, time if applicable, price tier, and number of tickets. *You will not be able to select the exact seats when purchasing tickets, only the price tier.*

4. Enter your phone number and name, and confirm that your ticket details are correct. At this point, the machine will print you a receipt to take to the cashier, where you will pay for and receive your tickets.
5. Enter your phone number and name, and confirm that your ticket details are correct. At this point, the machine will print you a receipt to take to the cashier, where you will pay for and receive your tickets.

IN-PERSON

In-person and phone box office tickets will be available, but only during box office hours. You can also wait in line for same-day tickets for theatrical shows and certain concerts. However, these tickets are often the last to come available, after all attending ticket holders have arrived. Same-day tickets are usually for standing seats only, with few exceptions. However, these are also usually the cheapest tickets, with dropped prices due to the theater wanting all leftover seats filled. If you can stand waiting in line from the crack of dawn, this is an inexpensive possibility!

OTHER OPTIONS

For almost every musician or stage actor, there's a fan club. While joining takes considerable commitment in terms of time and cost, members often get early ticket sales, pre-sale lotteries, and access to special seats. If you aren't able to join yourself, ask a member if they can get an extra ticket for you during the fan sales.

Most concerts and some stage shows will have lotteries, where you can enter your name for a certain number of tickets before they go on sale to the general public. It's competitive but worth it, since it costs nothing to enter and you might get a prime ticket!

Re-sale and online auction sites like Yahoo Japan Auctions and ticket.co.jp are growing in popularity. The sites have complicated registration, bidding, and confirmation procedures, and tickets cost much more than the original price. However, if you've exhausted all other avenues, this may be your best bet.

There you have it! While none of these options let you choose your seats, most cost the same and sell out at varying times, allowing you multiple chances at getting tickets. Figure out what works best for you, get out there, and enjoy the show!

— Patrick Finn

SNOWY SONGS, FROSTY FILMS, & BLUSTERY BOOKS YOUR JAPANESE WINTER ENTERTAINMENT SHOWCASE

SABRINA ZIRAKZADEH (OKAYAMA)

With winter bringing cold weather, early nights, and a myriad of potential illnesses, it is tempting to barricade yourself inside your home, burrow under the kotatsu, and never leave. But fear not, Connect is here to help you stay warm, toasty, and entertained! Here are some suggestions to help you get into the spirit of the season and enjoy your winter in Japan.

WINTER MUSIC PLAYLIST

SPECIAL THANKS
TO JET MUSIC ON
FACEBOOK

雪ほたる
PLASTIC TREE

WHITE LIGHT
NAMIE AMURO

12月のLOVE
SONG
GACKT

メリクリ
BOA

WINTER
SONG
DREAMS COME
TRUE

SNOW SONG
MISIA

ラストディ
KINOKO
TEIKOKU

MOMENTUM
AYUMI
HAMASAKI

雪の華
MIKA
NAKASHIMA

#1

クリスマス・イブ
TATSUO
YAMASHITA

LAZY?
CLICK THE
BUBBLE
FOR MUSIC
VIDEOS!

JAPANESE WINTER FILMS

"*Winter Days*" (*Fuyu no Hi*, 冬のひ), 2003, Kihachirou Kawamoto

Drawing inspiration from *renku* poetry, each of the thirty-five sequences was created by a different animator. *Winter Days* is a stunning visual introduction to the Japanese way of embracing winter.

"*Antarctica*" (*Nankyoku Monogatari*, 南極物語), 1983, Koreyoshi Kurahara

Based on a true story of an Antarctic expedition forced to leave behind fifteen sleigh dogs when things go wrong. While some scenes may distress animal lovers,

the final reconciliation is miraculous.

"*Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*" (*Senjou no Merii Kurisumasu*, 戦場のメリークリスマス), 1983, Nagisa Oshima

While technically a British film, the Japanese cast and production crew made this World War II prisoner-of-war story a hit in Japan. It also features a stunning, award-winning score by Ryuichi Sakamoto!

"*Departures*" (*Okuribito*, おくりびと), 2008, Youjirou Takita

This award-winning film about a cellist who begins

working as a *noukanshi* preparing the dead for cremation may not specifically be about winter, but the setting and themes of rebirth and moving on are a fitting way to welcome the new year.

"*Tokyo Godfathers*" (東京ゴッドファーザーズ), 2003, Satoshi Kon

When three homeless people discover an abandoned baby on Christmas Eve, the adventure they have returning it is beyond wild! For fans of animation, holiday movies, comedy, adventure, or even just the different sides of Tokyo, this is the must-see winter Japanese film.

WINTER BOOKS TO CUDDLE UP WITH

Fuyu no Hi (冬の日)
by Basho

(The poems that inspired the animated film) "If you want to understand how the Japanese feel about winter, these beautiful, famous poems will help you enjoy winter as we do."

Takae Nakashita, Okayama

*Hard-Boiled Wonderland
and the End of the World*
by Haruki Murakami

"This surreal story takes place in two worlds, one of which is an odd dream/nightmare town, with the cruelest winter this side of the apocalypse. The protagonist is warned often of the dangers of winter in his new home."

Joyce Wan, Hokkaido

"There is nothing I love more than to brew a quick cup of warm peach tea and crack open a few magazines for winter fashion inspiration. My favorites include Vogue Japan, Cluel, and NYLON!"

Elena Galindo, Shizuoka

Orrin Heath

LIFESTYLE

FOOD EDITORS

connect.food@ajet.net

Alexandra Brueckner

I am so excited that it's finally cold enough to break out my Harry Potter ugly Christmas sweater.

Mira Richard-Fioramore

TRAVEL EDITORS

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Leah Gray

Pia Peterson

I'm thinking tropical thoughts this winter with S.E. Rogie. Check out [@rabbit_heart_](#) on instagram!

