

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

JANUARY
2018

SPECIAL

END OF THE YEAR ISSUE



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

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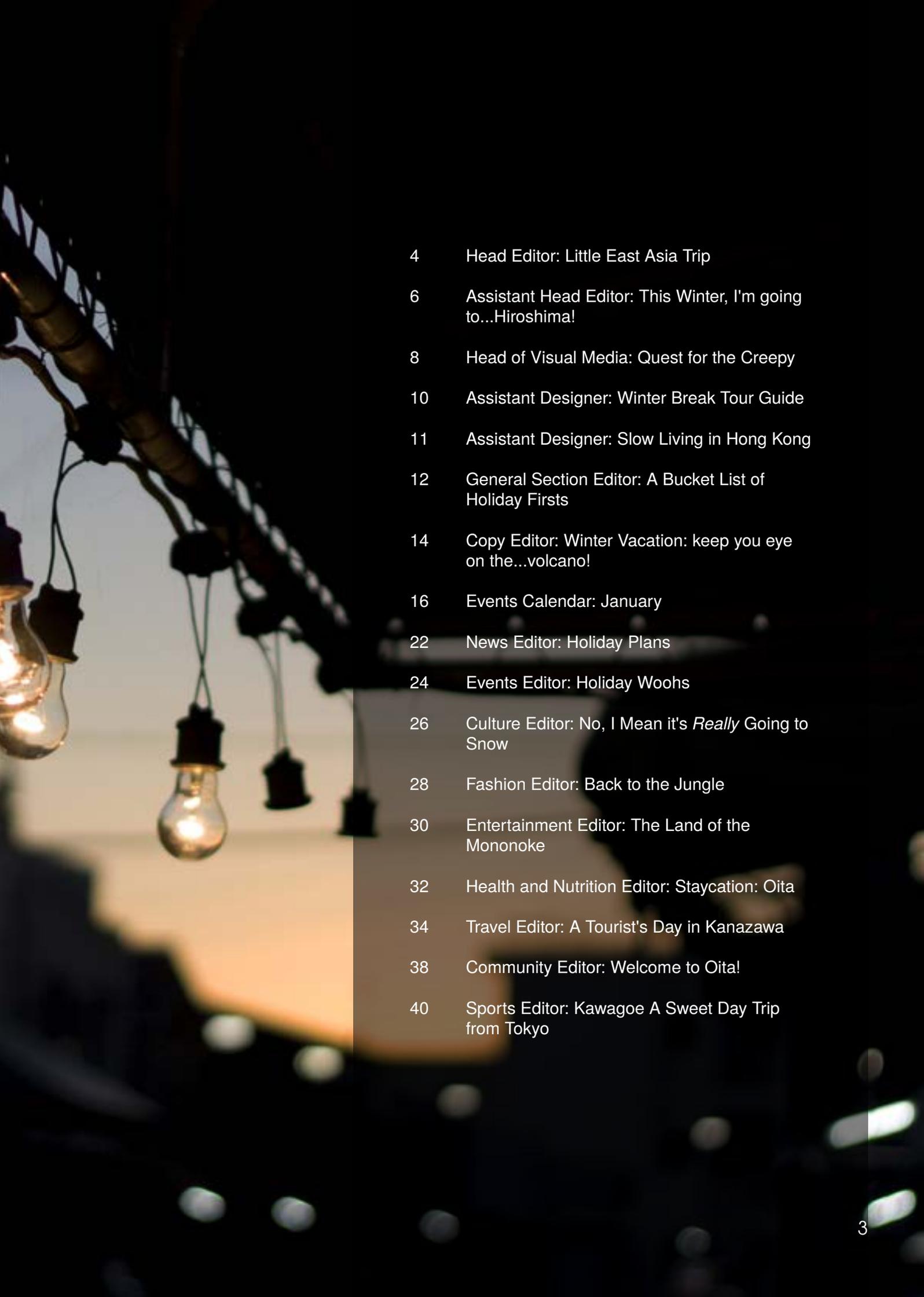
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— *HEAD EDITOR* —

Little East Asia Trip

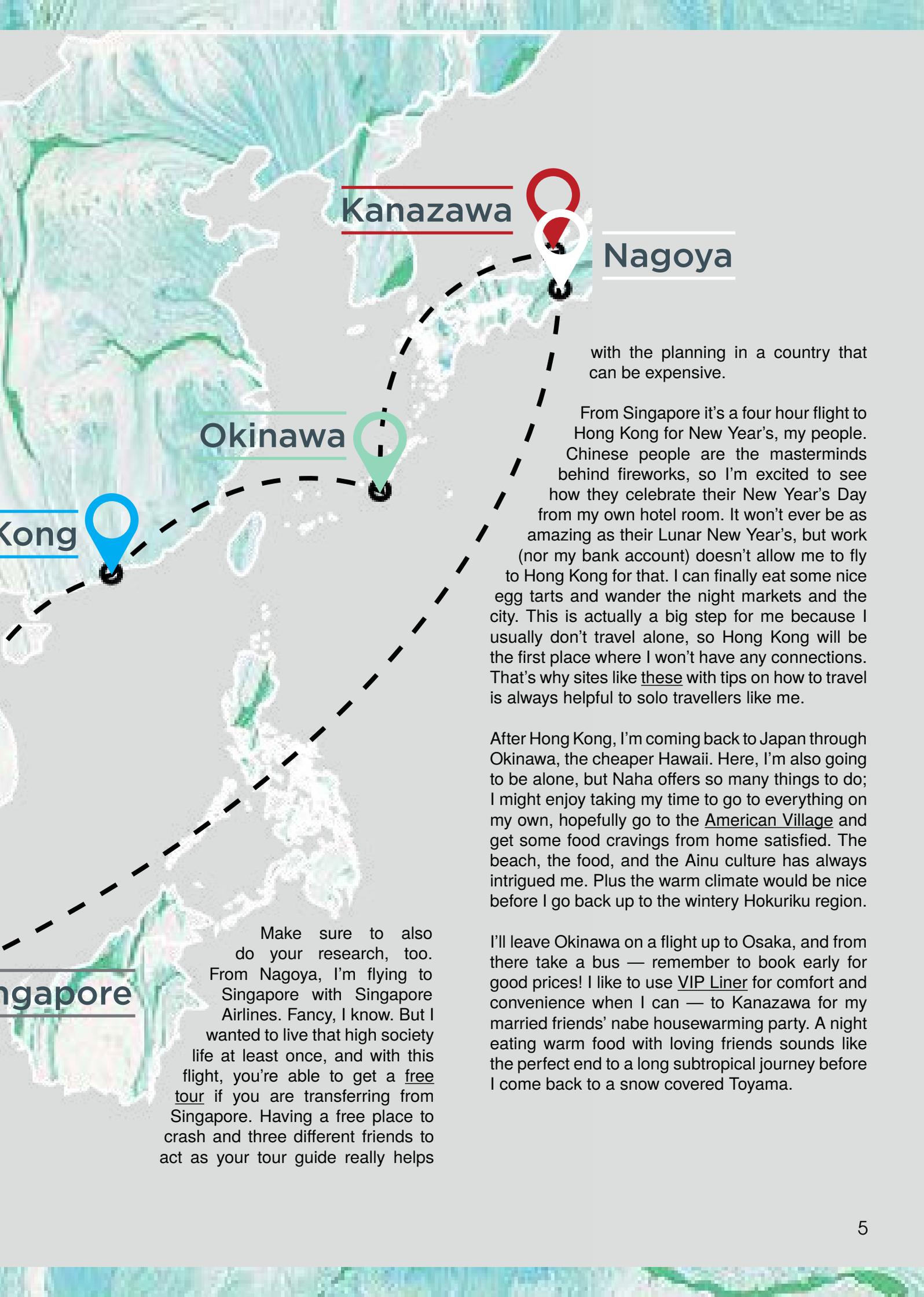
Lilian Diep (Toyama)

Last year around this time, I decided that this year would be my last year as a JET Programme participant. I don't think teaching is my thing, and that's okay, but I still wanted to stay in Japan because it's a beautiful country full of food, culture, scenery, and people that I haven't quite gotten enough of yet. I wanted to stay for one more year to get all my wanderlust out of my system. Or at least for the Southeast Asian countries that I can get into. The JET Programme has helped facilitate this because it allowed me to make friends all over the country, thus allowing me to have a reason to visit. And a place to crash. That helps.



