

**AJET**

# CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

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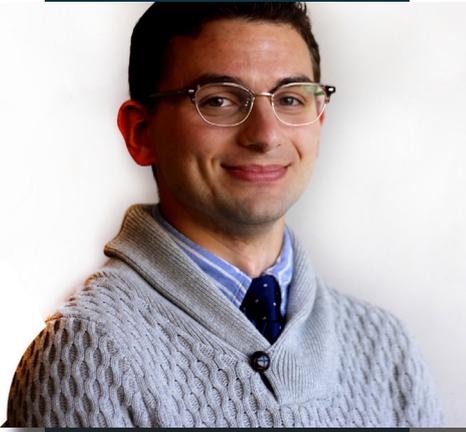
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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Timothy Saar  
Head Editor  
2nd Year Gifu ALT

Thank you for checking out Connect! And allow me to wholeheartedly welcome you to Japan. I am not being overly dramatic when I say that you're about to take your first step on a grand adventure. Living and working in Japan might seem daunting and even a little scary right now, but you're in good hands. We're here to help you make the most out of your first days so that you hit the ground running like a *senpai*.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm Tim Saar, the Head Editor for Connect Magazine. Connect is a community-run endeavour that is the culmination of work from JETs and other expats just like you. Every month, we bring you news and events from all of Japan, as well as helpful tips to let you enjoy your time here fully. This special Tokyo Orientation edition of Connect is stacked with info to get you started in your first week in Japan, beginning with your time at Tokyo Orientation. This includes a guide on what to wear, a great map of things to do in and around Shinjuku, help getting connected to the Internet, learning what your PAs do (and don't!), info about where you'll be living, and much, much more.

I sincerely hope you will find your temporary (or permanent, who knows?) home in Japan a place to truly explore and enjoy. And I would love for Connect to be your companion throughout that journey. We have many, many ways you can contribute to us and get your thoughts out there, so do not ever feel like you don't have a voice — it can sometimes feel that way even if you do speak Japanese. Keep an eye on our social media for our regular issues, and prepare to get Connected!

That was close; almost went a whole letter without making a "Connect" wordplay. Would have been a disaster.

Welcome to Japan and the JET community!

Hello everyone! My name is Stephen DiTomasso, and I'm the Chair of the AJET National Council. AJET is the JET community's voice for expressing opinions and experiences to CLAIR and the three ministries of the Japanese government that oversee the JET program.

We work in bringing the JET community closer together during everyone's time in Japan through events and various initiatives, as well as act as a lifeline and valuable resource for JETs to use for Japanese life during and even after their time with JET.

My goal is to further build AJET as a community building organization and resource for JETs and their new lifestyles in Japan. I believe a stronger AJET community makes for a more fulfilling experience and better outlook, which in turn strengthens cultural exchange with the Japanese students and community that JETs interact with. I want everyone on the JET Program to be able to make the most of their time here, and make meaningful, lifelong connections with their JET peers and Japan.



## LETTER FROM THE AJET CHAIR

Stephen DiTomasso  
National AJET Chair  
2nd Year Kagoshima CIR

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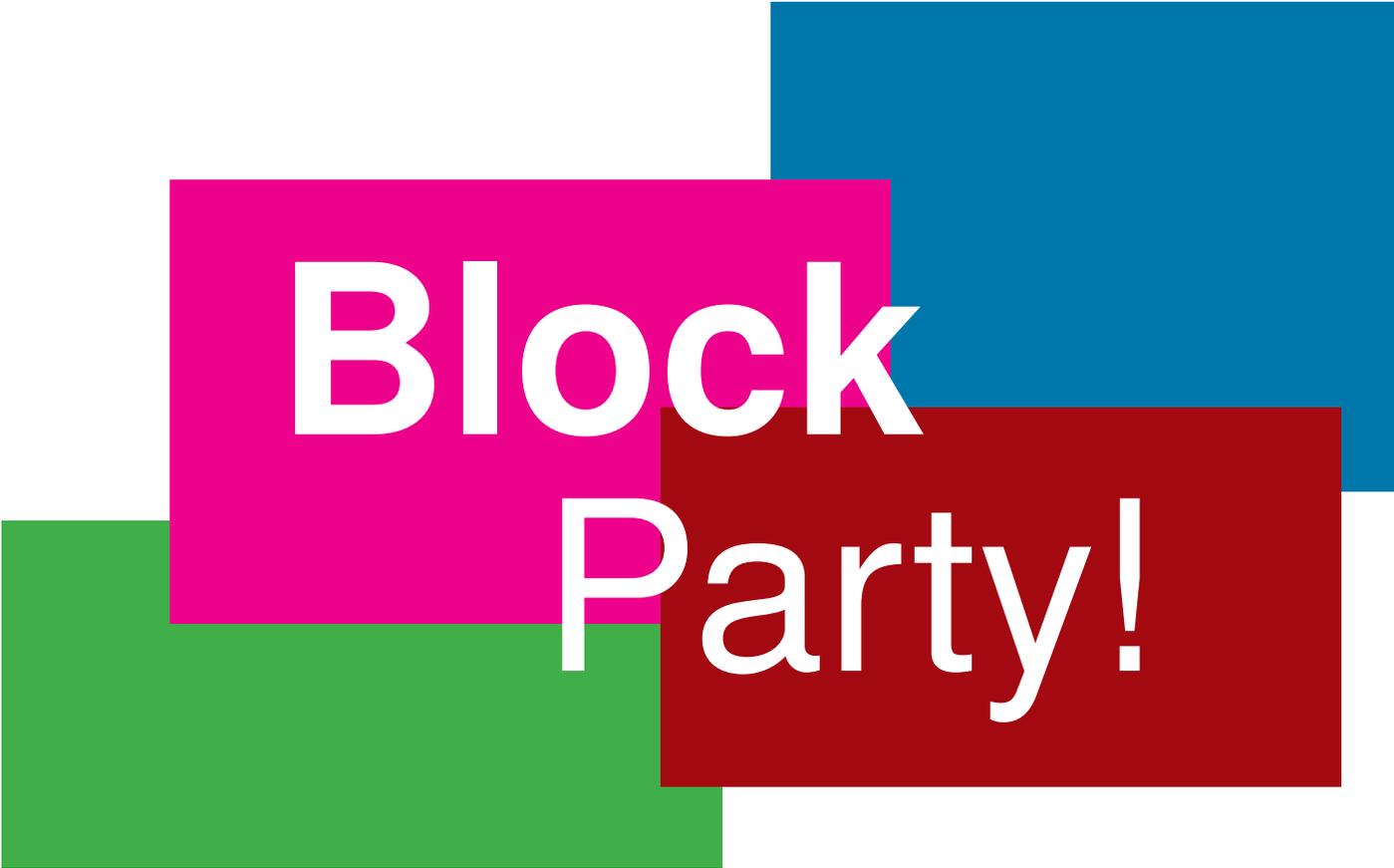
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# Block Party!

Meet your AJET Block Representatives and learn a bit about each block of Japan.

Dylan Brain (Hiroshima) & Lara Bigotti (Shimane)

## Block 1

**Aomori, Akita, Hokkaido, Iwate by Amanda Tsuhako**

Block 1 consists of Hokkaido, Aomori, Akita, and Iwate prefectures and is the biggest and northernmost block. We boast six-month-long winters lasting from October to March and awesome winter sports. Block 1 JETs are super “cool” and “chill,” but have the warmest hearts. With the new Hayabusa bullet train, you can go from Tokyo to Hakodate in four hours!

**Pro-tip:** Don't miss out on the Sapporo Snow Festival from February 6th–12th, 2017. JETs from all over Japan come to freeze their butts off and look at the amazing snow sculptures. Be sure to book hotels or hostels as soon as October because they fill up fast!

## Block 2

**Fukushima, Miyagi, Niigata, Yamagata by Merren Eby**

Welcome to Block 2! Whatever this big, friendly chunk of northeastern Japan might lack from the warmer climates of the south, it more than makes up for in community atmosphere, beautiful natural vistas, and

innumerable festivals. From the snow monsters of Zao to the pine-crowned islets of Matsushima, the rare birds and *taiko* drums of Sado Island, and the rich *samurai* history of Aizu, there's so much to see and do. The active local JET community here puts on events all the time, too, so be sure to plug yourself in as soon as you arrive!

**Pro tip:** Our *sake*, I mean, our rice is really, really good.

### Block 3

**Gunma, Ibaraki, Nagano, Saitama, Tochigi by Ashley Fox**

Welcome to Block 3! We hope you come and stay a while! Even though some may consider us a little *inaka*, we always impress with our overflowing natural beauty! Whether it be from mountains, *onsen*, national parks, or fields of flowers, we have it all. Do you love outdoor sports? We've got them! From rafting in Gunma to snowboarding in Nagano, we aim to please any thrill seeker or nature lover.

**Pro-tip:** If you plan on coming during the winter months, we recommend you bundle up and keep warm with some local *sake* after a day of winter fun. We hope to see you soon!

### Block 4

**Chiba, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Tokyo, Yamanashi by Kristie Fletcher**

What makes Block 4 special is the central hub that is the great metropolis Tokyo, and

therefore being able to access many different parts of Japan through its gateway. One of the greatest highlights of this region is taking part in the many local fireworks festivals throughout the cities, such as the Sumida River fireworks festival. The JET community in Block 4 includes people from a variety of countries, and we hold many events throughout the year.

**Pro-tip:** Don't limit yourself to just Tokyo — the other prefectures and cities around Tokyo are easy to get to and have plenty of their own unique cultural significance.

### Block 5

**Aichi, Fukui, Gifu, Ishikawa, Toyama by Domhnall McFarlane**

Hi all, welcome to Block 5! While it would be facile to try and rank the AJET blocks of Japan from most to least interesting, I believe that Block 5 is underestimated. And there is a very great danger in that. We are spread across the Alps of Japan, so when it comes to magnificent views that fill every corner of your perspective, we have that. We also have two of Japan's three holy mountains that you can climb with none of the crush of Fuji. Spread along the coast we also have fresh *sushi*, sprawling beaches and, further inland, ancient snow villages unique to this part of Japan.

**Pro tip:** If you come from December to March, be sure to expect lots of snow. See you there!

### Block 6

**Hyogo, Kyoto, Shiga by Carolina Swift**

Block 6 is the heart of Japan. Kyoto, the old capital, is the most well-known part of Block 6 with all of its rich history, temples, traditional gardens, and of course green tea. To the east is Shiga, home to Lake Biwa (the largest lake in Japan) as well as Hikone Castle (a national treasure) and the Koka Ninja Village. Further west, you will find Hyogo (which is famous for Kobe City), Himeji Castle (the largest castle in Japan), and Oishi Shrine (the birthplace of the *47 Ronin* story). Don't miss out on all the beautiful views, tradition, and culture that Block 6 has to offer.