© Lisa Hogya

LIFESTYLE

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CHRISTMAS BÛCHE DE NOËL

MIRA RICHARD-FIORAMORE (SAITAMA)

ROLL CAKE

- 5 eggs
- 50g flour
- 60g sugar
- 10g cocoa powder

BUTTERCREAM ICING

- 90ml butter
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder
- 2.5 cups icing sugar
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

WHIPPING CREAM

- 300ml whipping cream
- 50g sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

FINISHING TOUCHES

- Icing sugar to coat
- 10 strawberries
- 1 pear
- Christmas decorations

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C.
2. Separate the egg whites from the yolks and place in two different bowls.
3. With a hand mixer, start beating the whites, and slowly start incorporating half of the sugar. Beat until soft peaks form. Set on the side.
4. Add the other half of the sugar to the egg yolks and with the same hand mixer, beat until the yolks have doubled in size and are a light yellow cream colour. Sieve the cocoa powder and the flour into the yolks. With a silicone spatula, mix until nice and smooth. Take a third of the beaten egg whites and carefully fold it into the yolk mixture, making sure not to break the air bubbles and the fluff. Add the second and third of the whites one at a time until everything is well combined.
5. Place a long piece of parchment paper over an oven tray and pour in the roll cake batter, making sure it is evenly distributed. Tap the tray a couple of times on the counter so that the air bubbles disappear.
6. Place in oven and bake for 12-14 minutes. Once baked, take it out of the oven and remove the cake from the hot tray. Allow it to completely cool down.
7. Meanwhile, place the whipping cream into a large bowl and start beating with a hand mixer. After a minute, add the sugar and vanilla. Beat until the whipping cream is nice and thick.
8. Place the butter in a bowl and beat until creamy. Add the sugar and cocoa, mixing well. Stir in the milk a little at a time. Add the vanilla and stir it one last time.
9. Cut the strawberries and pear into small pieces.
10. Once the cake has cooled, peel off the parchment paper and trim the ends of the cake with a sharp knife. Spread the whipping cream over the entire cake and cover with the cut fruits. Roll the cake. Once rolled, diagonally cut a 10cm piece off the end of the cake. Place that cut piece over the cake—this will make it look like a tree log.
11. Cover the cake with the chocolate buttercream. You can imitate a real log by drawing on the 'log features': running a fork across the cake and drawing circles at the end of the logs. Finally, using a sieve, sprinkle icing sugar over the log and decorate with the Christmas decorations.

 Mira Richard-Fioramore

"TIS THE
SEASON TO
EAT!



NOT YOUR AVERAGE JIRO LUNCH

TEDDY TOYOZAKI (AOMORI)

Oh, you want to hear about that time I was the unofficial translator of a three-star Michelin sushi restaurant?

I showed up ten minutes early to my reservation while the store was still getting ready for service. The restaurant is really small, with only ten seats at the sushi bar. I was placed in the seat directly in front of Jiro-sensei's knife hand. I was trying to take in the moment and observe everything around me, but Jiro's son, Yoshikazu, quickly asked in Japanese, "Is there anything you don't want to eat?" In the past, I have had horrible, gut-wrenching experiences with *uni* (sea urchin). While I was making this final assessment and calculating the worst-case scenario while reading over the day's menu, I heard Yoshikazu start telling the others, "Oh, jeez, he's a *gaijin* and doesn't know any of the fish..." The fact that he was insulting me while I was sitting right there did not make me feel especially welcome.

Once they started, it was like a constant flow of sushi that started with the apprentice grabbing the fish and handing it to Yoshikazu, who sliced it, and then handed it to Jiro-sensei, who constructed it and placed it on my little tray on an elevated countertop.

As soon as I put a piece

of sushi in my mouth, the next piece arrived on the tray. This timing sequence ensures the best possible temperature and texture. I wish I could say that the first few pieces of sushi were mind-numbingly delicious. In fact, I just wanted to eat it quickly so that I wouldn't have everybody staring at me in unmasked irritation. Ten pieces in and I looked down at my watch: four minutes. "What?!" How am I supposed to be dining if my meal is going to take fewer than ten minutes at this pace?"

After a rocky start, I began to feel more comfortable with the surroundings and the pieces started getting really good. However, nothing served made me think, "Oh my God! I could die now and it would be okay."

Then the *uni* came. I took a deep breath, said a small prayer, and ate it. Somehow I expected "the best *uni* in the world" to taste like the love child of golden stardust and fluffy clouds, cultivated in the place where rainbows are born. Unfortunately, it tasted just like sea urchin. If you're curious, the *anago* (eel) and *tamago* (egg) were my two favorites. They were nothing short of spectacular.

I finished all twenty pieces in fewer than thirty minutes. Although still hungry, I decided I would get full on

the free tea, and they moved me from my seat at the bar to the nearby tables. At that moment, a 6'5" American dude came in. It was apparent that he spoke absolutely no Japanese, and the apprentice, who I'm sure was stressing about having to use English, asked, "Any fish don't like?" The customer said he could eat anything.

Two minutes into eating the sushi, the customer asked, "Where is the bathroom?" Four completely baffled Japanese faces stared back. The man tried to elaborate: "Toilet? Where is the toilet?" Immediately, in unison, all eyes in the restaurant zoomed in on me. "お手洗いどちらですか?" I offered.

Intercultural, non-verbal communication ensued with everybody pointing out the door. So, what should have been an incredibly easy translation for anybody who has taken 7th grade English (that mandatory course that the two younger apprentices had to have taken) became an opportunity for me to become the unofficial translator of a three-star Michelin restaurant. The gentleman went to the bathroom and didn't come out. Jiro-sensei left the sushi bar to walk around. Yoshikazu was getting noticeably upset.

I just sat there sipping my tea. I decided to ask the

apprentice if I could take a picture of the restaurant after I paid—a privilege not afforded to tourists without a reservation. For the first time during my experience at *Sukiyabashi Jiro*, they went beyond my expectations: "I can see if sensei will take a picture with you. Let me ask." Fortunately, the Master agreed. He even touched my shoulder to move me into a better position in front of his store! Not washing that jacket anytime soon.

By the look on his face, he was as thrilled as I was (not really). After the apprentice took the picture he said, "大丈夫英語で何と言う?" I thought he wanted me to say something about the picture in English, so I said, "Is it OK?" The apprentice nodded his head and repeated, "Is it OK? Is it OK?" And then he ran into the bathroom yelling, "Is it OK? Is it OK?" I went in to check as well (seeing as how I was now the unofficial translator and had some unofficial duties to attend to).

The guy was fine. Apparently he had choked and ended up throwing up all over the bathroom and on his shirt. As I walked back in, I told Jiro-sensei that the customer was fine but had choked. The Master, the living legend, the national treasure, replied with the only words he spoke to me that day: "He is so big, how can he choke on such a small piece of sushi!?"

— Teddy Toyozaki



mantis shrimp



japanese tiger shrimp



skipjack tuna

CURRIED APPLE-WALNUT FRIED RICE

ALEXANDRA BRUECKNER (AOMORI)

INGREDIENTS

- 4-5 cups cooked, cold rice*
- 100g raw walnuts, chopped
- 1 Tbsp + 2 tsp olive oil or butter, divided
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ onion, diced
- 1 medium apple, cored and diced
- 1 Tbsp mild curry powder
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 100g dried cranberries (optional)**
- 2 Tbsp fresh parsley, chopped

* Genmai's (brown rice, 玄米) natural nuttiness works especially well with this recipe.