For my 2017 winter trip, I decided to go on a whirlwind trip to Nagoya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Okinawa, and Kanazawa. Base starting price: 1500 USD for airfare and bus travel. BUT this was a plan in the making for almost half a year, so I knew what I was getting into.

Nagoya has a not so secret international airport that people don't really know about, and also a friend with KFC that I can visit for Christmas. If Tokyo or Osaka didn't have any flights that grooved with you, I recommend checking Chubu Centrair International Airport for some other flight times and probably lower prices. Also, using [airfare matrix sites](#) can help you mix and match flights and gives you the flexibility of searching based on price, duration, stops, and where you're departing and landing.



Singapore

Make sure to also do your research, too. From Nagoya, I'm flying to Singapore with Singapore Airlines. Fancy, I know. But I wanted to live that high society life at least once, and with this flight, you're able to get a free tour if you are transferring from Singapore. Having a free place to crash and three different friends to act as your tour guide really helps

Hong Kong

with the planning in a country that can be expensive.

From Singapore it's a four hour flight to Hong Kong for New Year's, my people. Chinese people are the masterminds behind fireworks, so I'm excited to see how they celebrate their New Year's Day from my own hotel room. It won't ever be as amazing as their Lunar New Year's, but work (nor my bank account) doesn't allow me to fly to Hong Kong for that. I can finally eat some nice egg tarts and wander the night markets and the city. This is actually a big step for me because I usually don't travel alone, so Hong Kong will be the first place where I won't have any connections. That's why sites like these with tips on how to travel is always helpful to solo travellers like me.

After Hong Kong, I'm coming back to Japan through Okinawa, the cheaper Hawaii. Here, I'm also going to be alone, but Naha offers so many things to do; I might enjoy taking my time to go to everything on my own, hopefully go to the American Village and get some food cravings from home satisfied. The beach, the food, and the Ainu culture has always intrigued me. Plus the warm climate would be nice before I go back up to the wintery Hokuriku region.

I'll leave Okinawa on a flight up to Osaka, and from there take a bus — remember to book early for good prices! I like to use VIP Liner for comfort and convenience when I can — to Kanazawa for my married friends' nabe housewarming party. A night eating warm food with loving friends sounds like the perfect end to a long subtropical journey before I come back to a snow covered Toyama.

Kanazawa

Nagoya

Okinawa

ASSISTANT HEAD EDITOR

This Winter, I'm going to... Hiroshima

Lauren Hill (Tokyo)

This year's my second on the JET Programme, but it'll be my first Christmas and New Year in Japan. I'll admit, last year I was suffering a little from the culture shock, and couldn't jump on a plane quick enough over winter break. This year, my fiancé's making the trip from Sheffield, England, to Tokyo, and we're braving a 12 hour overnight bus to Hiroshima (wish us luck!). My turkey and stuffing is gonna be *okonomiyaki* and *momiji manjyu*, and I couldn't be more excited. My partner speaks almost no Japanese, and reads even less, so I'm definitely looking forward to his face when that custard dumpling I feed him turns out to be cheese flavoured!

It's been a few years since my first visit to Hiroshima, and that was on a whirlwind tour of the country, so it'll be nice to take it a little more slowly this time. It's an especially important place for reflection, I think, so we'll

be heading to the Peace Memorial Park and Museum first. There's also Hiroshima Castle for a bit of history, and we'll be ending the first day with a wander through Hiroshima's winter illuminations — Dreamination.

The rest of the trip isn't set in stone just yet, but I'm toying with day trips to the adorable Bunny Island and nearby coastal Onomichi. The real highlight, though, is Christmas Day, which we're gonna spend hiking and shrine-gazing on Miyajima Island. We're even staying the night in one of the island's seaside *ryokans*—booked in early March, of course. Christmas is Japan's coupliest holiday, and Miyajima sells out *fast*.

I've never spent a Christmas away from friends, family or England before, but with so much going on, I'm pretty sure this year's will be one to remember.



My Top 5 Vacation Destinations (and one for the wishlist)

1. Naoshima, Teshima, basically all of the *Setouchi* Islands really...
2. Sapporo, Hokkaido
3. Seoul, South Korea
4. Hakone, Kanagawa
5. Kyoto

To Visit: Nagoro Scarecrow Village, Tokushima

Photo: Lauren Hill

HEAD OF VISUAL MEDIA

Quest
for the
Great
One

Ashley Hirasuna (Ishikawa)

“Where is this?!” I furiously typed in my messenger application to my friend after seeing his photos appear on Facebook depicting him with a bunch of dolls around an abandoned-looking town. “I want to go there; it’s so creepy!” He quickly replied with “it’s on Shikoku”. After some searching online, basically typing keywords such as “creepy”, “dolls”, and “Shikoku” I was able to find the name of the place. Nagoro Village in Tokushima Prefecture quickly became my next destination on my on-going journey to visit as many creepy spots in Japan as I can.

But why dolls? Why this village? The answer is simple and tragic; the dolls represent the people who used to live in the village but have moved or passed away.

The dwindling population of Nagoro is an unfortunate result of Japan’s population dilemma. Currently there are about 50 or so human residents of Nagoro, meaning that the number of dolls that inhabit the village are more than three times the current population. The dolls are placed around the village and even deeper into the Iya Valley itself; placed and posed to look like people living their everyday lives. Anything really to make the village seem and feel more populated than it is.

I found the story of the village to be beautiful and tragic with a bit of creepy thrown in there and just enough to appease my weird tastes when it comes to travel. Walking around the village with my friend, we quickly stumbled upon a blue binder. When we opened the binder we see that every single doll has an entry detailing who they represent, their backstory, their name and what they ended up doing with their lives. Every time a new doll is created so is another person’s memory.

Who makes all these dolls? The dolls are all the creations and brainchildren of Ayano Tsukimi, who can still be found in the town today, talking with tourists and making more dolls with her friends. She also has small clay monster statues around the village that she sculpts and fires in her personal kiln. The monsters are for sale, and as far as I can tell the dolls aren’t. The dolls started off as representing actual people, but today I think when Tsukimi-san creates new dolls she’s creating original characters and people.

When all is said and done, I wholeheartedly recommend visiting Nagoro just to visit a place that is equal parts unique, tragic and interesting.

Photos: Ashley Hirasuna



ASSISTANT DESIGNER

Winter Break Tour Guide

Malia Imayama (Okayama)



岡山
Okayama

大阪
Osaka

This winter break I am touring my family and boyfriend around Japan. Starting off in Osaka, we will be hitting up the aquarium and of course Saboten which is a Mexican restaurant that I have heard lots of great things about. My cravings for Mexican food have become too hard to suppress. I also am planning a day trip to Kyoto since it's only a thirty minute train ride away! After Osaka, I want to show my family my prefecture, the great Okayama. Since my village of 30,000 people up in the mountains doesn't have much except for snow in the winter, we will be staying in the "city" which is two hours away. I'm planning to take a day trip to my town Niimi via rental car to show my family my schools and home. I have found an amazing company which costs only 2500 yen for a day! Steal of a deal if I say so myself. My family will then go back home after New Years and my boyfriend will stay with me for another week. We will go back to Niimi and I will take him to all of my favorite restaurants here. Like a *tonkatsu* place that has *teishoku* for only 500 yen! I am also taking him to judo with me to hopefully show him that I can finally take him down!

Photos:
Malia Imayama
[Saboten facebook picture](#)

Slow Living in Hong Kong

Connie Huang (Hiroshima)

Around this time last year, I left Japan's unforgiving cold for the bipolar albeit slightly warmer climate of Hong Kong. I went to Hong Kong without much planning, only with a lackadaisical attitude and the intention to partake in as much as possible of the Chinese cuisine accorded by my ethnic roots. I did end up doing almost all the touristy spots, considering Hong Kong is surprisingly small and public transportation is as efficient and clean as Japan's, but also incredibly affordable. I ferried to Tai O Village and satisfied my seafood cravings, took a cable car up to Ngong Ping Village and hiked up to the Buddha, and rode a tram up to Victoria Peak to witness the spectacular evening skyline of Hong Kong. My friend from the States joined me for the latter half of the trip and we had our fill of herbal teas, fish balls, egg cakes, egg tarts, hot star chicken, *jook*, clay-pot rice and all the dim sum — including an egg character (disappointingly not *Gudetama*) steam bun that discharged melted chocolate.