**Pro-Tip:** If you are planning to spend some time in Kansai, be sure to get the Kansai Area Rail Pass.

### Block 7

**Mie, Nara, Osaka, Wakayama by Jessica Laufer**

Block 7 encompasses all that Japan has to offer, from bustling city scenes to traditional and historic temples and towns. Eat and shop 'til you drop in Osaka, cool off at Wakayama's Shirahama Beach, and drink in Japan's history throughout Nara City or at the Ise Grand Shrine in Mie. Block 7 has an active and vibrant JET community and amazing events throughout the year! Learn about *ninja* in Mie, meditate at Wakayama's Mount Koya, and feed the deer in Nara City! Excited to see Block 7?! You should be!

Come explore with us!

**Pro-tip:** We host a massive Halloween bash in Osaka, so come explore the city and celebrate with us!

## **Block 8** **Ehime, Kagawa, Kochi,** **Tokushima by Amon** **Bradshaw**

Shikoku — the four “countries” of Ehime, Kagawa, Kochi and Tokushima — is one of the most under-visited and perhaps under-appreciated travel destinations in Japan. Shikoku is blessed by nature with its rolling mountains, clear rivers, remote mountain villages, and many of Japan’s top waterfalls and beaches. The Iya Valley is really just the start! If you’re into outdoor activities, we have whale watching, whale shark diving, rafting, canoeing, kayaking, jet-packing, paragliding, fishing, hiking, and much more.

Culturally, we have two HUGE dance festivals: Awa-Odori in Tokushima, and Yosakoi in Kochi. In addition, there’s many specialty dishes for you to try!

**Pro-tip:** Get some mates together and hire a car. While Shikoku’s cities offer great attractions and events, there are many places worth seeing that are inaccessible without a car. You never know what’s waiting for you somewhere along one of Shikoku’s narrow, winding mountain roads!

## **Block 9** **Hiroshima, Okayama,** **Shimane, Tottori,**

## **Yamaguchi by Preston** **Backer**

Don’t miss out on some awesome experiences in the magical Chugoku area! The following are just a few of the unforgettable events Block 9 has to offer. Hiroshima City’s anniversary of the A-bomb event is a sight to behold, but you can also check out our *sake* fest with over 100 *sake* breweries, and our island of deer, Miyajima! Head over to Tottori Prefecture to ride camels on the sand dunes and try your hand at paragliding. The Shan Shan Matsuri in mid-August has special umbrella dancing for attracting rain. Well-known Izumo Grand Shrine is located in Shimane Prefecture, as are the Oki Islands, a group of islands created from ancient volcanic remains and a truly unique experience for any traveler. So come on down and get on this crazy train that is Block 9!

**Pro-tip:** Hiroshima’s famous snack is the *momiji manju*, which are maple-leaf-shaped treats with filling, usually either bean paste, custard, or chocolate. Enjoy the delicious fried version during the beautiful changing of seasons from September to November.

## **Block 10** **Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Oita,** **Saga by Harriet Bougher**

Block 10 is one of the most diverse and rewarding places to travel in Japan. Fukuoka City in Fukuoka Prefecture is the biggest metropolis in Kyushu, where you can enjoy an array of shopping

and colourful nightlife. Oita Prefecture is THE *onsen* capital, boasting the largest amount of naturally produced hot water and *onsen* in the whole of Japan! In Saga Prefecture, you can see the world famous FAI Hot Air Balloon Championship, and in Nagasaki Prefecture, you can explore untouched nature and appreciate the fascinating yet heartbreaking history of Nagasaki City.

**Pro-tip:** Consider getting the Sun-Q Northern Kyushu Pass. For 8,000 yen, you can have unlimited rides on all highway and local buses within all four prefectures of Block 10.

## **Block 11 Kagoshima,** **Kumamoto, Miyazaki,** **Okinawa by CJ Fischer**

Block 11 is home to the four southern-most prefectures of Kyushu: Kumamoto, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, and Okinawa. While visiting, you can explore culturally rich villages, shrines, and castles; hike through mountains forged by active volcanoes and relax in the sand *onsen*; or simply laze on the beach after snorkeling through coral reefs. The warmer weather provided by Block 11’s geography matches the warm personalities of the people living here, so be sure to add it to your list of places to visit during your time on JET!

**Pro-tip:** LCCs (low cost carriers) are your best friends when it comes to visiting Block 11. Peach, Vanilla Air, and Jet Star offer flights at incredibly low rates!

# Great Apps Guide

Josh Francis (Okayama)

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Many JETs will have a smartphone in hand when they arrive in Japan, so get the most out of them with these apps to help you thrive in your new home.

## Apps for Travelling

### Google Maps

Google Maps can help you plan any kind of journey from your daily commute to your next big expedition within Japan. A great aspect is that it includes public transport information, too.

### Hyperdia

Hyperdia can help you plan the best train routes for your destinations, which is perfect when you are new to an area and unable to understand the rail system.

## Apps for Learning

### Anki

Anki is a learning tool that works like a deck of virtual cue cards. You can build Japanese language decks yourself, or download shared decks (of which there are many, including supplements to textbooks). Anki is available for free on Android, but you have to pay on iOS.

### Memrise

Memrise uses a matching game involving words and pronunciations. The more you get right, the more you level up and the harder words/phrases unlock. Once again, there is a wealth of downloadable courses, plus the ability to create and share memes making hard words memorable.

### Mind Snacks: Japanese

Mind Snacks: Japanese allows you to learn through a series of different games which all tackle a different aspect of Japanese. The only downside is that Mind Snacks is only available on iOS.

## Apps for Communicating

### LINE

LINE is the go-to chat and call app in Japan, and is integral for keeping in contact with fellow JETs and new friends and colleagues in Japan. Plus, it has some hilarious emoticons and stickers.

### What's App/Facebook Chat/Skype

Do not forget your friends and family at home, too! They may not use LINE, so remember apps that you can use to contact them. Perfect for recounting adventures or beating homesickness.

## Apps for Translating

### Google Translate

Google Translate sometimes gets a bad reputation, but for those who do not have extensive Japanese skills, this could be a lifesaver. Google Translate can help by translating both spoken and written words, which can come in handy when speaking to Japanese speakers and deciphering food packages.

### Imiwa/Japanese English Dictionary (JED)

These are mobile dictionaries allowing you to type, or even draw, unknown Japanese characters and find the meaning in seconds. It is great for those who have an established Japanese skill, but encounter a difficult word. Also, if you are a beginner, a dictionary can be a great way to begin building your vocabulary.

## Apps for Your Money

### Miru Ca

Miru Ca allows you to sync different rail cards, so you can keep a track of how much money you have on them.

### XE Currency

This exchange rate app is great for exchanging your money, as well as keeping an eye on how much you are spending in comparison to what you would at home.

### Your Original Bank's App

If you still have an account in your home country, then you will probably want some form of online banking that you can access in Japan.

## The iConnect App

AJET iConnect app will keep you updated on events, provide access to help or advice, show phrases for different situations (including medical and shopping), and provide just about any other useful tidbits you will need when you are living in Japan. And if that wasn't enough, you can also get the latest issues of Connect directly on your phone.



# Lost in Translation

## (Welcome to Tokyo)

Dylan Brain (Hiroshima) & Lara Bigotti (Shimane)

Tokyo is the capital of the country that fuses ancient and modern, eastern and western, outrageous and subtle, and it has more to offer than you will have time for, even if you live there for five years. Remember that while you are in Tokyo, your top priority is learning all there is to learn from the wealth of information provided to you at Orientation. Being fresh and well-rested for each day of workshops, meetings, and dinners will allow you to best prepare for your new jobs and lives here. Don't take it for granted. That being said, here are our top suggestions for activities that should be available to you in your time off during your stay.

*Please be aware that the listed fares, routes, and times for trains were found via Google Maps, so you should always check the train times at a metro station for the most up-to-date information.*

### City Dwellers

#### Harajuku Street

Where else? Everyone should check it out at least once. Walking through this paradise of color and girls in heels and petticoats will work up an appetite, so grab a crêpe at one of the many vendors. The close-by Kawaii Monster Café will meet all of your needs, if what you need is bright colors and larger-than-life unicorns watching you eat.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Yamanote Line from Harajuku station to Shinjuku Station ¥140, or walk 30 min. LAST TRAIN: 23:06*

#### Shimokitazawa

For a more relaxed shopping experience, get over to Shimokitazawa. This collection of streets and alleys is jam-packed with vintage thrift shops, delicate waffle cafés, and a lot of quirk. It's a popular place to be, but it's

a bit more laid back than hectic Harajuku.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Odakyu Line from Shimokitazawa Station to Shinjuku Station ¥160 LAST TRAIN: 23:14*

### **Ameya Yokocho**

Tokyo's most exciting market really comes alive at night: fresh street food; clothing, comic book, and anime stores; bars; restaurants — the list goes on!

*Back to Keio: Ride the Oedo Line from Ueno-Okachimachi Station to Tocho-Mae Station ¥220 LAST TRAIN: 23:18*

### **Tree Huggers**

#### **Yoyogi Park**

You can have the city and the trees if you pair this with a trip to Harajuku, as it's conveniently just across the street. Yoyogi's sprawling green is just a moment away from the madness. In the summer, you might even catch some free live music in the park.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Oedo Line from Yoyogi Station to Tocho-Mae Station ¥180, or walk 20-40 min. LAST TRAIN: 23:15*

#### **Todoroki Valley**

This valley in Setagaya Ward provides certain escape from the city. Water runs serenely through its lush green walls. Descend into the peace of the valley, and consider checking out Todoroki Shrine whilst you're there.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Tokyu-Oimachi Line from Todoroki Station to Jiyugaoka Station, transfer to Tokyu-Toyoko Line, and ride to Shinjokusancho Station ¥580 LAST TRAIN (Todoroki): 23:21 LAST TRAIN (Jiyugaoka): 23:37*

### **Inokashira Park**

This park is also a nice escape from the city atmosphere. On another trip to Tokyo, try to make it to the Ghibli Museum, located in this park. You won't have time during this stay as it's only open while you're busy at Orientation. Inokashira Park also has a pond and an art market on weekends.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Chuo Line from Kichijoji Station to Shinjuku Station ¥220 LAST TRAIN: 23:21*

### **Cultural Enthusiasts**

#### **Akihabara**

If you love manga or anime, even if you're just intrigued by this cultural niche, take the train to Akihabara, where you can enjoy the maid cafés, take photo booth *purikura* pictures with new friends, and hit up the arcades or any of the multi-level stores filled with goodies.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Chuo-Sobu Line (Local) from Akihabara Station to Shinjuku Station ¥170 LAST TRAIN: 23:37*