** Cranberries can sometimes be found at larger grocery stores, near the nuts and other dried fruit. They can be substituted with raisins, or be omitted entirely.

Fried rice is one of the easiest staple Japanese dishes to make at home, and it's easily customizable to any taste, whether you love it with chicken or shrimp, spicy or mild, or just chock-full of vegetables. This version has an autumnal twist that gets a little bit of a kick from curry powder and some natural sweetness from apples and cranberries. Although the printed recipe is meant as a vegetarian side dish, adding some cooked chicken or beef can make it a hearty, filling main dish.

INSTRUCTIONS

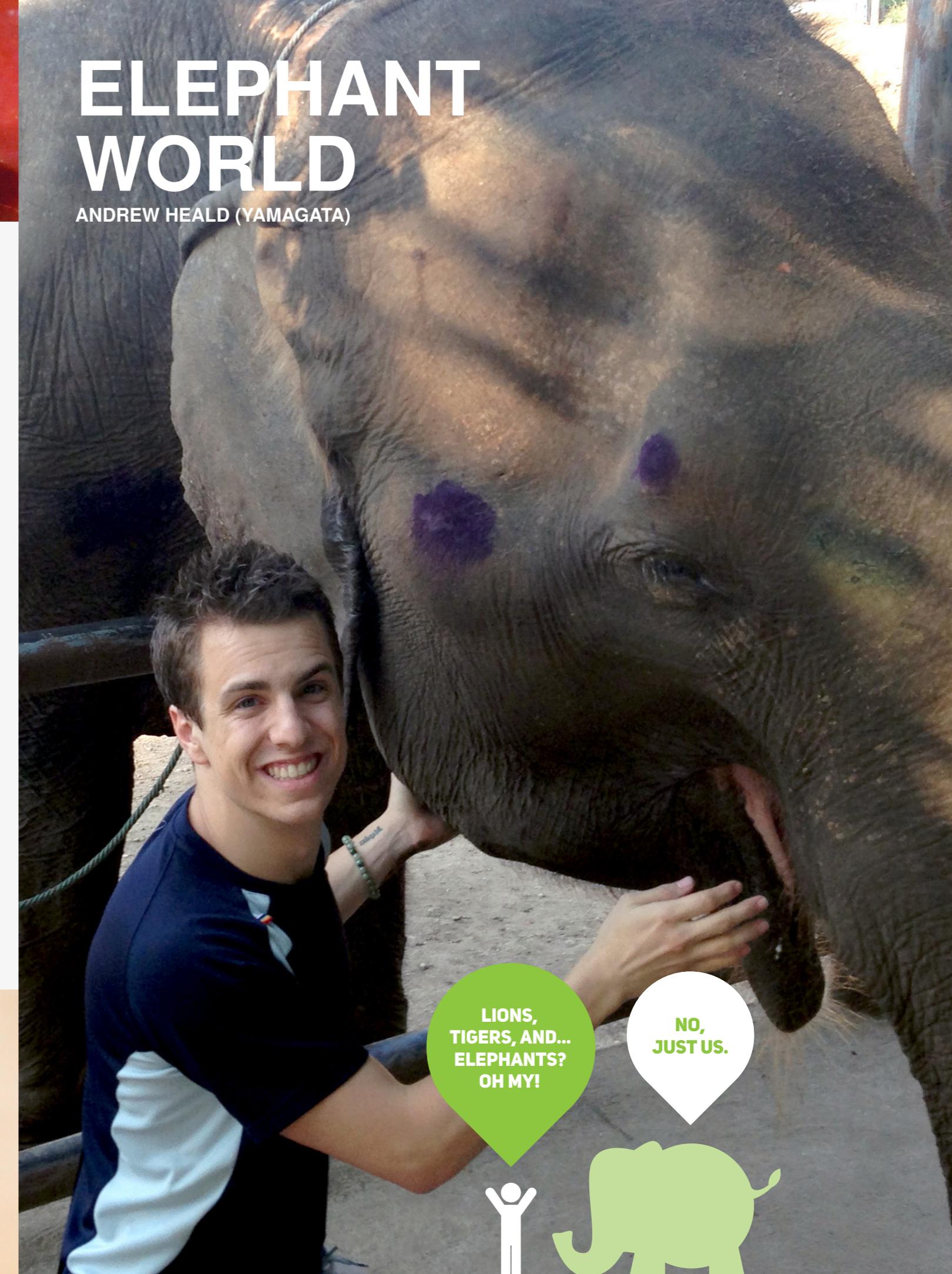
1. Toast the walnuts in a large skillet over medium heat. Stir them frequently until the nuts turn deep brown. Remove from the heat and set aside.
2. Heat one tablespoon of olive oil in the same skillet, and add the onions and apples. Cook over medium heat,
3. Add the remaining two teaspoons of olive oil to the skillet, and add the rice. Cook, stirring every few minutes, until the rice has begun to crisp up. Add in the soy sauce, thyme, curry powder, and a few pinches of salt and pepper, and stir to combine. Stir in the walnuts, apple, garlic, onion, and optional cranberries, and cook for a few minutes more, until everything is warmed through. Taste and if needed, add more salt, pepper, or curry powder. Stir in the chopped parsley, and serve!

— Alexandra Brueckner



ELEPHANT WORLD

ANDREW HEALD (YAMAGATA)



I have loved elephants ever since I watched *Dumbo* as a little kid. After coming to terms with the fact that elephants cannot, in fact, fly, I settled on knowing as much about the real thing as possible. Books, the Internet, and cute videos of baby elephants trying to get into little kiddie pools were my go-to entertainment for all things elephant. So naturally, when deciding where I could go on vacation last winter to escape the cold, Tohoku winter, I decided to look at Thailand, where I could fulfill my ultimate childhood dream of riding an elephant.

Now, elephant tourism is a tricky business. After doing some research, I discovered that while elephants are culturally valued and beloved creatures in Thailand, they are also a large source of income. When money is involved, things can get a little dodgy. These beautiful animals are used in the trekking, logging, and entertainment industries throughout the country and, as a result, there are many ways that elephants can become victims of abuse.

I wanted to see elephants, but I also wanted to try and avoid participating in the further abuse and exploitation of my favorite animal. In my research, I found two areas with elephant sanctuaries, places where foreign volunteers work alongside *mahouts* (Thai people who dedicate their lives to the preservation of elephants) to care for abused, mistreated, and old elephants. The first, and the more popular on the Internet, was a region in northern Thailand called Chiang Mai. There were several choices for sanctuaries throughout the region, but unfortunately northern travel wasn't on my itinerary.