It was my first New Year's in another country and I didn't will myself to do anything special but still enjoyed my time. Looking out Victoria Harbor, I felt everything with heightened awareness ("in the present moment"), learned from being in the slow calm of the Japanese countryside for so long.

Photos: Connie Huang



GENERAL SECTION EDITOR



**A
Bucket
List of
Holiday
Firsts**

Hayley Closter (Miyazaki)



The holiday season Down Under in Australia is hot. Extremely hot. If you can imagine your entire extended family stuffed into your living room wearing their cumbersome Sunday best in 40°C heat (105°Fahrenheit), then you've got a pretty good idea of what my Christmas is like. If it weren't for the white beaches or public swimming pools, Australians would probably melt quicker than the icing on a Christmas cake come summertime. Every December, I set up our giant Christmas tree, watch Vision Australia's famous Carols by Candlelight, make plum pudding, eat my weight in Christmas food, drink too much pear cider, and rotate my extensive selection of togs (that's Aussie for swimwear) to swim for hours in our pool. The final moments of the year are spent counting down rather drunkenly in the aforementioned pool. For my first year in Miyazaki Prefecture, I made the long trek back across the equator to spend the holiday season with my family. But this year, I won't be returning home, making 2017 my first holiday season away from family. In light of my Christmas-in-winter cherry popping, I've decided to pop a few other cherries on my holiday bucket list.

To start, I'm going to have to come to terms with being tremendously cold. It hardly ever snows here in Miyazaki but it still gets pretty close to below freezing. I'm still going to make the most of my first possibly white Christmas though.

This most likely means dragging (read: bribing) myself out from underneath the *kotatsu* and frankly, I wouldn't hold my breath for that particular cherry. At least this year I don't have to colour coordinate my togs and outfit! Does Uniqlo sell ugly Christmas sweaters?

When I set up my 1.5 foot-tall Christmas tree last year, my first thought was 'how the hell am I gonna fit a present under that fern?!' But the real question is can I find a present that is *bigger* than the Christmas Fern? The answer is yes. Just one of those plastic 5 litre bottles of *shochu* will tower over my meagre Fern and last until next Christmas!

Three bucket list points will be checked off on Christmas Eve. Usually, cleaning the house takes at least a full day back in Australia so being able to finish the pre-Christmas cleaning all before noon will be a dream come true. Once that chore is done, I'll be heading to Miyazaki City to do something everyone should try at least one Christmas: volunteer work. Every year, a handful of Miyazaki Prefecture's JETs volunteer at Miyazaki City's Christmas Market on Ichibangai. This year, I'll be channeling my inner Saoirse Ronan in *Brooklyn* and spreading the Christmas cheer by giving back to the community. Obnoxiously singing Christmas carols and helping children write their letters to Santa will definitely take the edge off my cousins-withdrawal. The youngest outgrew me years ago anyway. How rude. Once all the letters are "posted", the main event begins: prepping the food! Back in Australia, the Christmas table is often set with roast lamb, turkey, ham, mango and avocado salad, bread rolls, couscous, creamy potato salad, cheesecake, and of course, the plum pudding. The only problem? I don't have an oven and all these dishes cater for a summery feast.

After some tweaking, this year's menu will consist of carrot and chorizo soup, toaster oven baked rosemary chicken, fluffy mashed potatoes, hot butter rolls, pesto caprese pasta salad, crisp Caesar salad, boozy berry compote, and of course, the plum pudding. I've never eaten winter dishes at Christmas but I've got my fingers crossed I'm better at coordinating a warm menu than I am at swimwear outfits.

Even though the idea of quietly ringing in the new year seems rather lackluster to me, I know I'd regret not trying the subdued *oshogatsu* customs before finishing up on JET. I'm trading the glow in the dark glasses and Sydney Harbour Bridge fireworks display for a heavy coat and 108 rings of a temple bell at midnight. There are two Buddhist temples in my small town and half a dozen in the town over and I'm determined to visit one. No *oshogatsu* would be complete without flocking to a shrine for *hatsumoude* on New Year's Day. My chosen location is Miyazaki's striking red Udo Jingu Shrine, which is built inside a cliff cave and sure to be teeming with shrine goers from all over the prefecture. I recommend trying the clay stone throwing to start the year with an extra serving of *kami-sama* blessed luck! Most public facilities are closed during the first few days of the new year so I'll have to wait until just before classes resume to finish up my bucket list. I recently tried a *ryokan onsen* for the first time in early December and was promptly recommended one of the onsens in Ebino or Kirishima. The former hot spring town is where I'll check off my last holiday activity surrounded by Miyazaki's lush, green mountainside.

I'll be starting my last year in Miyazaki with a few less cherries and a shorter bucket list. Or maybe I'll just stay underneath my *kotatsu* where it feels like a real Aussie Christmas. Wherever you are this year, have a happy holiday!

COPY EDITOR

Winter vacation:
Keep your
eye on the...
volcano!

Verushka Aucamp (Fukui)

Despite my supervisor's endearing concern for my safety, I am going to Bali this winter vacation. Not even Mt Agung, in all its majestic glory, will be able to stop this first-year ALT from fleeing to a warmer climate this Christmas season. It also doesn't hurt that my boyfriend will be flying from South Africa to meet me there.

As you may or may not know, the volcano's threat level is on the highest possible level, level 4, while continuing to spew ash. The ongoing threat of an imminent major eruption, and subsequent evacuation of 22 villages, comes after more than five decades of the volcano lying dormant. However, in an attempt to counter the sharp decline in visitors, the Bali Tourism Hospitality Task Force has stated that the main tourist areas – an area some 70kms away from the "danger zone" – are in no direct threat to the volcano's eruption.

Maybe I'm still delirious from climbing Mt Fuji back in my first month in Japan, but I'm not canceling our trip. We're still excited to experience the renowned Balinese hospitality that awaits us on our trip to the beautiful Indonesian island!

My Top Five Things to Do in Bali

1. Tannah Lot Temple
2. Ubud Monkey Forest
3. Ayung River Rafting
4. Kecak Fire Dance at Uluwatu Temple
5. Nusa Dua Beach

Also, I might just get close enough for a once-in-a-lifetime peek of Mt Agung with a daunting ash plume above it. Nobody tell my supervisor about that idea.

Photo: [Unsplash](#)

Events Calendar:

January

Bailey Jo Josie (Miyazaki)