#### **Asakusa**

Home to Sensō-ji Temple, the five-story Pagoda, and Nakamise (the 'middle market'), along with so much more, Asakusa is the rich, old, cultural hub of Tokyo. If you love Japanese culture, an evening trip may be worth it for you.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Ginza Line from Asakusa Station to Ueno-Hirokoji Station, exit and walk to Ueno-Okachimachi Station, and ride the Oedo Line to Tocho-Mae Station ¥320 LAST TRAIN: 23:35 (Asakusa) LAST TRAIN: 23:37 (Ueno-Okachimachi)*

#### **Statue of Saigo Takamori**

*The Last Samurai* can be viewed in Ueno Park, along with other cultural attractions such as the Tokugawa Mausoleum, Tokyo

National Museum, Pagoda of Kan'ei-ji, and much more.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Oedo Line from Ueno-Okachimachi Station to Tocho-Mae Station ¥220 LAST TRAIN: 23:37*

### **Myth of Tomorrow**

Most museums will be closed by the time you're hitting the streets of the city, but you can still check out 'Myth of Tomorrow,' a powerful display of wall art featuring fierce subject matter. This wall is located in one of the lit walkways of Shibuya station. You'll find it inside the building complex called Mark City.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Yamanote Line from Shibuya Station to Shinjuku Station ¥160 LAST TRAIN: 23:38*

### **Tokyo Tourists**

#### **Tokyo Tower**

If you've been wanting to experience a tower that beats the Eiffel by just 13 meters, boy does Tokyo have just the thing for you. At night, Tokyo Tower is brilliantly lit in color. Just observing this amongst the city lights is inspiring and humbling.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Oedo Line from Akabanebashi Station to Tocho-Mae Station ¥220 LAST TRAIN: 23:40*

#### **Shibuya Crossing**

You've seen pictures, but nothing is quite like standing in the middle of this massive crossing and seriously pushing some buttons as you stop to take a hundred pictures in all directions.

*Back to Keio: Ride the Yamanote Line from Shibuya Station to Shinjuku Station ¥160 LAST TRAIN: 23:38*

# A New Day to Celebrate

## Taking a Breather in Japan's Famous Work Culture

Lauren Hill (Tokyo)

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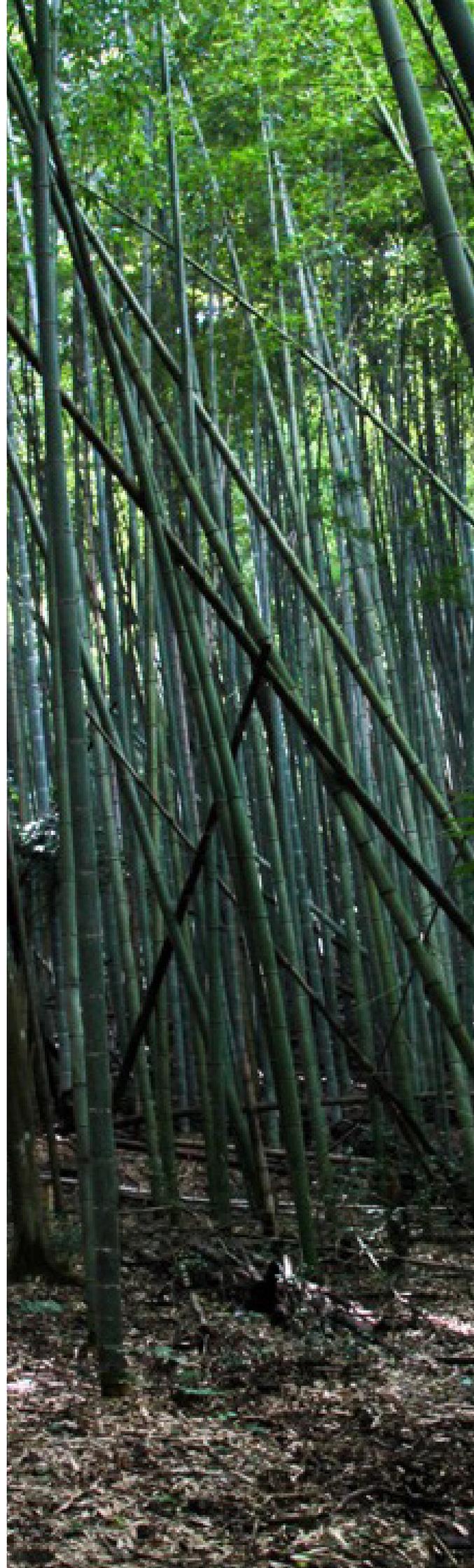
You're probably familiar with the limitlessly energetic Japanese work ethic. CNN has ranked Japan the ninth hardest working country in the world, with an average working person racking up 1,765 desk hours per year, so you're about to join colleagues that set the bar pretty high. (1) That's not to say there's no rest to be had. Along with the gradual decrease of working time — CNN's average is 145 hours down from figures in the 1990's — an increase in public holidays is working to reduce national stress levels, creating a healthier and more efficient work-life balance for many Japanese people.

This year, there are 16 Japanese public holidays — twice as many as the UK observes! (2) Many fall on Friday or Monday, creating those glorious three-day weekends we all love. (3) Unlike in most western countries, Japanese bank holidays tend to be imbued with some sort of natural or religious significance. (2) For example, Mountain Day will be celebrated for the first time on Aug. 11. Although many workers are simply happy to "get out of the office," groups such as the Japanese Alpine Club have pushed the religious and cultural significance of the holiday to Shinto practitioners. (2)

Mountain Day legislation recommends workers use the day to "get familiar with mountains and appreciate [their] blessings." (2) Whichever part of Japan you're going to be calling home, it's likely you've a mountain within travelable distance. Take the opportunity to get together with some new friends and soak up the surrounding scenery. On the other hand, Aug. 11 will come around before you know it, so if you're still getting to grips with your new life, nobody would blame you if your idea of a break is a hard-earned lie-in.

### Sources:

1. <http://cnnmon.ie/29eht0p>
2. <http://bit.ly/29tPS0P>
3. <http://bit.ly/29nDQnD>



# Important Japanese Laws to Be Aware of

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

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- 1 Foreigners must have their residence cards (*zairyū kādo*) or passports on them at all times — police are allowed to stop a foreigner and ask for it at any time.
- 2 AirBnB-style establishments are illegal under most circumstances <http://bit.ly/29lOhoQ>.
- 3 The voting age was recently lowered to 18.
- 4 Guns are outlawed or otherwise strictly regulated.
- 5 The legal drinking and smoking age is 20, and it is legal to drink publicly outside.
- 6 Many indoor restaurants and bars will allow for smoking, but there are many places outside where smoking is prohibited <http://bit.ly/29vEm3C>.
- 7 It is illegal to brew alcohol stronger than one percent in one's own home.
- 8 It is illegal to ride a bike while listening to music, using the phone, holding an open umbrella, etc. — keep both hands on the handlebars and remove distractions.
- 9 When riding at night, the bike must be equipped with a headlamp and a bell.
- 10 *Shaken* is a compulsory vehicle inspection one must pay for, usually every two years.
- 11 Taking even one sip of alcohol makes one legally intoxicated and unable to operate a vehicle — whether that is a car or a bicycle.
- 12 In traffic incidents, the victim is often legally seen as partially at fault. (For example, in a traffic accident involving a pedestrian and a vehicle, the blame will often not fall solely on the driver <http://bit.ly/29rPmOU>.)
- 13 Calling and riding in an ambulance is free (although this does not cover medical treatment while inside the ambulance).
- 14 While moves are being made to officially condemn hate speech, it is still not illegal, and there are no penalties for committing it.
- 15 Gay marriage is not legal, and there are currently no laws addressing LGBT+ discrimination in many areas (although signs of progress are slowly budding <http://bit.ly/29tBena>).

# Getting Connected

Lauren Hill (Tokyo)

One of the most daunting things when you're finding your feet in an unfamiliar country is discovering your new home isn't the most generous with free WiFi. Sadly, that's the case with Japan. That's not to say there's nothing for you to tap into immediately. Your Tokyo hotel, Starbucks, and an increasing number of JR trains all have their own internet provision — probably.<sup>(1)</sup> It's worth keeping in mind that the reliability of cloud services can vary; you're always in danger of travelling out of range, and you might have to pay a fee to access certain hotspots regularly. <sup>(2)</sup> Fortunately, we've put together a quick guide to the most common personal internet connections in Japan. Have a read, choose the method that's most convenient for you, and get back online in no time!

## Data SIM cards

If you've a tendency to overspill your data allowance, then a data SIM card might be your best bet. Available to hire or buy and compatible with any unlocked phone, data SIMs will get you set up in seconds. Choose from SIMs with a daily browsing limit — typically 200 MB — or larger allowances of between 1-6 GB. These larger limits are often valid for between two weeks and two months — perfect for documenting every detail of your first steps in Japan! You can pick up a data SIM card from eConnect <http://bit.ly/21YDNiW>, SoftBank <http://bit.ly/29jTOO6>, b-mobile <http://bit.ly/1oK29uB>, and most other major networks. As with each type of connection, prices vary between providers, meaning there's a plan to suit everyone!

*Keep in mind: You can have a pre-paid SIM card in your hands within an hour of landing if you've ordered in advance; often, they can be delivered to the airport, your hotel, or wherever's the most convenient for you.*

*It's also worth noting that the term "SIM card" might be slightly misleading. Data SIMs are usually for internet access only; they will not allow you to text or*

*call either within Japan or internationally — unless you count Skype. Skip ahead to the mobile phones section if that's what you're looking for.*

## Portable WiFi hotspots

Use a portable WiFi hotspot if you have multiple devices to keep online at the same time. Available from PuPuRu <http://bit.ly/19OZTgT>, eConnect <http://bit.ly/1nZ0w1w>, Japan Wireless <http://bit.ly/1IRdkvh>, and other providers, they're perfect when you're just starting out or planning a trip away from home. Charged regularly, most portable hotspots will last all day, though the signal can vary based on network coverage in your area or destination.

Contracts vary based on users' needs. If you're looking for something travel friendly, you can hire a hotspot for the duration of your trip. Minimum hire usually starts from around a week and can be extended as necessary. If you like the flexibility of a portable hotspot and want to use one as your main connection, most providers offer affordable monthly contracts.

*Keep in mind: Just like pre-paid SIMs, portable hotspots can be collected from airports, hotels, or any Japanese address, which makes them great if you're thinking about your connection ahead of time! They can also turn out to be miniature life savers if your school does not provide internet access for JETs. Classes might not begin until September, but when afternoons at your desk seem endless, use your hotspot to get online and access ESL resource sites or Japanese study materials.*

## Mobile phones

This might not be one for the first couple of days, but for many people, mobile phones are the go-to solution for internet access in a hurry. With contracts to suit a whole range of data-guzzling habits, some of the biggest mobile network providers in Japan

are NTT docomo <http://bit.ly/29fBCbj>, SoftBank <http://bit.ly/29mAXIO>, and au <http://bit.ly/29mCB6T>. Inclusive mobile phone packages also have the advantage of allowing you to call and text, both inside and outside Japan — great if you need to contact your supervisor last minute to let them know about absence or illness! The shiny new Japanese phone number says it all, really. As long as you're committed to the likely two-year contract period or prepared to pay cancellation fees if you're only staying a year, do it. You'll radiate *I've got this*.