Luckily, I found the second in Kanchanaburi, a region about two hours from Bangkok in southern Thailand. The sanctuary is called Elephants World, and their website boasts that the camp is run by a non-profit organization that offers quality time with elephants. The best part is a large red "x" next to the words "Animal Abuse." I contacted the organization through their website and, rather sadly, booked only a one day program (they also offer two day programs and a week-long *mahout* program).

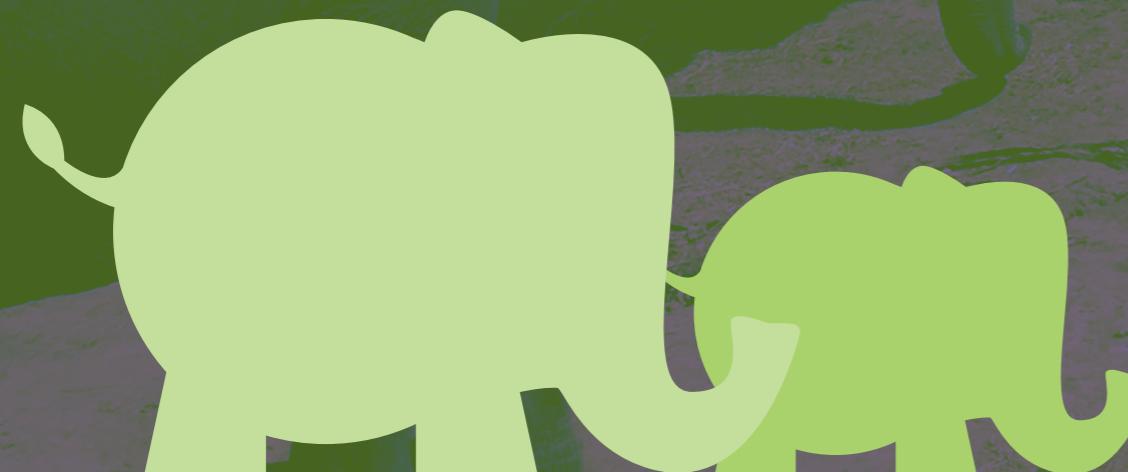
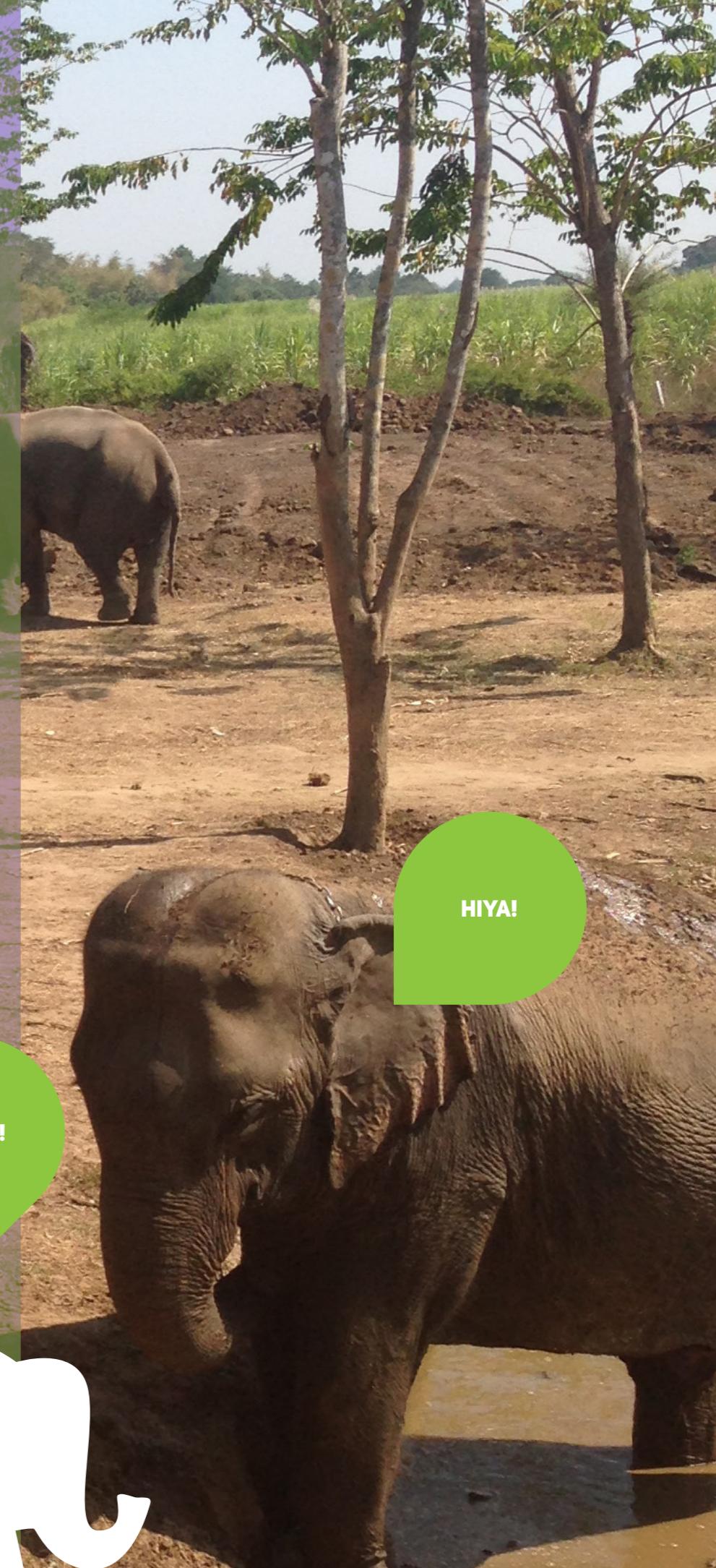
Once in Thailand, I was told to meet a driver at Kanchanaburi Bus Terminal. From there the driver took me and the other participants to the sanctuary in the back of a slightly rickety truck with no seatbelts. While driving through a rather beautiful part of the Thai countryside we exchanged important words in American English, Taiwanese Mandarin and Quebec French (like, "A beer, please.") among ourselves.

We arrived at Elephants World and I was a giddy mess. The moment I saw the seventeen giants wandering around the camp, I found it hard to concentrate on anything else. My facial muscles hurt from smiling so much. After a short welcome introduction given by some of the wonderful volunteers, we jumped right in. I immediately wrapped my arms around the head of the closest elephant I could find (after being assured that it was OK to touch her). We fed the elephants fruits and rice balls that we had prepared ourselves, cut down banana trees to prepare for their next meal, and took them to the river for a bath and swam with them. It was one of the best days of my life!