Block 1

Hokkaido
Aomori
Iwate
Akita

Block 2

Miyagi
Yamagata
Fukushima
Niigata

Block 3

Ibaraki
Tochigi
Gunma
Saitama
Nagano

Block 4

Chiba
Tokyo
Kanagawa
Yamanashi
Shizuoka

Block 5

Toyama
Ishikawa
Fukui
Gifu
Aichi

Block 6

Shiga
Kyoto
Hyogo

Block 7

Mie
Osaka
Nara
Wakayama

Block 8

Tokushima
Kagawa
Ehime
Kochi

Block 9

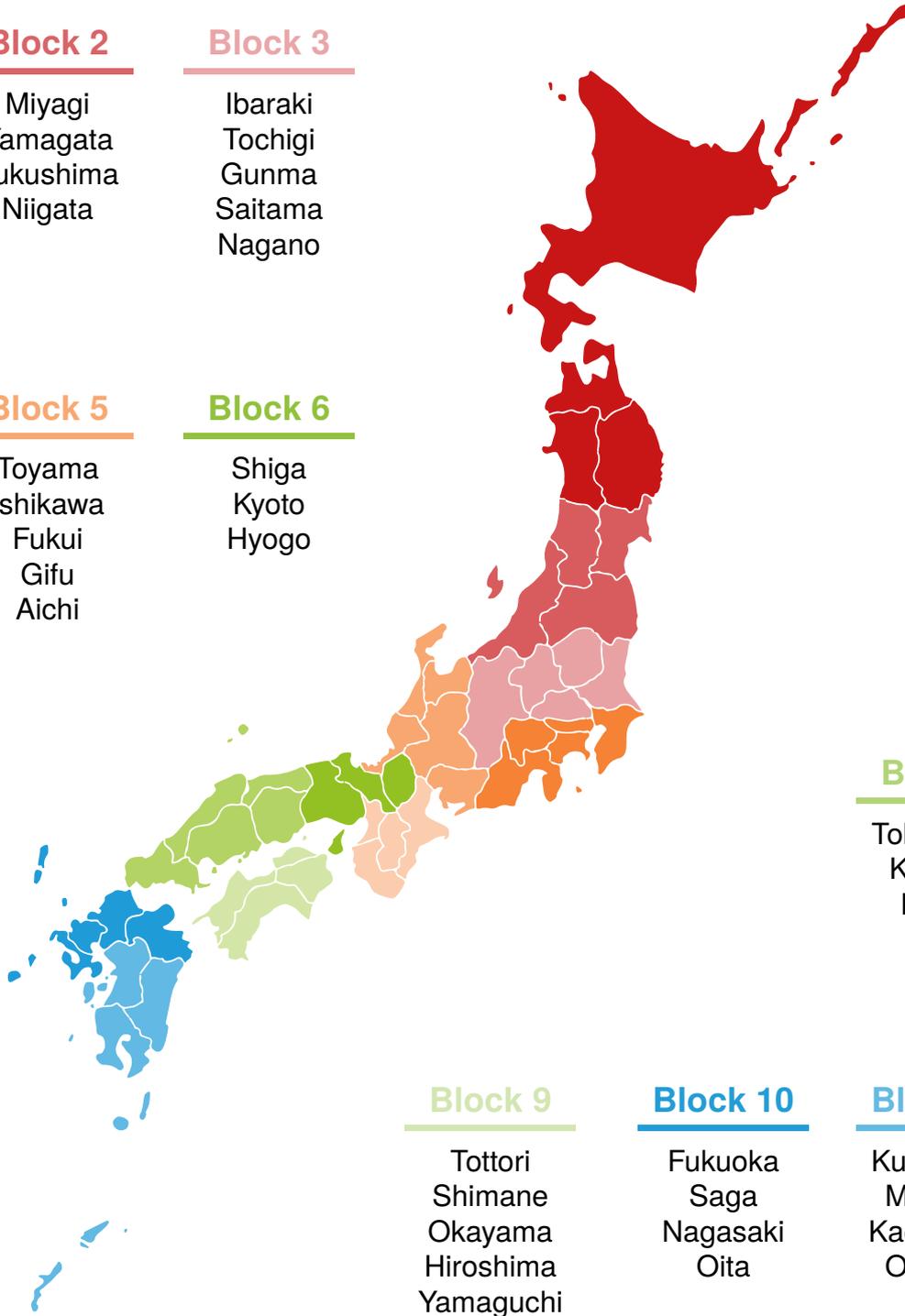
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

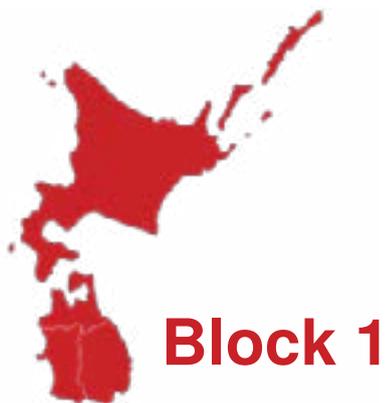
Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa





Block 1

The 11th Odate Shining Street

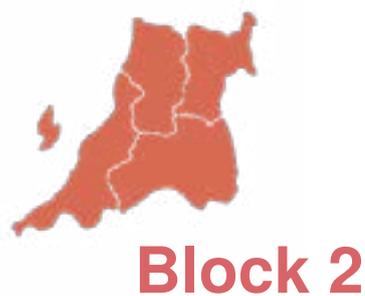
9 December – 14 January
Odate City, Akita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tsukinoki Light Fantasy

16 December – 14 January
Yokote City, Akita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Naked Festival

1 January
Goshogawara City, Aomori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 2

The 30th Niigata Pageant

8 December – 31 January
Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Takahata Wine Tour

Year-round
Higashiokitama District, Yamagata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tree of Light Pageant

15 December – 14 January
Fukushima City, Fukushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 3

SHARKS

7 October – 28 January
Ibaraki Nature Museum, Bando City,
Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ashikaga Flower Park

22 October – 5 February
Ashikaga City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Santa Hills Christmas Illumination

5 November – 3 January
Nakagawa Town, Nasu District,
Tochigi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Twin Illumination Lights Forest Pageant

11 November – 8 January
Alps Azumino National Government
Park, Azumino City, Nagano
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Takasaki Pageant of Starlight 2017

23 November – 8 January
Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 4

The Doraemon Exhibition Tokyo 2017

1 November – 8 January
Roppongi, Minato Ward, Tokyo
Prefecture

[Website](#)

Sagamiko Illumination 2017-2018

11 November – 16 December
Sagami Lake Resort Pleasure
Forest, Sagami City, Kanagawa
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Edo-Tokyo 100

28 November – 4 February
Shizuoka City Tokaido Hiroshige
Museum of Art, Shizuoka City,
Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Lake Kawahuchiko's Fireworks in Winter 2018

13 January – 18 February, Saturdays
and Sundays
Fujikawaguchiko Town, Yamanashi
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)



Block 5

Winter's Hida Takayama Light Up

1 December – 28 February
Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Experience of Geisha

10 June – 24 March
Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 6

Kobe Illumination

11 November – 12 February
Kobe Fruit Flower Park, Hyogo City,
Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

The 67th Nagahama Bonsai Exhibition of Ume Trees with Blossoms

10 January – 11 March
Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)



Block 7

Exhibition of Buildings of Ghibli 2017

2 December – 5 February
Abeno Ward, Osaka City, Osaka
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)





Block 8

Exhibition of the Southwestern Rebellion

26 October - 15 January
Nakaoka Shintaro Museum, Aki-gun,
Kochi Prefecture

[Japanese Website](#)

[English Website](#)

REOMA Winter Illumination

28 October - 28 February
Marugame, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Maintopia-Besshi Illumination

1 November - 28 February
Niihama, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Saka no Ue no Kumo Museum Illumination

1 December - 8 January
Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sketch Contest Exhibition

10 December - 18 February
Kochi Noichi Animal Park, Konan,
Kochi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Ebisu Matsuri 2018

9 January - 11 January
Tokushima, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 9

Golden Island Zipangu Illumination

6 December – 8 January
Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Hagi Illuminate Festa 2017

25 November – 5 January
Hagi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hiroshima Dreamination (Illumination) 2017

17 November – 3 January
Peace Boulevard, Hiroshima City,
Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 10

Open-air Bath of Capybara 2017-2018

1 December – 28 February
 Bio Park, Saikai City, Nagasaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Team Lab Light Festival in Fukuoka Castle Ruins

1 December – 28 January
 Fukuoka Castle, Maizuru Park, Fukuoka Prefecture
[Website](#)

Miyakonojo Machinaka Illumination

18 November - 8 February
 Miyakonojo, Miyazaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Florante Miyazaki Flower Garden Illumination

1 December - 8 January
 Miyazaki, Miyazaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 11

Winter Festival

8 December - 14 January
 Ibusuki, Kagoshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

New Year Celebration

31 December - 1 January
 Kumamoto Castle, Kumamoto, Kumamoto Prefecture
[Website](#)

Photos:
 Shantel Dickerson
 Ashley Hirasuna
 Duncan Cox
 Illaura Rossiter
 Duncan Cox

EVENTS EDITOR

Holiday

Plans

Bailey Jo Josie (Miyazaki)



My husband and I are used to travelling during the Christmas season because we've been doing it for years; before we moved to Japan, we went to college and worked in a city that was roughly 2 hours away from our families and after five years, we had become professionals at spending quality time with loved ones.