Something to be aware of is that mobile network providers may be unwilling to offer monthly contracts to a foreigner, as you likely don't have a Japanese credit card or credit history. If this is the case for you, then it's all the more reason to go with a temporary option until you've had the chance to save a little. Most companies will allow you to pay for a phone in full as an alternative to a monthly contract. Whichever you go for, remember to have all your ID — residence card, bank book, and your personal seal (*inkan*) — with you when you visit a store. Seals are used in place of signatures to authenticate Japanese documents. Your supervisor may have contacted you before arrival about the characters you would like to appear on your seal, but if that's not the case, they will help you get one in your first couple of days at work.

*Keep in mind: Many Contracting Organisations (COs) will require you to have a Japanese phone number so that they can contact you in the event of an emergency. This should be your primary reason for getting hold of a phone, rather than to hop online immediately. It might be a good idea to start small, picking up a cheap mobile in your first few days — minus internet access, the horror! — and splash out on a smartphone after a couple of pay days.*

## Home broadband

Amazing as they are, there are some things portable hotspots and smartphones just aren't built for. Video calling home, streaming Netflix and online gaming are all things best attempted with a home broadband connection. In Japan, this works in two stages.

First, you need to pin down a company who will connect your place to a network. Here, you can choose between companies offering ADSL or

Hikari-Fiber, the Japanese equivalent of fiber optic broadband. Hikari-Fiber is faster and generally considered a better connection than ADSL. You can contact Flet's <http://bit.ly/29mDufL> and au <http://bit.ly/29hqnTV> about setting up a Hikari-Fiber connection.

Next, you need to find an internet service provider (ISP). A number of providers will offer to take care of both your internet provision and your home's line connection — taking out step one for you! — but this is not always the case. Often, you will have to contact both companies to get connected at home. (2) Popular providers include Asahi Net <http://bit.ly/29nyLzR>, Fusion GOL <http://bit.ly/29nzLQk>, and SpinNet <http://bit.ly/29mGB7o>. Broadband in Japan can be excellent, and if you're willing to pay for it you'll almost certainly be able to select a speed similar to the one you use at home.

*Keep in mind: If you're taking over your predecessor's apartment, your line provider and ISP will most likely be predetermined. Also, as you've probably guessed, home broadband is not the most speedy connection method. Many new JETs go without a home connection for weeks or months after arrival. Every internet situation is different, and if you find you're stuck with something prehistoric or nothing at all, take it as motivation to grab a portable hotspot, get out of the apartment and do some exploring in your community. Don't forget to post loads of pictures to keep friends and family back home up to date!*

## One Last Thing

Hopefully you've now got some ideas about how to get online in Japan. The biggest and most important bit of advice we want to leave you with is this: always make sure you know what you're signing up for. If possible, take your supervisor with you when you go shopping; most likely they will be keen to make sure you get the best deal, and avoid any unnecessary extras that might manage to slip through the language barrier otherwise. Ensure you understand the length of your contract, its monthly payments, and any cancellation charges before you commit. Stay cautious, and happy browsing!

## Sources:

1. <http://bit.ly/29i7BH8>
2. <http://bit.ly/29omV4H>

# Festival Food Bingo



Lauren Hill (Tokyo)

Wherever you're headed after Tokyo Orientation, there's sure to be a festival or two happening somewhere close to home. *Tanabata* and *Obon* are two of the most iconic August celebrations, but festivals – *matsuri* in Japanese – show up everywhere in Japan, and for every reason imaginable. What do festivals mean for you?

Well, there's the chance to let your hair down after what's guaranteed to be a busy start to your new life in Japan, dress up, take in some expertly-curated festival fireworks, and of course, sample the best – and most unusual – that festival cuisine has to offer. On the next page are some of our summer festival favourites, with a little bit of an ingredients guide so you don't feel like we're sending you in completely blind. Menu or challenge? The choice is yours.

# How many will you try?



## Takoyaki

Octopus meat in batter, topped with *takoyaki* sauce, mayonnaise, *aonori* seaweed, and *bonito* flakes.



## Yakisoba

Fried buckwheat or *ramen* noodles with *yakisoba* sauce, cabbage, onions, and carrots. *Yakisoba* sauce — made from Worcester sauce, ketchup, soy sauce, sugar and oyster sauce — has enough kick of its own, but *yakisoba* is often also topped with mayonnaise, fish flakes, pickled ginger, and *aonori* seaweed.



## Yakitori

Skewered and grilled chicken, often served with a variety of grilled vegetables.



## Okonomiyaki

Literally meaning “as you like it,” *okonomiyaki* is a savoury pancake topped with cabbage and other vegetables, your choice of meat, and sauces such as mayonnaise and *okonomiyaki* sauce — which tastes something like a mixture of soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce and ketchup. Don't be put off; it's delicious, we promise!



## Ikayaki

Grilled squid, often glazed with soy sauce and served on a stick.



## Kakigori

Shaved ice, flavoured with sweetener, syrup or condensed milk. Want to try a uniquely Japanese flavour? How about green tea, plum, or sesame?



## Crepes

Thin pancakes topped with almost anything, from syrup to whipped cream to several types of fruits!



## Choco Bananas

Whole bananas dipped in a wide range of sweet stuff. Usually chocolate sauce and some kind of sprinkles, but the sky's the limit here.



## Taiyaki

Dessert waffle with a sweet filling. Often fish-shaped, but not always. Look out for shapes like this delicious looking *oni*, a demon from Japanese folklore. Common flavours include red bean paste, custard, chocolate, and cheese.

# A Guide to Entertainment in Japan

Travis Shaver (Niigata) & Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)

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Miss your old Netflix binges and streaming music on your commute? New to Japan and curious about local entertainment? Here's a quick introduction on how to do and see some amazing entertainment in Japan.

## Movies and TV

Most basic Japanese TV stations have fairly limited educational, news, and variety show programming. If you want more variety such as dramas, anime, or English shows, you'll need to invest in a pricey cable box. Similarly, movie theaters cost more than 1,800 yen per ticket, but offer the occasional couples', ladies', and late show discounts are available. English-language options, however, are limited to huge blockbusters, such as Marvel films and Academy Award-winners. Luckily, DVDs are easy to rent here. Find your local Tsutaya and sign up for a card to gain access to a comprehensive selection of movies and TV at any branch in Japan, or just visit your local *conbini* and see what new, popular releases they have to rent.

In recent years, Japan has embraced online streaming platforms. If you have Netflix back home, you can dive right in with Netflix Japan. Just open up Netflix and voilà! You are set for many of your favorites like *The Big Bang Theory* or *Orange is the New Black*. English programming is limited, but their library is expanding every day. Hulu Japan is also available, though you must sign up and pay to view any of their library. However, a free trial is available when you sign up. Finally, consider a Virtual Private Network (VPN) such as Express VPN and Buffered. Any websites or services you used at home that are not available in Japan can be accessed through a VPN, including overseas Netflix and Hulu accounts, as well as individual TV channels and streaming sites. On September 1st, 2016 it will become a criminal offence to stream from the BBC iPlayer website without a TV licence. (UK specific, but there could be similar laws in place elsewhere.)

Connect recommends [世界の果てまでイッテQ \(Sekai no Hate Made Itte Q! and テラスハウス \(Terrace House\)\)](#)

## Music

Japan has not quite embraced digital music, so your music fix will mostly come from CDs. Unfortunately for those who prefer digital or portable music, many streaming services are not reliably accessible in Japan, such as the ever-popular Spotify and Pandora. However, with Apple Music, the content you see is not based on location but on the country your iTunes account is attached to — whether that be Japan or your home country. It is the first of hopefully many music streaming options to become available in Japan. Also, if you don't mind buying a cheap CD player, Tsutaya and other rental shops rent CDs as well, and there are plenty of indie and big-name record shop chains to be found in even the smallest of towns.

Prefer live music? Many big-name Western artists, from Lady Gaga to Queen, tour in Japan, though often only in Tokyo and possibly Osaka. If you keep an eye on your favorites, you may get lucky! Most Japanese artists perform all over the country, multiple times per year, so fans should have no trouble checking them out firsthand. Most mid-sized cities will have local indie music clubs, opera companies, and symphony halls, so no matter your preference, there will be something for you. Finally, music festivals are the best deal you can get: Summer Sonic (Aug. 20-21, Tokyo and Osaka) features dozens of Japanese and foreign artists, and there are many more, including niche EDM, salsa, jazz, and video game music showcases for you to check out!

Connect recommends [One OK Rock, sukekiyo, and Babymetal!](#)

Check out [Connect's guide to buying tickets in Japan](#) <http://bit.ly/29wFKCY>

## Theater

Between outdoor performances during the summer festival season to major touring productions, it is easy to find stage shows in Japan, even in the countryside. Many popular Western musicals, like *Rent* and *The Lion King*, frequently play in large cities, albeit translated into Japanese. Shakespeare and other classics are also available, and even traditional *noh*, *kabuki*, and *bunraku* shows occasionally have English audio guides available. These are usually limited to specific shows, so be on the look-out! If you can make it to Tokyo or the Kansai area, the all-female Takarazuka Revue performs many original and translated Western musicals and operas, though tickets are in high demand. Finally, if you feel up to the crowds, the many anime-inspired musical series, such as the *Sailor Moon* and *Prince of Tennis* hits, are always on tour and worth it for the uniquely Japanese experience.

Connect recommends *The Lion King* and 夏祭浪花鑑 (*Natsu Matsuri Naniwa Kagami*)

### Video Games

If you're wanting to buy the latest video game trend or play a childhood favorite, you may want to check for compatibility with your device. While the latest consoles Xbox One and PS4 are region-free, other devices — portables, Nintendo, and older generation — are region locked. Regions vary depending on the generation, make, and model, so see what countries are included in your region for your specific system. Many publishers do make their games region-free regardless of platform, but it's worth a double-check. Luckily, if you bring your home consoles, play online, or use Steam, you can still access and enjoy all of your favorite games with no problem.

Connect recommends *Puzzle and Dragon*, *Monster Hunter*, and anything *Pokémon*!

No matter what your entertainment niche is, you will find it in Japan without a hitch once you start looking. This is definitely not an exhaustive list but rather a jumping-off point for you to start your own entertainment excursions. The possibilities will go as far as your imagination and sense of adventure take you.