These wonderful creatures are massive, majestic, and moving. Spending a day with them was incredible. I could feel their gentleness and warmth from the moment I hugged my first elephant to a few hours later when one of them played with my hair with its trunk. If you are ever in Thailand, I highly suggest heading to Elephants World and experiencing something completely new.

Andy Heald is from California and currently lives in Yamagata Prefecture. He loves writing, reading, snowboarding, and is currently obsessed with drinking tea.

• *Andrew Heald*



HOKKAIDO PHOTO ESSAY

LIZZIE HENNESSY JONES (YAMAGATA)

Lizzie Hennessy Jones is a photographer who recently took a road trip up to and around Hokkaido. She captured beautiful shots of Japan, the sea, and the open road in this photo essay for Connect, and gives a few tips on how to stay sane and appreciate the beauty of this country while traveling... with your parents.

Lizzie is a third year High School ALT in Nagai City, Yamagata Prefecture. You can usually find her on the slopes or in coffee shops. Follow her on Flickr [here](#). Follow her on Instagram [@lizziefhj](#).

 Lizzie Hennessy Jones





TRAVELING WITH THE PARENTS

LIZZIE HENNESSY JONES (YAMAGATA)



ARE YOUR
PARENTS TAKING
THE PLUNGE
AND COMING TO
JAPAN?



Last August my parents came to visit. It was their second trip to Japan, but this time they were staying with me for 10 whole days in the sweltering humidity of Yamagata.

When my parents initially broached the subject of their visit, I had a little pang of worry. They are not as young and sprightly as they were, and although adventurous in their own meandering way (travelling the new train route from the Scottish borders to Glasgow being the highlight of my dad's autumn—thrilling indeed), Japan is another kettle of (raw) fish. With this in mind, I got planning. I wanted to make it a fun and easy trip for them and something new for me as well, so we settled on a road trip to Hakodate in Hokkaido.

The first three days of their visit we spent mooching around my home prefecture, visiting my favourite onsens, cafes, and a couple of local sights. I switched my charmingly rickety Kei car for a White Plate to give myself and my parents the luxury of real air-con and a more comfortable drive. We then set off towards our destination by driving to Aomori through Miyagi, and a little bit through Iwate and Akita, and then caught the ferry to Hakodate, Hokkaido.

Travelling with parents can be a little stressful; I was certainly apprehensive about looking after them for a week, but the whole trip was really great. It was the perfect combination of good quality family time, Japan time, and

adventure. So, here are some of things that made it great and ensured smooth sailing:

NIHONGO-NO-GO

My parents cannot speak Japanese; But they like having a go, so it meant I had to do all the speaking, ordering, and reserving for the three of us, which can get tiring for even the best Japanese speakers. To spread the weight a bit, I wrote out our route and all the places we were going to pass through in big romanji and kanji so that my dad could do the navigating. It got him more involved and gave them both a confidence boost for trying Japanese successfully.

OLD AND NEW

Make sure you go somewhere you have never been before. This makes the trip fun for you, too. You can all share the memories of somewhere new and you won't have to be the tour guide because even you won't know where you are going!

HAVE SOME DOWN TIME

Having my parents in my home prefecture and taking them on errands and daily life bits and bobs was really good. It gave them the time to rest and we got to have a proper, relaxed catch-up before we went travelling.

REACHING YOUR PARENT ANNOYANCE THRESHOLD

Though I love my parents, we all still have the grumpy teenager deep inside of us. Make sure you give yourself a little time alone, whether that's leaving them in a museum for a few hours or

just going to bed early.

PURIKURA

Probably the best thing we did! Even after the beautiful time in Hakodate and the stunning drives, the iconic Japanese photo booth was so much fun and the perfect end to our trip.

RESTORING YOUR LOVE OF JAPAN

When my parents visited I had been here for two years, and although I still love my job and my little town, having them here really reminded me of just how beautiful it is and how lucky I am to be here. It was refreshing and reviving.

Lizzie is a third year High School ALT in Nagai City, Yamagata Prefecture. You can usually find her on the slopes or in coffee shops. Follow her on Flickr [here](#). Follow her on Instagram @lizziefhj.

Lizzie Hennessy Jones

LIZZIE HAS PLENTY OF TIPS TO HELP YOU OUT!



COMMUNITY

SPORTS EDITORS

connect.sports@ajet.net

Hiroshi Fukushima

Becca Simas

Counting down the days until my Christmas break!

COMMUNITY EDITOR

connect.community@ajet.net

Cameron Joe

Safe travels to everyone for the winter holidays!

I myself will be enjoying the sunshine in Vietnam. What are your plans?

• Thea Felmore

COMMUNITY

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THE TOKYO RAINBOW (BURRITO!) CONNECTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHU-SAN

CAMERON JOE (CHIBA)

When I came to Japan three years ago, one of my first contacts with the Japanese LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community was the wonderful Chu-san. At Tokyo Orientation, Stonewall Japan (formerly Stonewall AJET) organized a group outing in Tokyo for the new ALTs, freshly arrived from their home countries. Chu-san hosted the event and served us her famous burritos, warming our tummies with fresh Mexi-Cali flavors. Hailing from San Francisco myself, my first burrito from Chu-san felt like a bridge between two distinct chapters in my life, a warm connection that continues to this day. I cannot imagine what my community would look like if not for Rainbow Burritos and the amazing space that it provides for the LGBT (and ally!) communities. If you're in the Tokyo area, please drop by Rainbow Burritos for a bite to eat!

I got the chance to interview Chu-san on November 1st, 2015. We discussed the history of her own experiences in the LGBT community, LGBT pride, the politics of coming out, the essentialness of community spaces, and more. We conducted the interview primarily in English, but there were several moments where we spoke Japanese instead. For the sake of space and length, I decided to omit Japanese from the written interview. Enjoy !



COMMUNITY



CONNECT

Hello Chu-san! Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. First, can you talk about where you grew up and a little about yourself?

I was born in Osaka, but I moved to Tokyo area when I was two or three. Most of my life has been in Kanto area—Saitama, Naka-Meguro...

And how did you get involved with the LGBT community in Tokyo?

I was born in 1961 and at that time in Tokyo—and most of Asia—we didn't have a lot of [open LGBT] community. I didn't really like Nichome—it is like our gay town [in Tokyo—but it was so scary to go. It was very hard to come out at that time in the 70s and 80s. I don't know why, but from the early 90s I think things started to change a lot. I even saw one person on TV. It was the first openly lesbian person I ever saw—

What was her name?

Kakefuda Hiroko. She was a lesbian who came out on TV. From there, I started to think about my own sexuality and gender in my 30s.