We almost had it down to a science — drive down the morning of December 24, spend Christmas Eve with his family in Seattle, spend Christmas Day with my family in Enumclaw, and then try and do a secret Santa drunkfest with our old

newspaper friends before we had to quickly drive home for our retail jobs.

But this year is different.

We never really expected to fly back home for the holidays only a few months after moving to Japan, but one thing has led to another and if it hadn't been for my family's generosity, I would have been completely alone the entire month of December.

I say completely alone because my husband, Sean, had to fly back to Seattle because there was a roadblock that landed in the middle of the process that is

bringing our cat to Japan. Yes, yes I know, JETs are advised against bringing their pets to Japan because of the long process and the stress and whatever, but I don't really care. Sean and I plan on being in Japan for a long time and to us, it is completely worth it to bring our cat here — even after all the vet visits, shots, quarantines, bureaucracy, and dealing with the terrible airlines.

We knew all of these things would happen, but we were not expecting our little Sakamoto (that's our cat's name) to suddenly become sick because of the place he was staying at. This threw a huge wrench in our



plans and Sean had to leave to take care of it. For Sakamoto to be able to fly into Japan by New Years, he would need extra vet visits and one of us to take care of him properly. All I can really say is thank God for pet insurance and Sean's visa forbidding him from work.

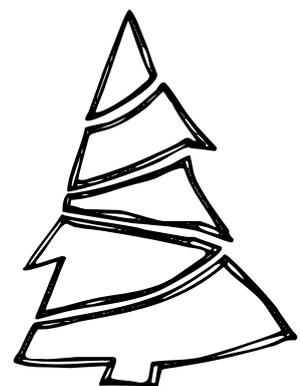
So, Sean flew off and it looked like I would have to spend Christmas alone. At the time, I thought that I had used up most of my *nenkyuu* to remove my wisdom teeth and I just didn't really have the money for a plane ticket. I was content with the situation, but I was a little sad that I wouldn't be

with my husband on our first Christmas as a married couple (we got married on our five-year anniversary in January 2017).

Thanks to the divine intervention of my supervisor — who told me that I actually had six vacation days left and not three — my family offered to fly me home for the holidays. It was a Festivus miracle!

Instead of hanging around the Miyazaki prefecture like a Grinch, I plan on giving my growing nieces and nephews Japanese gifts, watch *Bad Santa* with my siblings, sing Christmas carols with my in-

laws, get drunk with my best friends, and reunite with my husband and kitty before we all fly back to Japan to kick off the new year. You said it, Andy Williams: it really *is* the most wonderful time of the year. *Kanpai!*



Photos: Bailey Jo Josie



EVENTS EDITOR

Holiday Woohs

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)

Alas, another Christmas holiday is underway in Japan. And whilst I'm not a very festive kind of person, I do enjoy the subtle, warm-fuzzy feels that seem to rear their head at this time of year.

There's not much that I do during the holiday season in Japan — actually, I don't really do anything but drink wine and watch movies under several blankets. In Jamaica, this time was spent with family and loved ones drinking rum-filled sorrel (a traditional Jamaican Christmas drink), basking in the sun at some random beach or river, and eating way too much food. Still, even though I'm so far from home, the warm-fuzzy feels still lingers. That's why, this year, I've decided to have a happy, merry Christmas ~~even if it kills me~~.

Mind you, I do have an ulterior motive... I happen to have a visitor staying with me for the holidays — so I've decided to use him as an incentive to stay out of bed and actually try to enjoy the season.



So, without further ado, I shall give you a snippet of my holiday plans in a step-by-step list.



1

Hunt for a Christmas tree — then overburdening said tiny tree with too many decorations.

2

Set up a new Amazon Japan account so I can apply for Amazon Prime's free trial and get fast, free shipping.

Use this as a guilt-free time to buy gifts... mostly for myself (it's been a long year and I've earned it all. Muahahaha!!).

Look up various Christmas recipes for a feast planned for Christmas day. Also, trying to figure out how to make mulled wine because, why not?!

Go on mini adventures in and outside of Kyoto. By the way, I would highly recommend going to [Arashiyama's Hana Touro Illumination Festival](#). And Kobe's Port Tower has stunning views of a lit-up Harbor Land and the surrounding vicinity.

5

6

Attempt to execute the most absolutely perfect Christmas dinner ever!

Devour this feast with fervor and happily gain at least five pounds.

7

8

Meet up with friends and continue the holiday festivities with drinks and a few questionable end-of-year choices (trust me, the latter is a requirement).

9

Retreat from the world and become a recluse under my blankets for a few days.

10

Finally, head back to work a bit too early since I've only a few paid vacation days left and conservation is a necessity.

Photos:
[Arashiyama light up](#)
Tresha Barrett

CULTURE EDITOR

No, I Mean it's Really Going to Snow

Jack Richardson (Yamagata)

Being one of those lucky few whose parents shunned (read: grimly accepted that flights to the UK are very expensive) them over the Christmas period, I'll be staying in this lovely land for the holidays. That's not to say I'll be crying alone in my freezing rural flat, however — Travel editor Jaz will be here to keep me company over Christmas in Yamagata, then we'll be jetting (spending 10 hours on local trains) off to Kanazawa for a big city-folk New Years. Have a look at her article if you want to read a bit more about that.

Yamagata is a pleasant land that gets a lot less pleasant once winter sets in. In some parts of the prefecture we get almost 10 metres of snow over the course of the winter. Couple this with aforementioned uninsulated apartments and it means burying yourself under a kotatsu can be a very good idea. Thankfully, *nabe*

exists, so un-Christ

There are about what these ste shabu-shabu konbu (ke spring on every kin get your l clay pot a on your k some me work bes boiling w dunk it i sauce and your way vegetable of an hou or udon n broth to fi you to bu bones.

this may well form a (rather messy) staple for the week.

aren't hard-and-fast rules that you can put in one of these, but I like to go for *aburage*. It's a stew made with (chicken) stock, Chinese cabbage, mushrooms, potatoes, carrots and a bit of mushroom you can get your hands on. Get your *donabe* (a heavy pot) and a tabletop stove, pop it on the fire, add *otatsu* and get cooking. Get some *atashi* (the thin strips of beef) and swish it through the water to cook it lightly, then add some *ponzu* or sesame oil and enjoy. Once you've eaten through all these meats and vegetables (which can take upwards of an hour), pour some cooked rice and noodles into the remaining broth and finish it off. Guaranteed to fill you up and warm your chilly

But just because I'm a bit chilly doesn't mean we need to spend the whole time bundled up indoors. Yamagata obviously has a fair number of mountains, and these provide wonderful diversions once the snow has settled.

First of all, skiing cannot be ignored. Zao Ski Resort is one of the better ones in Japan (or so I'm told): a towering mountain with lovely long runs all the way from the summit. Couple that with world-class onsen and we have a full day's warm exertion coupled with the most satisfying après ski this side of the Alps. It's a shame the wine and cheese aren't quite at the European level just yet.

Quite aside from throwing ourselves down mountains, we can trudge up them, too. Yamadera is open all year round, and features a temple that stretches all the way up the mountain. While Bashō's haiku shows he

visited in summer, the place's poetic heritage means that it's well worth experiencing in every season.

Our holy mountains, the Dewa Sanzan, also deserve a mention here. Although Yudono and Gassan are too full of snow to be accessible, Haguro's 2,446 stone steps can be climbed all year round to reach the five-story pagoda that's a Japanese National Treasure.

Yamagata may not be as glittering as Kanazawa or as well-known as other prefectures, but it remains a place where (for better or worse) one can really feel the passing of the seasons. Coming as I do from the south east of England, where winter is more like late autumn in Yamagata, I can't wait to be surrounded by snow. White Christmas, here we come.



Back to the

When I think of a vacation, no matter what country I am in or going to, my mind invariably wanders to Costa Rica. It doesn't matter that I spent only a meager week there a handful of years ago — it completely displaced everywhere else to become the prototypical, Platonic sphere-realm image of a *vacation* vacation. Howling monkeys. Steep hill paths through the buzzing jungle down to the coast. Mangoes falling off trees into the streets. It was warm, and everything was alive, and that green density of life is what I chase whenever I have a chance for a break.