# Give Me a Break

## Work and Vacation in Japan

Annamarie Carlson (Shizuoka)

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### National Holidays for 2016-2017

#### 2016

**August 11** – Mountain Day\*

**September 19** – Respect-For-The-Aged Day

**September 22** – Autumnal Equinox Day

**October 10** – Health and Sports Day

**November 3** – Culture Day

**November 23** – Labor Thanksgiving Day

**December 23** – The Emperor's Birthday

#### 2017

**January 1** – New Year's Day

**January 2** – New Year's Day Holiday

**January 9** – Coming of Age Day

**February 11** – National Foundation Day

**March 20** – Vernal Equinox Day

**April 29** – Showa Day

**May 3** – Constitution Memorial Day

**May 4** – Greenery Day

**May 5** – Children's Day

**July 17** – Marine (Ocean) Day

\*This new holiday is being held for the first time in 2016. Source: <http://bit.ly/29nDQnD>

### (Over)Work Culture in Japan

It's Friday, and your contract hours for the day are over. You pack up your bag and head for home, thinking about dinner and your plans for the weekend. On the way out of the staffroom you say a quick goodbye to the teachers still working diligently at their desks, meeting with students, or running to club activities. But wait, shouldn't they be heading home soon as well?

One of the first things any new ALT may notice about their new school is that the teachers seem to be always working. They are there before we arrive in the

morning, and some are there long after we have gone home in the evening. It isn't just teachers pulling long hours; about 22% of Japanese people work more than 49 hours a week. In 2013, the average worker took only 8.6 days of personal vacation time, less than half of the average 18.5 available days (1) (2). For many of us looking in from the outside, it can seem vastly different from how employees are expected to behave in our home countries.

Japanese workers are known worldwide for their hard work and commitment to producing a high quality product (3), but the cost of this image of perfection can be the health and welfare of the employees themselves (1). The intense commitment to work can be connected in part to Japan's declining birth rate, as people do not have time to get married and raise children. It also can lead to illnesses related to stress and fatigue, and in the most extreme cases, *karoshi*, meaning "death by overwork."

While ideas about work are changing, working long hours and not taking vacation time is still seen as a way for many Japanese workers to show their loyalty and devotion to their company and has long been a part of the unique work culture in Japan (1). As one of the top economic powers in the world, it would be wrong to say Japan's focus on work hasn't been successful.

### **Time to Take A Break**

As JETs, we only touch the fringe of this work culture. Teachers are not salarymen who have to prove their loyalty to their company, but that doesn't mean they don't work equally as hard. While it isn't strange to see a teacher grabbing a quick nap on their desk, the likelihood of seeing a coworker collapse from exhaustion is pretty slim. These days, the Japanese government is taking steps to try and encourage people to take time for rest and relaxation.

With the addition of Mountain Day in August 2016, Japan now has 16 national holidays annually, which is more than any of the other G7 (formerly G8) nations (2). Unlike the bulk of the other G7 nations, however, most Japanese workers receive and use relatively fewer paid vacation days. This is in part because of their workload, but also because of pressure from their coworkers to not take days off. For many Japanese workers, taking personal time off can be seen as causing trouble for the coworkers they leave behind, and that causes many

people to feel reluctant to take the time they need to rest (1).

### **Bridging the Cultural Divide**

What does this mean for JETs? At the end of the day, we are not, or should not, be expected to perfectly assimilate to Japanese work culture. Our job is to celebrate and teach what makes us different, as well as share in what makes us the same. In the past, however, conflicts have arisen when it comes to using the paid vacation days (*nenkyu*) many JETs are given in their contracts. At the heart of these conflicts, it seems, is often a fundamentally different understanding of what vacation time is for and when it can be used. For example, using our paid vacation time for things like medical appointments or trips to the bank may seem odd to us at first, though it may be completely normal for Japanese teachers.

For most of us coming from work cultures very different to Japan's, our contract hours and vacation days are non-negotiable rights as an employee, but for many of our Japanese coworkers, taking time off is not only a luxury but a indulgence that might bring the disapproval of the people around them. This isn't to say that, as JETs, we need to be staying after our contract hours and never using our *nenkyu* in order to fit in. Respecting our contract hours and using our paid vacation days are our rights, but if a situation arises where you feel some tension with the teachers around you because of vacation time, it can be helpful to take a step back and try to understand the work culture around us.

It takes time to understand the culture of any new workplace and can be even more difficult in a new country. In Japan, it can be difficult to adjust to an increase in national holidays that do not necessarily equate to a satisfying break. So, this year, as you are celebrating the inaugural Mountain Day, take some time to appreciate the unique intricacies of this place we currently call home. And if Mountain Day isn't enough of a rest, remember there will always be another national holiday next month. Unless it's June. During June, you're just going to have to work.

### **Sources:**

1. <http://bit.ly/29K7T7C>
2. <http://bit.ly/29BVzZT>
3. <http://bit.ly/1Nmafnb>

# Shinjuku at Night:

## Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Steps From the Hotel

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Mike Sosnick (Kobe)

You only got half an hour of shut eye on the flight and the jet lag is real. Even if the bustle of Shinjuku doesn't jolt you awake, it's worth trying to explore this not so little slice of Tokyo. It's natural that you may not want to stray far from the hotel, but it's easy to get an ample taste of the city right in Keio Plaza's backyard. Here are a few of our suggestions to help you make the most of your nights.

## Dinner

Every great night out starts with a full stomach. Even if you're tuckered out, you still need to eat. You have plenty of time to gorge yourself on Lawson *bentos*, though, so do yourself a favor and dig a little deeper for these first few dinners.

### Ramen: Menya Musashi

This well-known *ramen* mini-chain took the noodle world by storm in the late 1990s, and the Shinjuku outpost is its original store. Menya Musashi still serves up delicious bowls of Tokyo-style *shoyu ramen* to this day, without the long waits of other local *ramen* heavyhitters like Fuunji. 7-2-6 NishiShinjuku <http://bit.ly/29UfoYq>

### Udon: Mentsudan

Mentsudan is a humble shop where great respect is paid to a very humble noodle: *udon*. Your wallet is well-respected too; prices are kept low at this counter-service spot that lets diners choose from a plethora of toppings. The *Sanuki*-style is quite faithful to its Kagawa roots, so Shikoku-bound JETs may find it a bit redundant. But for the rest of us, it's a spot-on reproduction. 7-9-15 NishiShinjuku <http://>

[bit.ly/2ab4lfl](http://bit.ly/2ab4lfl)

### Horumonyaki: Nihon Saisei Sakaba

*Horumonyaki* isn't on the radar of many foreign Japanese food fans, but it should be. Supposed health benefits of eating offal aside, Nihon Saisei Sakaba is a smoky, standup establishment serving the most obscure of grilled organ meats. This isn't gag food for the sake of gag food, though. While pig uterus may test your confidence, Nihon Saisei Sakaba puts taste first and begs you to wash it down with beer, *shochu*, and *sake*. The social lubricant makes conversing with your chatty neighbors even more exciting. 3-7-3 Shinjuku <http://bit.ly/2ab4lfl>

### Kushikatsu: Tanaka

*Kushikatsu* (also known as *kushiage*) is deepfried stuff on a stick — what's not to like? This outpost of the small, Osaka-based chain is a bit rowdier and cheaper than its native Tokyo counterparts, but Tanaka doesn't skimp on quality. It's hard to choose from the long list of meat, fish, and veggies, and even harder to say no to the inexpensive drinks. As you get wrapped up in the raucous atmosphere, don't forget that doubledipping in the communal sauce is totally forbidden. 3 Chome-12-4 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku <http://bit.ly/29NEasN>

### Vegan: Ain Soph.Ripple

Don't let the vegan label scare you: Ain Soph. Ripple is a tasty choice for even the most dedicated carnivore. Confusing punctuation aside, this trendy spot's burgers, bowls, and burritos are scrumptious. You'll leave with a clean conscience, messy hands, and a newfound appreciation for how good vegan food can be. 2-46-8 Kabukichō <http://bit.ly/29SZumD>

# Nightlife

Everyone wants something a little different out of their night out, so we've compiled options from soft saxophones at a jazz bar to hardball at the batting cages.

## Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building Observatories

No city sprawls quite like Tokyo. The bustling metropolis' scale is staggering even for lifelong city dwellers, and there's a powerful feeling of insignificance that comes from standing over it all. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building Observatories let you do just that — for free! Take in the spectacular views until 11 p.m. 2 Chome-8-1 NishiShinjuku <http://bit.ly/29ZwgzN>

## Asyl

This six-seat bar is of about average size for its Golden Gai surroundings, a jam-packed collection of miniscule watering holes with hyperspecific themes. At Asyl, world music is the specialty, meaning you can discuss K-pop with the talkative, knowledgeable owner while bhangra is piped through the speakers. 1 Chome-1-8 Kabukichō <http://bit.ly/2at5Y7j>

## Oslo Batting Center

Unleash your inner Hideki Matsui at this urban baseball oasis. At 300 yen for 30 pitches, you can hit home runs to your heart's content — or at least entertain your new friends with your poor coordination. Oslo Batting Center, where you can keep swinging until 1 a.m., will make you feel like a member of the Yomiuri Giants without all the downsides of sports stardom. 3rd Street 2F, 2 Chome-34-5 Kabukichō <http://bit.ly/29XGuSb>

## Tanto

After a long flight and endless orientation information, you may just want to settle down with a beer. But during a night out in Tokyo, a few too many can take a toll on your wallet. That's not the case at Tanto, where drafts are only 100 yen a pop. Sure, you may have to buy a cheap bite of food, but if you're in it for the long haul, this spartan *izakaya* is hard to beat. 2 Chome-45-13 Kabukichō, Shinjuku-ku <http://bit.ly/2a7MxDI>

## Campy! Bar

Campy! is just that. This over-the-top drag bar is a perfect introduction to Shinjuku Nichome, Tokyo's lively LGBT+ neighborhood. The friendly, outgoing

staff and lack of a seating charge set Campy! apart from the rest. No matter your orientation or gender, you're bound to have a compelling conversation or two, and you'll be welcomed with open arms. 2 Chome-13-10 Shinjuku-ku, Shinjuku <http://bit.ly/29Ux6xi>

## Pit Inn

This famous jazz bar is all about the music. Japan's most acclaimed jazz acts all stop at the Pit Inn, where all seats face the stage. Entry is a tad on the pricey side, but this should be on the list of all jazz-inclined JETs. Check out their handy website <http://bit.ly/29icsnH> for English information and a nightly schedule. 2 Chome-12-4 Shinjuku-ku, Shinjuku <http://bit.ly/29UI3h8>



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# Dress to Impress in Japan

Liam Nolan (Kumamoto) & Erica Grainger (Fukushima)

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Arriving at Tokyo Orientation is a fashion free-for-all. Staggering off the plane in crumpled shirts, skirts, or dresses with greasy matted hair, you don't feel or look your best, but it's time to do a 180 and put on a smile and dress to impress. How? Try this...