Wow, in your 30s?

Yes, that was in the early 90s and it was very good timing. At that time, information was easy to get from books and magazines. I often went to the book store and found books and newsletters—we didn't have the Internet so we had to find other ways to connect. Also overseas in the early 90s, activists and activism in the US were getting more and more powerful.

LGBT activism?

Yes, especially with AIDS in America. A lot of people started to come out at that time—even in America before the 90s, it was also difficult to come out. As people started to come out more and more, I started to think about my own sexuality—I only liked women, but I didn't know how to identify. Again, I didn't like to go to [Shinjuku] Nichome because I don't drink alcohol, so I got most of my information from books and magazines at that time...

Then I saw k.d. lang on TV—she got the Grammy award for Best Female Vocal.

(Here Chu sings a bit, making me laugh.)

She was so cool! And my feelings about lesbians started to change a lot. I thought "Wow, I want to be a lesbian!" (laughs). Before k.d. lang, I was so nervous to even touch an LGBT newspaper or newsletter. But I wanted to be like k.d. lang so bad! I thought, "I need to make a band and make music!" My first post in the newsletters was about starting a band. That was my first real community organizing action. I don't really drink alcohol and I'm not used to going to bars in Nichome. But starting a band was fun because we could meet in cafes and make music together. It was totally different.

Wow, so that was in the early 90s?

Yeah.

That's amazing! So the newsletters and the cafe in Meguro—for example—were they special events or were they exclusively LGBT spaces at that time?

They were special events like dance parties or small meet-ups. They weren't in Nichome so they were easier to go to. Also we had Dyke Weekend and the weekend retreats for a long time too.

So you said you started a band through the newsletters as your first LGBT activist moment. How did you start cooking and feeding the community?

Cooking? (laughs) Well, first I started making music and got involved with the lesbian community that way. I sang at parties and started dance parties. We also organized a group to go to the Gay Games in New York (in 1994). It was my first time seeing such a large community coming together all at once. So from there I got a lot of energy and inspiration to bring LGBT people together in Japan. All of us who went to the Gay Games came back to Japan and felt like we had to do something big. So we started to organize the first Tokyo Pride Parade in 1994.

So you helped to organize the first Tokyo Pride Parade?

Yeah, we made the group and started to get organized. It was the first one in Japan so there was so much media attention on us. It was mostly lesbians—not a lot of drag queens like in the US. We wanted to do something a little

more low-key. It was really fun dancing in the streets and organizing. We even had a few international organizations and associations develop out of the event!

One of the head organizers of Tokyo Pride and I became good friends and she ended up taking me to my first Dyke Weekend. And I realized that the lesbian and women's community was exactly what I needed. I was tired of being just a consumer—buy buy buy, pay money. Dyke weekend was about being an organizer, doing something. It was an international group that brought people together. It changed me a lot. I thought, "I can do anything! I can make music and create my own art." There is no place like that in Japan.

Japan is always telling me to "do this and do that." I didn't like that atmosphere very much, so I realized I had to become an organizer myself, I should be in charge of myself more. Everything I do in the community is based on this feeling—being against always consuming and doing what you're told. All of my organizing is inspired from that first Dyke Weekend—like my bar, Rainbow Burritos.

That's wonderful. So let's talk about Rainbow Burritos. How did it start?

Well it started from Goldfinger bar [a lesbian bar in Shinjuku Nichome]. I found a small kitchen to work out of to make burritos for the community.

What was the inspiration? How did you get the idea to start a burrito shop?

From Toby, my partner. Toby and I were living in Shizouka at the time, stuck in a small apartment and about to break up (laughs), and Toby asked me to leave Shizouka, but helped me find a place in Tokyo to live. Goldfinger had a really cool kitchen so I decided to start a shop as a small job to help me live in Tokyo. It was actually really dramatic, but that's how it started. Sorry!

Apologies for the misleading framing of Chu and Toby's relationship. Chu and Toby are still happily together and are planning on getting married sometime in the near future. Please send them your best wishes!

No no! It's really good and important. I appreciate your honesty! So you've been making burritos for the community for three to four years?

I started making burritos three years ago. I hated working in the small shop though. Business was OK, but it was not enough to pay for the high rent. I was always poor and struggling, and all my customers were foreigners. My friends at Cafe Lavanderia [a small radical cafe across the street from Goldfinger] found a small bar for sale and asked if I was interested. I decided to take over the space on my own, and that's sort of how the pop-up business started!

Thinking about it though, my whole life has been a pop-up bar. (laughs) Before the burrito shop, I used to run a small bar in Shibuya on Wednesday nights for the women's community

Chestnut and Squirrel. I did that for eight years, every Wednesday. My customers then followed me over to Nichome and Rainbow Burritos.

Did you always know you wanted to open a restaurant or a bar?

(laughs) No. Opening a restaurant is hard work, and it's not good business. (laughs) But, [the LGBT community] need a place to meet each other, meet up, and just be together.

Can you talk about Rainbow Burritos a bit? It's not just for LGBT people, right? Can you talk about the space and who comes?

Yeah, of course. Basically my plan was to have it a safe space for women. But of course, gay [men] and straight people would be welcomed as well. But the idea was starting with a safe space for women, and then slowly opening up from there. Rainbow Burritos is for everyone! Chestnut and Squirrel was like that too. Mostly a women's space, but we never refused people at the door. For gay guys, a lot of them come to the bar at the beginning of the night before going to Nichome to dance and hook up. But recently, a lot of gay guys come to make friends and hang out—probably because they like lesbian bars!

Of course, like me! (laughs)

Yeah. Life isn't only about sex. Making friends is essential for having a good life. (laughs) But I seriously believe that. Life is more than just hooking

up and dating. Finding good friends in a relaxed space is important for life, I think.

Just one more question. When I go to Rainbow Burritos, I always see Japanese people and foreigners mixing.