Of course I could go back to Costa Rica, but I get itchy and think I should explore something new. Or, uh, sort of new. This year, like last year, my search for the tropics is taking me to Okinawa, the closest one can get to leaving Japan without actually leaving. Maybe by “new” I actually mean “affordable, easy, and where I can still use my bank card at the 7-11, but with more jungle.” And ocean. And islands. And reefs. And cafes with fresh vinegary sea grapes which you eat staring out at the wide stripes of blue.

“my search for the tropics is taking me to Okinawa”

Okinawa rewards the intrepid explorer. Last Christmas, my traveling companion and I rented a converted van and spent the days driving roads lined with sugar cane fields and steep mountain walls of tree ferns and banyans, and the nights camped at the side of secluded beach coves. Luke and I laid on the dark beaches in the chilly evenings drinking Orion cans and listening to the insects in the brush,

and in the mornings spent hours walking in the surf collecting bits of washed up coral or exploring the rocks and caves. We tried to keep track of the animals we saw — clambering mongooses, inoko which trotted ahead of our van, the blue and black striped poisonous sea snake we watched resting in a gully on a trash-strewn stretch of coast on the eastern side of the island, so many birds.

“Everwhere we looked there was ocean, and behind us, the wild dark forest of the island’s interior”

We didn't eat great in the evenings — supermarkets are sparser down there — but made up for it with long lunches of sea vegetables, *champuru* and pork on rice. We adored our van-home, sleeping in the back and lifting the hatch in the morning to see how the night's chosen beach looked in the early light.

You could easily spend days exploring Okinawa Honto and the nearby smaller islands linked with bridges, but you may not know what you were missing further away. Last winter, after saying a sad goodbye to the van, we took a ferry some hours south to Akajima, the westernmost of the Kerama islands and famous for its corals and snorkeling. It was small and sleepy, with other islands scattered nearby and the sea so transparent and turquoise it seemed we could walk across. We stayed at a small inn on the beach, where deer were frequent visitors. The woman who

The Jungle

Abby Ryder-huth (Gunma)

ran the inn cooked excellent dinners of local fish and vegetables, and for lunch we went every day to the same ramshackle diner by the ferry port, where we sat outside eating taco rice and playing with the resident chihuahua. Everywhere we looked there was ocean, and behind us, the wild dark forest of the island's interior.

Luke — a marine biologist-turned-designer — could spend all day watching the changing habitats of rock pools, and we spent stretches of mornings crouched where the waves broke, lifting rocks and shells to see who swam out from behind them. But the tiny fish and crabs were the barest fraction of what makes the island coasts famous, and soon we donned snorkeling gear and swam out. I have spent most of my life living around the Great Lakes in the US, and am no stranger to water. But the reefs — full of streams of fish, octopuses, snakes, colors, twisting corals, eels, light, graceful and enormous sea turtles — would have stopped me stunned if the waves hadn't kept me floating over them. Here was the wild sense of life that had stayed with me from Costa Rica, in an alternate blue world invisible from the shore. It was so full, so completely contained, and I felt like an interloper, greedy and staring and overwhelmed but unable to stop. It was in every way the philosophical Sublime, a beauty so great you are dwarfed and left afraid. On the shore Luke and I sat blankly in our wetsuits, asking each other over and over like children, "but did you see the sea turtles? Did you? Did you see all those fish?"

"an alternate blue world invisible from the shore"

Museums, culture, shopping, the must-try restaurants — I am an avid fan, and most weekends find me in Tokyo lapping it all up. But my best escape is this feeling of being drenched in life, where the things that breathe and buzz are so strange and many that they can't be counted. That's what I talk about when I talk about vacation. Okinawa may not be Costa Rica, but it's quite a bit closer and there are some sea turtles I'd like to catch up with. So, after watching airline prices rise for more other South Asian jungle locales, we decided that this year we'll just go back.

To change things up, we'll be bypassing Honto completely with a direct flight to Ishigaki, the hub of the Yaeyama islands which make up the furthest southwest edge of Japan's reach. We won't have a van, but a handful of AirBnB apartments and *minshuku* spread across Ishigaki and Iriomote, islands famous for their own rich undersea environments as well as their inland flora and mangroves. Over 90% of Iriomote is covered in jungle, and already I hear it calling my name. I love mangroves, the trees that bridge belonging to the forest or the water, and hope when I am paddling slowly around their roots I'll have the sense of the breathing, dense wilds that seep under your skin with their noises, the smell of all that green. Now, too, I know how much is waiting under the water, and that strange other-world. At night we'll look for the Iriomote cat, the rare and small leopard cat which in local dialects is called "that which shines on the mountain." I expect we'll again spend most of our time moving slowly along beaches and through forests, listening and looking for what creatures are there, combing for coral, running our hands across the thick tropical leaves.

Photo by Ryo Yoshitake on Unsplash

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

THE LAND OF THE

MONONOKE

Sabrina Zirakzadeh (Osaka)

Of all the places I've been in Japan, my favorite by far is Yakushima. Located south of Kagoshima-shi in Kyushu, Yakushima is probably best known as the setting of Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*. With its ancient forests, towering waterfalls, and crystal clear ocean waters, it is a stunning, peaceful retreat into a unique part of Japan's history. These are some of the things the island taught me during my stay.

PLAN AHEAD!

Because Yakushima is so remote, winging it can be a challenge. Limited places to stay, sparse public transportation, and infrequent flights and ferries to and from the island mean planning ahead is a must. There are obvious reasons to do so, namely ensuring you aren't stuck sleeping at the ferry port or hiking hours between hotels when one town is fully booked, but I discovered there are some surprising benefits as well.

I discovered that advance ferry reservations are discounted and free of some extra fees, and also that it would be cheaper in the long run to rent a more expensive hotel room than a cheaper hostel. Why? Because Yakushima has very few conbinis, large grocery stores, and restaurants, finding inexpensive food is difficult. However, the price of most hotels, cabin resorts, and ryokans include large, elaborate breakfasts and dinners, as well as inexpensive bento reservations for additional meals. The meals are all huge and made up of amazing local cuisine and I spent most days running on just the two free meals without feeling hungry at all! Plus, these places also often have on-site onsens, rental facilities for hiking and water activities, and even hammocks or river cruises at no additional cost! In the end, my pricey hotel room cost the same or less as staying at a cheaper place without included meals, and with many perks that made our trip far more memorable.



Ohkonotaki waterfall

CONSIDER A GUIDE

Yakushima's main attraction is hiking through its giant forests of *yakusugi* trees, which include some of the oldest trees in the world. I'm used to going on challenging hikes on my own, but this time, I opted to hire a guide and was very glad that I did! While Yakushima's forests are not virgin due to extensive logging and mining in the past, there aren't many actual trails, so without an expert, following the paths would have been difficult and we may not have made our way to all of the sights and back before nightfall.

In addition, the history and science surrounding the World Heritage-recognized sites is fascinating, and having someone to explain everything to us without distracting from our surroundings made our experience all the better. Whether it was drinking the cleanest, freshest stream water I've ever tasted after learning how it stays uncontaminated, exploring the caverns beneath tree roots while learning about their formation from second and third generation trees, or enjoying a traditional lunch while listening to stories of transporting giant tree trunks down the mountain, I gained a deeper appreciation of our surroundings, and all without having to worry about sticking to a time schedule, getting lost, or missing a single bit of beauty around me.



The Anbo River

THERE'S MORE TO SEE THAN THE SEA

Yakushima's crystal-clear ocean waters are beautiful but far from all the island has to offer. I arrived expecting to spend most of my time at the beaches but as it turns out, the beaches are more like a bit of tarmac with picnic tables and a lifeguard near calmer coves and tidal pools. Still, this didn't change how nice it was to swim and snorkel in the calm and relatively empty waters, and I was able to wander away to more distant tidal pools and shallows not too far away when I wanted more adventure. The different types of fish and coral were numerous, but in the end, it isn't the beaches I remember the most from this trip. It's the rivers, the outdoor onsens, and the waterfalls.