## During Tokyo Orientation

Gentlemen - Wear a suit and tie every day of Tokyo Orientation. Save the shorts and graphic tees for parties with your friends. Japanese etiquette dictates: *Never* pair a black suit with a black tie. This combination is reserved for funerals.

Ladies - Suits and professional attire during the day. Avoid heavy, warm fabrics, like wool. You'll roast to death! Avoid neon colors, low-cut, tight, or revealing clothing. If your grandma would object, we object!

Erica recommends: Daily showers (obviously) and keeping breath mints in your purse. I avoided a smelly JET during Orientation. Actually everyone avoided him! (Hopefully he's improved his hygiene)

Liam recommends: Be polite to your fellow JETs, and always be on time!

## Post-Tokyo, First Week Jitters

Ladies and Gentleman: Avoid busting your jeans out right away, and size up what people wear at your schools as soon as possible. SHS JETs are expected to dress more formally whereas JHS and ES JETs can dress more casually.

Ladies - Avoid tight, short and sleeveless clothing. It's a school, not a nightclub! No cleavage or short skirts, think knee-length skirts or longer.

Erica recommends: Classic elegance is best! Wear discreet accessories, and avoid flashy colours and styles. You don't want to look like the class clown!

Liam recommends: Always suiting up for your first visit to school or with an important town official, like the mayor I overdid this a bit ... I spent my first month in Kumamoto, a bone-melting 35+ degrees Celsius at the time, fully suited. Never again!

## Essential Accessories

Have a hand towel ready for the bathroom. Often there are no hand wipes or hand-dryer.

Have comfortable indoor shoes ready for your school(s). Ensure they are easy to slip on and off!

Erica recommends: Ballet slippers! Any colour's fine, but don't wear any shoes with heels, buckles or laces.

Liam recommends: Slip-ons from UNIQLO or cheap, comfortable running shoes.

## What's That On Your Face?

Gentlemen - Grooming is very important in Japan. If you prefer to be clean-shaven, try and avoid growing too much stubble, because Japanese people will comment.

Liam recommends: If you're biologically capable of growing a beard, try and keep it neat and trimmed.

Ladies - Try a low-maintenance hairstyle, and keep makeup and perfume to a minimum. You don't want to scare the kids away!

Also, check your school's policy for jewellery, nail polish, etc.

Erica recommends: *Enkais* and special events are a great excuse to glam up your look with your favourite lipstick! Remember though, you want to be sassy, not crassy! So, don't over-do it!

Erica is the Fashion and Beauty Editor for Connect. Please contact her at connect.fashion@ajet.net anytime for fashion conversations, tips, tricks and more!

Liam is a Canadian 1st year JET, who was placed in a rural town of 10,000 people in Kumamoto prefecture. He had five schools, of these, one was Junior High and four were Elementary Schools. Sadly, he's leaving the JET programme to return to school. He'll be missed by many!

Click here <http://bit.ly/1UAe249> to understand Cool Biz



# Dealing with Dietary Restrictions in Japan

Jessica Williams (Yamaguchi)

Moving to another country can seem daunting, and if you have dietary requirements, then you might be worried about what you can and cannot eat safely. Well, worry not as here at Connect magazine, we have got your back. Whether you are lactose intolerant, vegetarian, vegan, gluten intolerant, or have any other dietary requirements, with a bit of preparation and our handy vocab guide you can eat out in Japan without fear!

## Reading food labels

When you decide to eat pre-packaged food or quick *combin*i snacks, the first thing you should look for is the nutritional information and ingredients label. There are usually two ways that the label will indicate if the product contains a potentially allergy-inducing ingredient.

### *The bold method*

Like in Western countries, sometimes the ingredients known to be an allergen will be highlighted in bold. The most common ones are wheat, egg, milk, and soy.

### *The circle method*

This method is mostly used on packaged food in Japan. On the packet will be a small table listing common allergens and fish. If the food item contains this ingredient, it will be marked with a circle.

Japanese	Romaji	English
乳製品	<i>nyuuseihin</i>	milk products*
卵 (たまご)	<i>Tamago</i>	egg
くるみ	<i>Kurumi</i>	walnuts
小麦 (こむぎ)	<i>Komugi</i>	wheat
かに	<i>Kani</i>	crab
大豆 (だいず)	<i>Daizu</i>	soy/soybean****
そば	<i>Soba</i>	soba (buckwheat)
落花生 (らっかせい)	<i>Rakkasei</i>	peanuts/tree nuts**
魚 (さかな)	<i>Sakana</i>	Fish (generic)
さけ	<i>Sake</i>	salmon
えび	<i>Ebi</i>	shrimp
いか	<i>Ika</i>	squid
いくら	<i>Ikura</i>	salmon roe
かつお/かつお節	<i>bonito</i>	dried fish flakes
牛肉 (ぎゅうにく)	<i>Gyuuniku</i>	beef
さば	<i>Saba</i>	mackerel
鶏肉 (けいにく)	<i>Keiniku</i>	chicken***
豚肉 (ぶたにく)	<i>Butaniku</i>	pork
まつたけ	<i>Matsutake</i>	matsutake mushrooms
ゼラチン	<i>Zerachin</i>	gelatin

\*Dairy/cow milk is 牛乳 (ぎゅうにゅう), but by itself the *nyuu* part (also read *chichi*) refers to “milk,” and in this context, dairy milk.

\*\*The word “peanuts” is also commonly listed as ピーナッツ.

\*\*\*Chicken is also *toriniku* (鳥肉, とりにく).

\*\*\*\*Soy milk is 豆乳 (とうにゅう, *tounyuu*).

### Asking about allergies

If you are worried that a meal might contain something you can't eat, then you can ask the staff for a nutritional information card, most big-name chains will even carry them in English, or you can try out your language skills with these set phrases.

Excuse me does this contain \_\_\_\_\_?  
*Sumimasen, kore ni wa \_\_\_\_\_ ga haitte imasu ka?*  
すみません、これには\_\_\_\_\_が入っていますか。

I am allergic to \_\_\_\_\_  
*Watashi ni wa \_\_\_\_\_ no arerugī ga arimasu.*  
私には\_\_\_\_\_のアレルギーがあります。

I cannot eat \_\_\_\_\_  
*Watashi wa \_\_\_\_\_ ga taberaremasen.*  
私は\_\_\_\_\_が食べられません。

If you are feeling uneasy trying out your Japanese, you can get a bilingual allergy card. A lot of food allergy awareness groups create ‘allergy cards’ in multiple languages explaining dietary requirements and restrictions. These are a great way to make sure both you and the people preparing your meal fully understand your dietary requirements.

You can get a downloadable Japanese/English allergy card here <http://bit.ly/1e309yc>

We hope that with this guide, being able to stay informed, and asking questions, you will be able to enjoy the many foods that Japan has to offer without having to worry about your dietary requirements.

### TOP TIPS!

- Always ask! If you are ever unsure, most staff will be happy to help you with your needs.
- Write it down! If you are having trouble communicating, write down your requirements.
- Many Japanese people's written English is a lot better than their speaking.
- Looking for that hard-to-find specialist ingredient? Try your local imported food store. They have many things such as almond flour that might be otherwise difficult to find.



# Dealing with Culture Food Shock

Pameline Kang (Ishikawa)

Moving to Japan can be an overwhelming experience. You may have to adjust to the different language and culture, adopt new routines, and even adapt to an entirely new way of life.

For many of you, the Japanese cuisine (和食 *washoku*) can be a huge shock to your gastrointestinal system! Here are a few do's and don'ts to help you adapt to your new diet in Japan:

DO	DON'T
<b>Start slowly</b> Try a small bite before diving head first into ordering a whole new dish by yourself! Wasting food is a terrible sin, not to mention the money wasted if you toss the entire dish away.	<b>Force yourself</b> If you aren't entirely comfortable with certain Japanese meals, don't force yourself to eat. Your gut and your brain are connected! Not only will you feel sick physically, you might develop a phobia towards the food.
<b>Observe how the locals eat</b> The best way to adapt to the local cuisine and food culture is to closely observe the natives and become knowledgeable of the etiquette. Remember not to stick your chopsticks upright into your bowl of rice!	<b>Be afraid to try new things</b> Even if something looks or sounds like it wouldn't appeal to you, try it anyway. It might sound like an overused cliché, but you'll never know if you like something until you try it!
<b>Embrace the eating culture</b> It is tempting to seek out familiar foods (like McDonald's), especially in the early days upon arrival. However, try your hardest not to. Instead, ask your neighbors where the best places to eat are and they'll tell you where the locals typically dine.	<b>Panic if your body doesn't react favorably at first</b> Japanese cuisine may feature very different ingredients than what you were accustomed to consuming back home. You may experience some gastrointestinal discomfort in the early days, but it is only normal, as your digestive system needs to become acquainted with these new foods.
<b>Keep an open mind</b> There may be some food that you come across in Japan that is strange or revolting. Remember that someone has worked hard to prepare the food that you will be eating, even if you don't like the taste of it. Always remember to be respectful and keep an open mind!	<b>Be impatient</b> Food is closely tied to memory and personal experiences, and it may take some time for you to develop a taste for Japanese cuisine. Don't worry if you don't take an immediate liking to it, as you're bound to develop a taste for it the longer you live in Japan.

# Top Health Tips to Survive Your First Week in Japan

Pameline Kang (Ishikawa) & Jessica Williams (Yamaguchi)

**1** Your apartment might be dusty when you first move in. For those who have sensitive airways, do consider wearing a surgical or face mask when cleaning your apartment.

**2** Familiarise yourself with the nearest clinic, pharmacy and/or hospital in your area. Do write down important addresses in English and Japanese as you will need it a lot in the first few weeks.

**3** Memorise the number to call for an ambulance in Japan. Remember, it is 119.

**4** Always wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before eating or preparing food and after you use the bathroom, cough, or sneeze. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol based hand gel (with at least 60% alcohol). Do also keep a hand towel with you as most public restrooms don't have hand dryers/paper towels!

**5** Limit alcohol intake! Please remember that drinking and driving (not just in Japan!) comes with harsh penalties. This also applies when riding a bicycle.

**6** Take care of your health. Avoid close contact with sick people in public areas and crowded public transports.

**7** Drink plenty of water as you will get dehydrated very easily during the summer.

**8** Rest, rest and rest! Have some ME time to relax and let your new life sink in.

**9** Don't forget to catch up on your Zs so you can carry out your duties to the best of your ability.

**10** The sun in Japan can be scorching during the summer. Consider applying sunscreen to reduce contact with harmful UV rays, especially those who suffer from sensitive skin!

**11** For those who have been prescribed medication, do not miss your dose! Seek medical help immediately if your condition worsens. Refer to points 2 and 3 if you have a medical emergency.