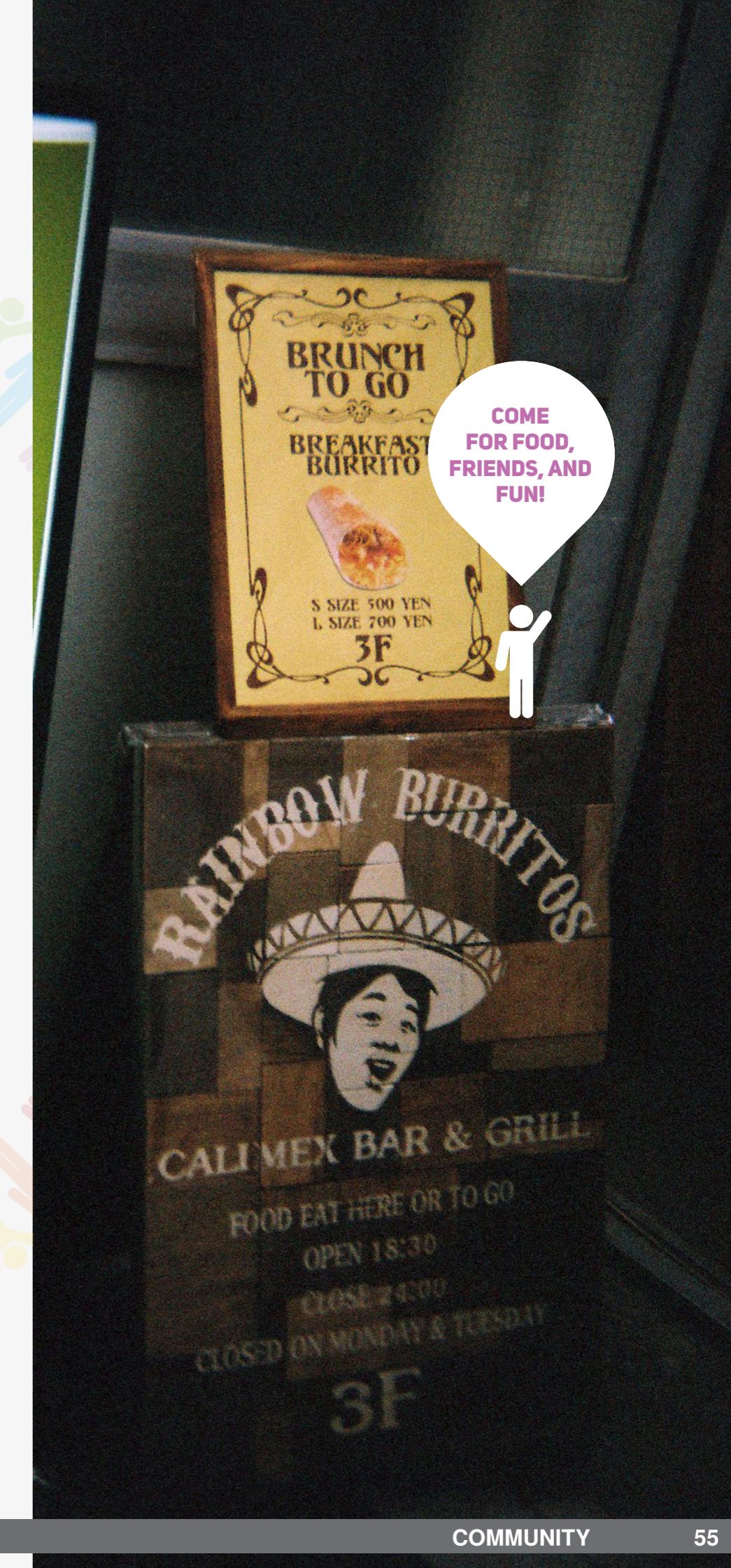
Yeah! My first experience with the LGBT community was in San Francisco. Everyone was so friendly and welcoming to me—really chill, calm, and relaxed. I wanted to open up a shop that would feel like a San Francisco atmosphere. Do you understand?

Yes! I'm from San Francisco and Rainbow Burritos feels like a home to me.

I'm so glad! I wanted to make a Californian atmosphere. But, the goal was to get people from California to come to the space. I don't make the atmosphere, the customers do! So the key was making good food and bringing Japanese and foreign people together. The burrito shop and bar was the best solution!

Definitely! Thank you so much for your time Chu. I really enjoyed learning about the history of your community organizing. Thank you again!

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BRAVE BLOSSOMS BLOOM CHANGING JAPANESE RUGBY

HIROSHI FUKUSHIMA (KUMAMOTO)

Japan started their 2015 Rugby World Cup campaign against the mighty South African Springboks. Their goal was to make it to the quarterfinals. Sixty minutes into the match and Japan's Brave Blossoms were fighting to keep themselves in the game while the Boks came back to score over and over again. The match could have (as most people expected) finished with a score of 50-20, and then well done to the plucky Brave Blossoms for the mighty fight. But this was not how the game ended.

Even Eddie Jones, the mastermind behind the Japanese team, said, "Let's be honest, before this tournament Japan was one of the joke teams. Teams would put out their B team against them and win by 80-90 points." As an Australian, when Japan played rugby, the crowd knew to cheer them on just to play the whole game.

However, Jones's comment was made after Japan won. Yes, Japan won! Even the coach had to look at the scoreboard before celebrating the David-versus-Goliath win. JK Rowling (author of the *Harry Potter* series) said in a Tweet, "You couldn't write this..." (1) This was the first win for Japan in the tournament, having won only

one previous match against Zimbabwe in Belfast in 1991. The Brave Blossoms played the "Japan Way," working diligently up the field in an 18-phase move. The Blossoms won a penalty that would have allowed them to equalise, but a pre-game coffee chat inspired captain Michael Leitch to go for the touch-line and play for the win. In the final 35 seconds of the game they opted for, of all things, not a line-out but a 5m scrum which they won, and with a few quick passes they scored a try—and the rest is history. This was no fluke. The Brave Blossoms ambushed the Springboks: they were more efficient and better with handling the ball, and their scrums were more active, playing the game with speed and agility. They not only made the biggest upset in the tournament's history, but they transformed into a true rugby team. As Peter FitzSimons, a former Australian Wallaby said, they were just "playing rugby."

A mate of mine was fortunate enough to be there when it happened. I've shared some of his photos from the stands. Cheers Daniel Ong!

What a way to start off the tournament. Japan would continue to show their transformation and beat

Samoa and USA in the group stages and finish third in their pool at the World Cup. They finished as the greatest ever Japanese team to play in a World Cup and the only team in history—with the pool game wins—not to progress to the quarter finals. Watch the highlights of their campaign [here](#).

This change didn't happen overnight. Eddie Jones had one of the biggest assignments in the history of rugby. He had goals for Japan to be a top 10 rugby nation, to focus more on developing players in Japan, and to make the quarter finals at the 2015 World Cup. Since 2012, Japan has had players make the top league in the Super Rugby, a player made the legendary Barbarians squad, they became the 9th best nation, and beat Top Tier nations (Japan is a Tier 2 nation). He changed not just the way they played, but *how* they played, creating their own "Japan Way." Players started training at 5 a.m. and trained longer, becoming stronger and faster with the ball. They didn't just listen to the coach, they thought to play the game themselves. They trained to play the game (placing more emphasis on skill rather than technique) and not just to look like a rugby team. They

also played more games and gained more international experience with the current World Cup squad, and have a combined international games experience of over 600 games.