There are tons of natural onsens in Yakushima, most at the seaside. While taking a dip in an outdoor, mixed onsen takes some courage, some allow swimsuits, and most are remote enough to find a pool with decent privacy. The experience coupled with the view was totally unique and well-worth the planning to sync up with bus times at each spot. In addition, since they were on the way, we took the time to visit some of Yakushima's famous waterfalls, including Ohkonotaki, one of the tallest falls in Japan. This was one of the highlights of the trip; the walks to each waterfall were scenic, easy, and peaceful, and the falls themselves were breathtaking, with pathways to get up close and personal with the falls.

Then there was the Anbo river. The largest of many rivers in Yakushima, our hotel was situated just where the river met the sea, and on our final day I decided to sign up for a kayaking excursion, as I'd heard Yakushima's river kayaking was beginner-friendly. It was completely worth the cost. The water was even clearer than in the ocean, the mangroves, waterfalls, and wildlife (including monkeys) were fascinating, and when we stopped for a snorkeling break, I saw more interesting wildlife than I had even in the ocean! Eels, snakes, brightly colored fish, and even non-aquatic life dipping in for a drink or a snack — it was magnificent. If I had to recommend one thing to do on Yakushima, it would be a river kayaking trip.

For a magical, unique vacation you can't go wrong with this lush paradise down south. I suggest everyone make Yakushima a part of their Japan bucket list!



Trip #1

Fukuoka-ken, Kitakyushu-shi, Kokura-ku, Corona Cinema

STAR WARS time! [Corona Cinema](#) is equipped for 4D which makes for an... interesting cinema experience! The seats shake, and move up and down, and occasionally pummel your back like a massage chair on steroids. Water and streams are sprayed in your face; there are even smells and steam. Star Wars, with all its space travel and battles, is the perfect movie for trying out 4D.

My top tips: 1. Don't bring food and drink. This should be obvious... however, my addiction to cinema popcorn lets me down each time. But unless you want popcorn flying everywhere and a lap full of soda, forget it! 2. Women, wear a sports bra. I'm not joking!

Onsen: [Taiheiraku](#) is on the way home from Kokura — actually, the first building after exiting the expressway at Koge. This busy, popular onsen has amazing water; your skin will feel smooth and soft after. The men's and women's baths swap sides periodically — each side has a selection of therapeutic indoor pools and several outdoor baths, including western-style hot tubs for that party feel (except for the random, naked strangers joining your party).

Trip #2

Oita-ken, Nakatsu-shi, Yamaguchi-machi, Core Yamakuni Skate Rink

Winter is not winter without at least one spin around the ice. [Core Yamakuni](#) is a community centre in the middle of the Kyushu mountains, boasting a theatre and outdoor skating rink. The cost is 1530 yen including skate hire, and there are vending machines and simple fast food available. There are other restaurants in the area, budget bungalows nearby, and an onsen a block away from the rink to quickly soak your tired (and possibly injured) limbs. We, however, will be heading back towards Nakatsu to visit:

Onsen: [Kanairo](#), my favorite onsen. A large indoor pool is built around massive rocks, and they have good quality charcoal body soap, shampoo, and conditioner. The best part, however, is waiting for you outside — Kanairo is set in the side of Hachimenzan, a small volcano. The *rotenburo* is a series of pools going up the mountain side, including a large main pool, a waterfall pool for shoulder massage, and a shallow pool for lying down, as well as a long wooden bath. The combination of superior products, a climbing work-out, and relaxing hot spring water produces the best sensation of relaxation (and a wonderful night's sleep!).

HEALTH & NUTRITION Stayo OIL

Rachel Green

Nope. Nowhere. Not planning on going overnight anyway. Instead, I have the January weekends; not far from home, cosy (and free) home each week, and Oita, of course an *outrigateur*, so I'm also in the best

Photo: Rachel

BONUS

Space World: Rest in Peace

Alas, by the time you read this, [Space World](#) will be gone. After opening its doors in 1990, December 2017 will be its final month. I hope I can add a final trip to Space World, with its gorgeous Space Eye ferris wheel, space-shuttle-themed Venus roller coaster, fun water rides, thrilling Titan roller coaster, and terrifying Saturn.

CRITIC EDITOR

Creation:

TA

Greenwood (Oita)

going anywhere these holidays. Well, not we planned a series of day trips during from home, so we can return to our day. Since this is mostly Kyushu onsen on the way home is *de* including my favorite picks for onsens to visit!

Greenwood

trip #5

Oita-ken, Beppu-shi, Kijima Kogen

This [amusement park](#) in the hills above Beppu is famous for its rollercoasters, including Japan's first wooden rollercoaster, built from 60,000 Norway spruces. With rides named Mars, Jupiter, Neptune, and Newton, I'm sure we're in for a crazy ride!

Onsen: [Sakura](#)

We'll be tired after all that riding, so I'm choosing my hometown Nakatsu's favorite onsen, Sakura, for this day, so I can get home to bed quickly after my bath! It's a busy, high quality onsen in the middle of town, with only one, very pretty, outdoor bath, but several baths indoors with various special qualities, including a spa bath, ionizing bath, sauna and lie-down massage bath. You can also book a massage!

trip #3

Oita-ken, Usa-shi, Ajimu-machi, African Safari

Lions, zebras, and elephants wandering around the Oita mountains? Welcome to [African Safari](#). In contrast to some other zoos in Japan that I've seen, at African Safari, the humans are caged and the animals run free. Visitors hop on a lion-shaped, caged open bus and travel through the enclosures, feeding the animals on the way.

Onsen: [Suginoi Palace](#) is a huge resort, a little too big to give you the essential Japanese onsen experience, but it offers a few advantages over other onsens: a) rooftop pools with views from the mountainside location over Beppu city to the ocean, b) the Aqua Garden pool is mixed, and people wear swimsuits, so you can go with all your friends and family, and c) there's an illuminated light show!



TRAVEL EDITOR

A Tourist's Day in Kanazawa

Jasmin Hayward (Ishikawa)



Like many first-year JETs, I made an uneasy decision to spend the winter holidays in Japan this year. And that's why I've decided to make these winter holidays as action-packed as possible. The first week or so, I'll be staying in Yamagata Prefecture: a place I have seen little of, so I cannot comment on what adventures await me there (for that, I suggest you read Culture Editor Jack Richardson's article). But for the few days over New Year, the tables will turn and I will be a guide myself, showing my guest around my new hometown: Kanazawa.

Kanazawa is the capital city of Ishikawa Prefecture. It is a thriving city economically: producing around 99 percent of Japan's gold leaf and increasingly becoming a tourist destination for Japanese people and foreigners alike — thanks to the extension of the Hokuriku Shinkansen in 2015. Kanazawa is not just your typical *nouveau riche*, up-and-comer, however.

The city, once the fifth largest in Japan, is steeped in history, from its well preserved samurai districts to the sixteenth century Kanazawa Castle. Kenrokuen, Kanazawa Castle's former private garden, is one of the three Great Gardens of Japan, too. Most importantly, for me, it's home; and I do not know a place I would rather spend the winter.

Though there are many hidden days in the city, no trip to Kanazawa is complete without visiting the tourist attractions at least once. I've found, however, that if you're desperate to explore the "real" side of Kanazawa and you're strapped for time, as my guest and I will be, then most of the main tourist destinations can be visited in the space of a day. A jam-packed but, by all means, doable day. So, with that said, here is my guide to a "tourist day" in Japan's golden marsh. One that I plan to follow myself with my guest, this holiday.

The first destination on the list is Kenroku-en , the traditional garden mentioned above. Get there early. It opens at 7 a.m., so try to get there within the first two hours or so after that. If you can't, cross it off the top of your list and visit later on in the afternoon. You do *not* want to visit the garden around lunchtime. Believe me, unless you want to drown in a sea of tour groups, it is best avoided at peak times. But don't avoid it entirely! I regret not visiting Kenroku-en sooner, because it really is as beautiful as the hype suggests. With any luck, the frost may have settled by our trip and we can enjoy, in those quiet hours, the peace that only such a garden can evoke.

Only a stone's throw from Kenroku-en is Kanazawa Castle. A quick visit here is a must, if only for its stunning view. Standing on the grounds, you can see a lot of the great landscape of Kanazawa, a city far larger than you'd expect upon first arriving. The castle itself stands there impressive and stately, with the varying types of stones reflecting the different periods of Japan it has outlived. Indeed, I have been told by many that a visit inside the building itself is well worth the few hundred yen entrance fee, and it's an experience I'm eager to have on this upcoming trip.