**12** Folks stressing out back at home? Remember to Skype your loved ones for your and their peace of mind.

**13** You might find yourself sitting at your desk a lot during your first week at work! Remember to get up, stretch and walk around occasionally to get the blood circulation flowing!



Amir Bagheri (Kagawa) & Josh Francis (Okayama), with help from the JET community

Moving to a new country can be stressful and make you anxious, but don't worry! Take a deep breath in, and now exhale. We managed to interview a handful of current JETs from all over Japan that went through what you are about to experience in the next coming months.

## 1- What is the first thing you did when you arrived in your placement?

### **Zak - Nakatado-gun, Kagawa**

The first thing that happened was that my supervisor took me to get my phone, electricity, internet, gas, and water sorted out (really exciting stuff). My town is a fusion of three towns, so there are a lot of town offices. This meant that when I did the "self-intro tour" it took about two whole days of the standard spiel of name, place of origin, etc.

What really sticks out in my mind though is the experiences with the rest of the members of the JET community. There were two days of training and a couple of get togethers with everyone from the prefecture, which was really nice. Kagawa is small, so everyone is really close, which makes for a good time.

### **Denica - Tokyo**

I attended a two-week orientation whilst staying in hotels and homestay. It was actually incredibly stressful as I just wanted my own space at the time. This was separate from Tokyo orientation. So, when everyone else left Tokyo Prefecture, the Tokyo public school jets were put on a bus and sent to the Shinagawa Prince Hotel to start off with. Be warned: not all JETs get to move in and relax when they reach their prefecture. Although I'm unsure how many prefectures work the same as us.

## 2- How did you go about setting up your apartment?

### **Nicole - Minamikyushu-shi, Kagoshima**

My school had the apartment professionally cleaned before I arrived, which was a huge burden off me. It

came fully furnished, so I didn't need to worry about that.

Otherwise, I just had a little fun with making the space my own. To be honest, there was still stuff I wanted to get rid of a year after I arrived. So it's constantly a work in progress.

### **Natalie - Sapporo-shi, Hokkaido**

Crazy! My apartment had been used by predecessors going back at least 10 years (I found JET handbooks from 2003!). The apartment was old and dirty, with so much junk in the closets. But at least it had all the essential appliances and furniture.

The biggest problem was that we couldn't get the hot water to work, so I showered at a neighbour's twice. After a few days, it was decided that I would move into a different apartment in the same complex. They gave me the keys to the new apartment, and said they would move me on the following Saturday. On that morning, the school's baseball team arrived and moved everything except the couch and junk (they insisted the couch was unsafe when they removed the cushions).

### **3- Did you make any silly/embarrassing mistakes and how did you overcome them?**

#### **Nicole**

Grocery shopping and home cooking has been a constant adventure! Trying out a green variety of *konnyaku*, which to this day I am convinced you're supposed to cook or something but I dare not try it again. Then there was trying to eat *goya* like a cucumber, and figuring out my rice cooker; I have still not graduated to *natto* though. I started to give myself a lot of shopping time and not be afraid to stand in the store with Google.

Coming from a country that uses British English, I sat down with my first pile of marking and massacred the spelling! I had to explain to my JTE and students why it looked like I had killed a small animal over their notebooks.

Having my recycling returned to me was also a rough day. In my town, there is one recycle day the whole month and you have to label your bag with your name and address. I didn't know you should sort the recycling or take it out the night before, and the entire bag was returned to my doorstep with a huge red notice – which I then had to take to school because I can't read...

None of my colleagues live in my town so I had a very kind and patient neighbour who helped me figure it out. She then came to check on me the next month.

#### **Natalie**

Tons! My first mistake was my first day at my school. I walked on the carpet in the *genkan* with my shoes on. My supervisor was at first kind of shocked and said "no!" and I jumped off. Then she laughed and explained where to take off my shoes. There were a lot of little things like this, but people understood I was new and foreign and were very forgiving.

A bigger mistake I made was talking too fast. My JTEs had such great English, I thought they could understand me and my natural speed. Later I found out they couldn't, but were too polite to let me know.

### **4- What was your best experience in the first few months?**

#### **Nicole**

The process of building a new community, learning about them, and teaching them about me, has been great. A standout was my first Christmas season in Japan. In South Africa, my grandmother would usually bake enough ginger cookies, mince pies, and shortbread to sink a ship. Friends and family would be snacking and chatting, whilst celebrating the festive season. I was given the opportunity to run a home economics class and share this tradition with my teachers and classmates. It was an amazing cultural exchange and made the festive season feel a little more like home.

#### **Christophe - Hokkaido**

Definitely the first English camp with younger students. I am a high school JET, so working with elementary and middle school students was an awesome treat. The staff at my local Nepal (Nature Pal) are awesome and the students wanted to be there, which always helps with learning!

### **5- What is your favourite thing about Japan?**

#### **Aaron - Kyushu**

My favourite thing is definitely the food. The quality and the freshness is unparalleled.

#### **Hanna - Saiki-shi, Oita**

My favorite thing about Japan is the appreciation for small gestures and items. This makes every tiny moment special, and I appreciate gifts or the production process of items more so than before.

#### **Denica**

The countryside. I know, it's crazy for a Tokyo JET to say that, but I actually requested rural! It is so easy to see where Hayao Miyazaki and Shigeru Miyamoto got their inspiration from; it's so romantic

and mystical. I have gotten heavily into hiking and camping since arriving. I will be spending August hiking in Hokkaido, too. I go with a combination of people. The Japanese are more adventurous though, and have a better knowledge of the routes and what to watch out for. Although I was pretty worried when they told me to get a bear bell.

## 6- What is your favourite local food?

### Christophe

Definitely *zangi*, which is the *Hokkaido-ben* way of saying *karaage* or fried chicken. Even if it's hot and muggy, there are different flavors which can keep you going in the early evening and at festivals.

### Zak

Living in Kagawa, I feel obligated to say *udon*. But if I'm being honest, my favorite food of all time is *miso ramen*.

## 7- What does your daily schedule look like?

### Nicole

I arrive at school between 8:15 and 8:30. Some weeks, I have an average of two/three classes a day, other weeks I may have no classes because of upcoming tests or for other reasons. On those days, I am either planning for other classes and English club, or studying Japanese.

### Niall - Marugame, Kagawa

My daily schedule has classes, class prep, marking homework, heading to other schools on my bike, helping the students clean, having a look at club meetings or practice, walking, and listening to the latest hits. Oh, and somewhere in the middle of that eating lunch with the students too, that is a highlight of my day.

## 8- What kind of school do you teach at and how is your teaching environment?

### Natalie

My base school is an SHS (senior high school) with a pretty good system. The English course for first years is divided into two sections: textbook English and oral communication. Each of the 8 first year classes are split into A and B groups (20 students in each group). While A group is being taught the textbook stuff by a JTE, B group does communication and speaking activities with me and another JTE. The next week it switches. In the OC class, I prepare all the lessons and activities and take the leading role.

The environments of visiting schools vary. Some schools just don't know what to do with an ALT. They already have lesson plans, and just don't know how to incorporate me. At the infrequent visiting schools, they will ask me to do an English activity with the students.

### Aaron

I teach at middle schools and elementary schools. My teaching environment is actually very nice. The kids are all very respectful and ready to learn. My co-workers are also fairly understanding, although I am not sure how much this has to do with the fact that I plan lessons in Japanese with them rather than risk things being lost in translation.

## 9- Do you shop online?

### Zak

I'm not a big online shopper. If I do get anything, it is usually bulk food (cornmeal, oats, etc. are near impossible to find in this country and are usually super overpriced).

### Nicole

I only really use Amazon.jp, and that is usually for DVDs and books.

### Natalie

Rarely. I only order things for my family back home for birthdays, etc.

## 10- What did you end up shipping to yourself after arrival?

### Zak

Nothing after arrival, but I did pay an extra fee to have my surfboard shipped with me.

### Niall

Nothing, actually. Though I did take some clothes and books with me when I went back to my home country.

## 11- How is your Japanese?

### Christophe

I have been studying Japanese since the first year of college, and for conversational purposes it is going awesome. But *kanji* is pretty difficult for me. A little bit of advice is that if you have extra time and haven't studied previously, start watching Japanese media and learning words by listening. You can double check with a site like [jisho.org](http://jisho.org) to make sure your pronunciation is okay. I would also

recommend just a simple phrase study of things you are going to need. Obvious ones include things like “where is the toilet?” and “how much for this?” and an understanding of basic directions.

### **Natalie**

I’m in my third year, and only REALLY started learning this year. I knew basics, and tried the CLAIR course, but it just wasn’t working for me. Once I realized I wanted to stay longer, I decided to take studying more seriously and started seeing a tutor. I am learning much better this way, because it is harsher to disappoint a real person than a computer screen.

It depends on the ALT’s situation, of course. But try your best to learn Japanese, and do it in the way that works for you. It makes relationships easier to forge with teachers and students.

## **12- Have you picked up new hobbies after landing in Japan?**

### **Christophe**

My free time right now is split between some basic lesson preparation, Youtube, Warhammer, and hunting for fun festivals to go to. I have yet to pick up a new hobby, unless constant festival trips count because I didn’t do much travelling in the states.

### **Niall**

I play the bass, read, walk, and go travelling around Japan. I have started collecting postmarks. Yes, postmarks. If I go somewhere new, I send a postcard to myself. It was my Dad’s idea. Now I’m pretty into it!

## **13- Any advice for incoming 2016 jets?**

### **Hanna**

Say yes to everything. If someone invites you to do something, go somewhere, or asks if they can help you do something, say yes. More than likely they are trying to reach out and get to know you, so it’s a fantastic way to make connections and get to know those around you (even if you do already know how to get to the supermarket or whatnot). If you do refuse, don’t be surprised if they never offer again. Being embarrassed by rejection is a rather big deal here so people are not likely to risk you saying “no” a second time. Some of my best interactions have been because I said “yes” to something I didn’t really know anything about, which helped me get to know not only my co-workers and community better, but also become a bit more comfortable asking for help when I needed it. Of course, don’t

feel obligated to do anything unreasonably outside your comfort levels or which violates your beliefs. Stay true to you, be open to help, and remember that opportunity comes in many guises.

### **Natalie**

First off, join your placement/prefecture’s Facebook group. Everyone is usually incredibly insightful and helpful.

Secondly, find your “teacher” voice. I thought that teaching SHS meant the students and teachers performed at a level high enough for me to speak a little fluidly, but I was mistaken. Speak slowly and loudly. It also helps relax the teachers when you introduce yourself and add a line such as “please don’t be afraid to ask me to repeat myself if I talk too fast.”