Watch Eddie Jones's interview (in Japanese) [here](#).

The unexpected blooming success of Japan's rugby team has come at a vital time with Japan hosting the next Rugby World Cup in 2019. The success will have trickling effects in the country, with numerous public viewings around the country drawing massive crowds. "Now we'll have kids back home who wanted to be baseball or soccer players like Keisuke Honda, or like Nakata who want to be the next Goromaru," said Eddie Jones. Kids at school are getting told off by teachers for making scrums in the corridor. That's how much the impact this success has had. It's enough to make a school

rugby coach cry and not have to see students unwillingly switch sports. Sport stores better set up a rugby stand, as rugby is making waves. They may not have won the World Cup, but they won the hearts of the crowd, the nation, and aspiring kids wanting to play rugby. Since when did rugby make the front page of a newspaper over baseball?

It's like learning English; many people didn't believe they could, but they did. They had a coach that had ambition and gave them strength when they needed it most. The next time a student says to you "*Eigo shaberenai*" (I can't speak English), tell them off for not believing more in themselves and focus on working towards the goal.

THE UNEXPECTED BLOOMING SUCCESS OF JAPAN'S RUGBY TEAM HAS COME AT A VITAL TIME WITH JAPAN HOSTING THE NEXT RUGBY WORLD CUP IN 2019. THE SUCCESS WILL HAVE TRICKLING EFFECTS IN THE COUNTRY, WITH NUMEROUS PUBLIC VIEWINGS AROUND THE COUNTRY DRAWING MASSIVE CROWDS.

"NOW WE'LL HAVE KIDS BACK HOME WHO WANTED TO BE BASEBALL OR SOCCER PLAYERS LIKE KEISUKE HONDA, OR LIKE NAKATA WHO WANT TO BE THE NEXT GOROMARU," SAID EDDIE JONES. KIDS AT SCHOOL ARE GETTING TOLD OFF BY TEACHERS FOR MAKING SCRUMS IN THE CORRIDOR. THAT'S HOW MUCH THE IMPACT THIS SUCCESS HAS HAD.

The Brave Blossoms focussed on their goal and their coach never stopped believing. Jones said, "We've come to this World Cup to gain some respect for Japan. At the end of the tournament we want people to say that Japan is a respected rugby country." If the Brave Blossoms made the quarter finals, Eddie had plans to "retire. Sit back, enjoy, and criticise and be like Clive Woodward and get a job on the television. That's [his] dream." That wasn't the case, but the Brave Blossoms may achieve this goal at the next World Cup at home.

"It's been great fun," Jones said. It sure has!

 Daniel Ong



AN ISLAND PARADISE OF BADMINTON

NATHANIAL HAYES (KAGOSHIMA)

When I applied for the JET Programme, I thought my days of never-ending badminton might be over. Where I lived in Canada there was a place to play badminton every day of the week, and I took advantage of that opportunity; I played every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday. Sometimes I even played on Friday night. Badminton was an important part of my life.

FINDING A COMMUNITY IN JAPAN

Luckily, I was placed in Setouchi-chou, an area in the southern end of Amami Ōshima, and found an active badminton community there. In this town, I play badminton

four times a week for two hours each day (the time limit is strictly enforced). However, just in case this is not enough (and many times it isn't), Amami City in the north has a gym where people can play badminton every day of the week from nine in the morning until nine at night.

DIFFERENT SWINGS FOR DIFFERENT THINGS

Despite finding many places to play badminton, I have had to adapt to some new badminton customs. First, the all-reaching power of *janken-pon* has invaded the badminton realm. Before any game begins, to determine which team serves, one member from each team

steps forward to perform the timeless version of "rock, scissors, paper." Sometimes this results in a long stream of "aiko-deshous" as opponents continually produce the same item. Becoming accustomed to this was a little strange, because in Canada we usually hit the shuttle upwards and the direction in which it lands determines which team serves first. At times, I still hit the shuttle upwards, and when it lands the people I am playing with give me strange looks.

This next difference might be specific to Amami. In Canada typically when a man and a woman play on the same team, in what is known as mixed doubles, the

man covers three quarters of the court while the woman takes up one quarter. The quarters that each partner covers is constantly changing in relation with the shuttle. In this style, the men are in a battle of attrition while the women wait to make the decisive shot that will end the rally. This is not the case in Amami. Here women and men always play a style known as sides. That is where each person is responsible for one half of the court. The two players switch between standing beside each other covering the left and right sides of the court, or moving into a front and back position where one player is at the net while the other covers the back half of the court. I always find myself feeling a little awkward when I am placed at the net in this situation because it is the opposite of what I am used to in Canada. It always makes for an interesting experience.

READY, SET, GO!

Lastly, the most notable difference is the warm-up. Before any games begin on badminton night, everyone pairs up with a partner and performs a warm-up routine involving drives, drop-shots, clears, smashes, and net shots. Once this regime has been completed, the games can start. Compared to Canada, it feels similar to military training. Back in the land of forty below zero, we simply grab some old shuttles and hit them for about ten minutes before setting up a game. These two styles are night and day to each other, but having been in Amami for seven months now (I was an early arrival in April), I cannot imagine starting my badminton session without the Amami warm-up regime.

Even with these differences, playing badminton in Amami has given me the opportunity to connect with people from all over the island. It has

especially helped me form a stronger bond in Setouchi-chou, as the people I often play with are students and community members. If you have ever thought about playing badminton, I suggest looking for a place in your community. It may help you create stronger connections and new friends. If that doesn't convince you to get out and play, you can always imagine you are a Jedi with a lightsaber instead of an athlete with a racket, like I do.

Nathaniel Hayes is a first year ALT located in Setouchi-chou on Amami Ōshima where he often finds himself braving the waves to get to school. When not playing badminton, he can be found at the gym or enjoying a "nomikai" with friends because the local, venomous snakes, called habu, prevent him from roaming the forests.

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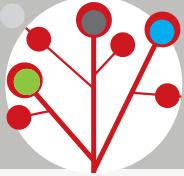
CALM DOWN.
IT'S JUST A
SHUTTLECOCK

IT'S A
BIRD!

IT'S A
PLANE!



CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT



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Contact the Head Editor of Connect, Rajeev Rahela, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

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SPOTLIGHT

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COMMENTS

Let us know what you think. Click the comment button at the end of any article, or interact with us on Facebook, Twitter, and issuu.com.

PHOTOS

All of Connect's photos are provided by the community, from the cover to the articles and everything in between. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Patrick Finn, at patrick.finn@ajet.net.

HAIKU

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

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