## **14- Do you have any regrets?**

### **Denica**

I wish I’d known more about how to get over jet lag (it’s all about getting sunlight first thing in the morning which is difficult when you’re cooped up in windowless board meeting rooms) and about dealing with the heat. I didn’t really know how hard dealing with the heat would be, in addition to getting everything sorted out, so I wish I’d had some strategies in place for keeping myself cool. But there are plenty — my favourite is getting those cooling strips from the *konbini* (meant to be put on your forehead if you’re ill) and putting them on my back before class to keep me cool throughout.

### **Niall**

No regrets.



# Taking Root, Branching Out!

Stories and Advice on Getting Involved  
at Your School and in Your City

Emma Riley (Tokyo) Subane Abdi (Shiga)



You have arrived and are finally settled in your placement, but now you are wondering how to get more involved in your new community. There are ways for you to incorporate your own culture into your JET experience as well as learn about Japanese culture. Here are some stories current JETs shared about how they got involved in their communities beyond teaching English. These JETs express their unique experiences, struggles, and advice to help you integrate into your community and maximise your JET experience.

I am Trinidadian and back in my country, I am a certified Aerobics Instructor. It was something I did in my free time. Being devoted to a life of health and wellness, I had hopes that when I came to Japan that I would be able to find an avenue to continue my practice.

On the day I arrived at Ikubunkan, my supervisor asked me if there were any activities at Ikubunkan that I would like to be a part of. I explained to them what I did before coming to Japan and that I was willing to avail my services to the Physical Education Department at the school. They told me that they would speak to the dance teacher, and I would be able to work together with them.

A few weeks after the beginning of the school term, my supervisor set up a meeting with the dance teacher about the possibility of me getting involved in the dance class. The dance teacher was elated about what I had to offer, and said that the students would learn something different from what they were used to. The only rule I had to follow was to conduct the class solely in English so that it could be another opportunity for the kids to be exposed to the language.

Some days later, I started teaching dance classes. The children were happy because they had never been exposed to this kind of dance before. I also used the opportunity to incorporate music from my country called “Soca” in the classes, and I spoke to them about music diversity while also integrating dance moves associated with this type of music.

At my school, the day after end of term examinations, there is a half day of activities called an English Shower. This activity has three segments: cooking, games/exercise, and music. There are three JETs at my school, and coincidentally we all fall nicely into each of these activities — one is an opera singer, the other likes to cook, and I like exercise — so we all take one of these activities which run for 45 minutes. My task for every English Shower is to find a way of teaching English while creating activities based around exercise and games.

For the last English Shower, I used aerobics to reinforce students’ vocabulary of the different body parts, and also taught them to follow commands in English. The English Shower before that, I used the infamous “Cha Cha slide” dance song which gives commands in English and students had to follow the instructions.

Through the aerobics classes, I was able to teach the value of physical health and wellness to my students whilst also teaching them English — my original purpose of being a JET. Combining my skills as an English teacher and a fitness instructor was a rewarding part of my JET experience.

**Shenel Coggins-Duke, Bunkyo, Tokyo (1st Year JET)**

When I first started out on JET, I knew that I wanted to try something new, something that I could only do whilst in Japan. It seemed too easy to just join a football or basketball club, so I really wanted to try something like *taiko* drumming or Japanese dance — something unique and Japanese.

The only problem with trying these new activities is that it can be pretty hard starting out, unless you have an “in.” On my first official school day in September, whilst super jet-lagged, I was asked to make a speech. It was more than a little nerve-wracking having a sea of faces suddenly looking up at me! But I used this as an opportunity to tell them about my interest in taking up a Japanese pastime, because I figured the more people knew about it, the more likely they would recommend clubs to me.

One day, I was talking to a member of my English club when she happened to mention that she was part of a *yosakoi team*\* — and I pounced! I asked which team, where they practiced, and all the other usual questions. I was worried it might be a little weird being a member of the same team as a student, but in actual fact it really helped with the introductions, and she helped translate things when I didn’t understand. The team has people from 10 years old to over 60 years old — a real mixed bag!

I’ve been a member of the team for nearly 10 months now, and I’ve been able to participate in loads of competitions and tournaments (including one all the way out in Hokkaido!) Before the big competitions, we practice for around 20 hours a week, but otherwise only two hours a week. It can be really intense, but I can’t even express how much I enjoy it! I’m the only non-Japanese person in the team, so it’s also an amazing opportunity to practice my Japanese.

I thoroughly recommend trying a new sport or activity whilst in Japan. My advice on how to do this is to ask anyone and everyone you know (within reason) if they know anyone who does the activity you’re interested in. Once you manage to find someone, ask if you can go watch and chances are that the other members will ask if you’d like to join in. Play it by ear! Good luck!!

**Jenny Brokenshire, Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture (2nd Year JET)**

\*A style of dance, from Japan, that is often danced at festivals and events throughout the country.

When you arrive in August, you may find yourself with quite a bit of spare time on your hands at work. A good way to make use of that time and get out of the office is to go and have a look at students practicing their club activities. The students will always be happy to see you, and will feel more familiar with you by the time English classes start.

**Harriet Bougher, Kashima City, Saga Prefecture (1st Year JET)**

I love singing, and have sung in choirs for years, so it was a most welcome surprise to discover when I arrived at my placement that my school had a well-established chorus club. I’ll always remember meeting those girls for the first time, and how much fun it was spending time with them over the summer learning their names and their quirks. The interactions you have with your kids outside of class are often completely different from what you get during lessons, since the pressure to study isn’t so present. Use that to your advantage to connect with them, show genuine interest in what they care about, and they’ll be eager to share their lives with you.

**Merran Eby, Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture (4th Year JET)**



I went around to different clubs and tried talking to students in English, but most couldn't really understand me. Using simple English words and gestures worked fine though! It's a little awkward at first, especially when you have a very basic level of Japanese. I really liked forming bonds with students. Now students don't see me as a teacher, but more as a friend. They come and have lunch with me and we talk about all sorts of things like J-pop, K-pop, anime, manga, and games. We show each other our own artworks or illustrations too. It's really great. I am so much closer to the students than I am to the teachers at this point.

I would say it's nice to let students know that you like the same things they do, so that they know you are human too. Personally, I don't think they think of us as normal people so they are often very surprised when they find out that we like the same things they do. This breaks the "foreigner" barrier, and makes you much more approachable. Just take the initiative, as students in Japan are almost always too shy to try to speak to you. I took the initiative and now my students are comfortable to join me for lunch and talk as friends outside of class. This makes coming to school every day such a joy for me.

**Sahra Alsheekhhamid, Saitama Prefecture (1st Year JET)**

I decided that I was going to get to know my co-workers and other teachers as much as possible — despite the language barrier, a lot of smiling will get you far! Showing an interest in a teacher's club activity or sports club can be exciting for them. Usually any curiosity on your part will lead to an invite, and if not simply asking is okay! It's a great way to get to know your kids, but also helps with building solid, friendly relations with your co-workers.

**Vicky Woodards, Fukuoka Prefecture (1st Year JET)**

# Who and What Are Your PAs (Prefectural Advisors)?

Kelsey Lechner (Tochigi)

## In most cases, PAs:

- Consist of a mix of JETs and CIRs, JETs and Japanese staff.
- Attend PA seminars 1-2 times a year.
- Mediate when issues arrive between schools and JETs.
- Plan prefectural orientations.
- Help in emergencies/crises.
- Disseminate information to JETs through websites, newsletters, social media, etc.
- Can guide you to resources for *you* to solve *your* problems.
- Are there to encourage you to develop a self-help system.

## PAs are not:

- Google.
- Your mom/dad (if anything, they are the cool aunt/uncle).
- Your boss.
- Your boss's boss.
- Automatic advocates for JETs in disputes.
- Professional counselors.
- Lawyers.
- Tax Agents.

## When should you talk to your PA?

You are strongly encouraged to use your PAs, as they are excellent resources! PAs are always there to help you — that being said, remember that they have lives just like you. While they are probably chock-full of useful information, they do not know everything and often refer to the same resources that you already have to answer your questions. Keep in mind that the only PA-specific training they

receive is one to three days of seminars per year, so make sure you try to solve your own problems first that way they aren't bombarded and overwhelmed with questioning JETs.

Be aware that many questions you have can be answered by first checking the General Information Handbook, searching online (at reputable sites), or asking your supervisor/school. (Your PA will thank you for taking the initiative to first try and solve your problem yourself!) PAs are here to listen to your concerns and help guide you, but cannot provide you with professional counseling or solve all of your concerns. Remember that if you would like professional counseling or further guidance (or advice) on an issue, you can always use the JET Online Counseling Services or the AJET Peer Support Group <http://bit.ly/29MgSY4> respectively.

Furthermore, if you are having any difficulties with your contracting organization, the first thing the PA will ask you is most likely a variation of, "Have you directly and clearly talked about your issue with your school/supervisor yet?" PAs are here to facilitate communication and understanding when all other methods have failed between JETs and their schools; they are not there to (and cannot) tell your school what to do.

## How is the PA system structured?

While every prefecture and designated city has at least one PA, the structure can change significantly. A few prefectures have JETs who leave their current position to become full-time PAs, and many prefectures have further divisions, such as Regional Advisors. Others are much more casual in structure, in which PAs act similar to volunteer helpers. Check with your prefecture/designated city to learn about the system in your area!

# CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

Connect is a magazine for the community in Japan, by the community in Japan. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! 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. We'll work with you to make it the best it can be and share it with our audience of thousands. Not every article needs to be an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, photo spreads, travelogues, and more.

Contact the Head Editor of Connect, Timothy Saar, at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net) with your submissions, comments, and questions.

## ARTICLES

Write about something you're doing. Write about something you love. Tell us a story.

## SPOTLIGHT

Tell us about someone in your community who's doing something neat and noteworthy. Cooks, collectors, calligraphers — we want to hear about the inspiring people around you.

## COMMENTS

Let us know what you think. Interact with us on Facebook, Twitter, and [issuu.com](http://issuu.com).

## PHOTOS

Members of the JET community contributed to the photos you see in this issue. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Lehlogonolo Mokotedi, at [lehlogonolo.mokotedi@ajet.net](mailto:lehlogonolo.mokotedi@ajet.net).

## HAIKU

Each month Connect will feature *haiku* from our readers. A *haiku* is 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](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net).

## COMICS

You asked for it, and now Connect features comics. Whether you're a desk doodler or a published artist, we want to see your panels and strips about life in Japan.



## CONNECT WITH US

Interested in contributing to Connect? Want to stay up-to-date on interview opportunities, photo requests, and Connect announcements? Sign up to be a contributor at the [Connect Contributors Circle](#) online to receive updates from us, pitch your ideas, and get involved with the Connect staff and community. You can find the current Connect team and their contact information [here](#).

You can also like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Instagram](#), [Tumblr](#) and [Twitter](#), and interact with the magazine via CLIP at [ISSUU](#).