Next, we will venture on to Oyama Jinja. This is a large shrine not far from the main downtown areas of Korinbo and Katamachi. It's peculiar because of its mix of Japanese and Western European (particularly Dutch) architecture, its gate which boasts stained-glass windows, and its lightning rod. Step inside, however, and you are transported to one of the most traditional and tranquil parts of the city. I highly recommend releasing your inner child and going for a hop on the pond's stepping stones, too.



After a very jam-packed morning, and maybe a coffee or two, we will head to the Samurai district. You reach Kanazawa's samurai district feeling like you have accidentally turned a corner and ended up in the Edo period. The small samurai houses and their earthen gates stand there now as they did hundreds of years ago. Some of the buildings have been turned into museums, others into shops and restaurants, but the feel of the whole area is distinctly historical. If you have enough time, I recommend venturing into one of the restored samurai residences and experiencing what life was like for them 300 years ago.

A busy day then calls for a quick lunch. Though there are many fantastic restaurants in Kanazawa, a quick picnic in the park, if the weather allows it, is just as appealing. Daiwa Department store has an array of different foods, both Japanese and international, on offer in its food hall. Many, from melon smoothies to the cakes decorated in Kanazawa gold leaf, are perfect to take away. And the memorial park behind Daiwa, Shikoukinen Kouen, is, I feel, one of the most under-appreciated parts of Kanazawa. A medium-sized park in the middle of the bustling city; it never has more than a few visitors, despite it being a perfect place to sit and watch the rest of the busy world go by.

With our picnic finished, we will go on to Omicho Market. Having just eaten, we will be there purely for the atmosphere — but oh, what an atmosphere! The market is over two hundred years old and has just gotten bigger and bigger over time. Though it's mainly a fish market, you can buy everything from vegetables to clothes there. It's particularly cool to watch the vendors shouting out their daily bargains. For those few streets, this small city in Japan becomes something more akin to Portobello Road.





Photos: Wikicommons

Our last daytime destination will likely be Higashi Chaya, Kanazawa's tea district, and, in my opinion, it's the most picturesque part of the city. It's like you're on a movie set, a high-budget Coen brothers' movie set. If the samurai district was a step back in time, Higashi Chaya is a testament to how well history can be preserved. The Chaya houses are every bit historic and authentic in exterior, and step inside and you can treat yourself to some bitter green tea and delicious *wagashi* (or if you're like me and completely unaffected by the December weather, some sweet *kakigoori* instead).

On my last "tourist day", I also went to a Geisha performance, which was immensely entertaining and if you're ever in Kanazawa in the autumn I highly recommend it. However, the shows aren't on over New Year so my guest and I will be heading to one of Kanazawa's local breweries, Oriental Brewing, for a beer or two instead. It's an absolute tourist hotspot, but this is a "tourist day" — so what better day to visit? And the beers are more than worth it.

Following this, ever aware of the cold December weather, we will eschew all sensible hot food establishment choices and go for sushi. Kanazawa is by the coast and has beautifully fresh fish all year long. There are some really amazing family-owned sushi restaurants in the north of the city where I live, particularly. They're cheap and friendly but also

provide delicious plates of meaty fish. And the best part is I've stumbled across many of them without even searching.

"Tourist day" should end with a cheeky hour in one of Kanazawa's public baths, followed by a few drinks in one of the many bars that sit behind the main strip. Of course, the night wouldn't be complete without a drink or two — and a few spicy chicken wings — at the JETs' favourite haunt, Kaname.

Hence will end our "tourist day" in Kanazawa. Of course, though these are the major destinations, what I have suggested doesn't even cover an eighth of what the city has to offer. Truth be told, my original intentions for this article included four extra days of activities. However, Kanazawa has so much to offer that it just became unfeasible. And I think one of the best aspects of the city is that you can find some of the best parts of it just by wandering around: there's always so much to find, there can't ever be a comprehensive guide. That's why I recommend this "tourist day" here, so you can get it all done properly but still have time to make your own discoveries in an endless city. And, I don't know about you, but that's the sort of atmosphere I want to create for my guest. With this, you can have all the more peaceful walks and discoveries of favourite backstreet bars. But what do I know? I'm just the travel editor.

We Have Paragliding!

Most people only drive through the sleepy town of Kusu on their way to and from Oita and Hita, and almost everyone who passes through notices that the sunny skies are often freckled with paragliders. Head up Mt. Kirikabu, Kusu's boldest mountain in the center of town, and you are sure to meet instructors who are more than willing to take you on a tandem trip for about *ichi man* (after signing some liability waivers, of course).

COMMUNITY

Welcome to Oita

We Have Monkeys!

Mt. Takasakiyama, just halfway from Beppu to Oita and a predominant feature of Beppu Bay's coastline, is a giant among giants, as it soars well over 600 meters into the sky. The Macaque Monkey Nature Sanctuary, at the base of the mighty mountain, boasts one of Japan's largest populations of wild monkeys. Tourists may enjoy strolling amongst some 1,500 monkeys who have made Mt. Takasakiyama home.

Shantel Dickerson

Oita Prefecture
Kyushu! It is riddled with
karaage, and the things
you will ever meet
be far from where
to Oita is more than

Photos: Shantel Dickerson

TY EDITOR

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We Have *Jigokumushi!*

Everyone loves onsen, but have you ever tried onsen steamed food? Beppu is famous for *Jigokumushi*. Before heading to the restaurant, stop by the local supermarket with your friends and pick up some veggies and seafood which you will steam yourself at the restaurant. Alternatively, you can pay a little extra to choose from the food provided by the *Jigokumushi* restaurant. Be sure to try the pudding and *onsen tamago!*

We Have Castles!

Kitsuki is a quaint, historical town where Japanese and foreign tourists alike stroll along the ancient roads and visit samurai houses while wearing rental kimonos. Said to be just over 700 years old, Kitsuki Castle is a famous landmark of Oita Prefecture. Want to imagine life as a samurai? In the museum you can don samurai armor that was worn over 200 years ago.





SPORTS EDITOR

KAWAGOE

A Sweet Day Trip from Tokyo

Kirsty Broderick (Saitama)

Kawagoe has fast become one of my favourite spots in Japan! Known as *Ko-Edo*, or Little Edo, the city captivates with charming wee shops in old buildings selling beautiful traditional goods, grand temples in beautiful garden settings, and even some castle ruins.

Kawagoe is an easy day trip from Tokyo, only half an hour from Ikebukuro on the Tobu Toju line. Despite this, Kawagoe is not a well known spot. Here are just a few of Kawagoe's gems!

*The contemplative quiet of
Kitain Temple*

Kawagoe contains such a multitude of temples and shrines that I haven't yet visited them all. Thus far, Kitain remains my favourite. Kitain is the head temple of the Tendai sect in Kanto. It holds the only remaining palace buildings of the former Edo Castle. A highlight of the temple complex is the Gohyaku Rakan statues. These are 540 stone statues of the disciples of Buddha, in a small courtyard in the temple grounds. Each statue is unique and the courtyard feels eerie. The large and beautiful complex leaves you with a feeling of peace.

The bustling excitement of Penny Candy Lane

Penny Candy Lane is a narrow street filled with tiny shops. Not quite true to name, these shops sell all manner of snacks, not merely candy. There are crackers, skewered fish, and of course, lots of candy. Penny Candy Lane, usually packed with people browsing the shops, is a great spot for people watching. Parents with inquisitive young children, bored teenagers and the ever-present dog in a carriage are all common sights.

The delicious sweet potato

Like most parts of Japan, Kawagoe has its own local delicacy, the sweet potato; their mascot is a smiling sweet potato. Kawagoe has many sweet potato treats, several of which can be found on Penny Candy Lane. There are sweet potato crackers, candies, and the most famous of all, sweet potato soft cream.

The iconic bell tower

The bell tower still chimes four times a day, 6 am, noon, 3 pm, and 6 pm. It is an icon of the city and can be seen in many advertisements and souvenirs. You cannot go inside but the structure is beautiful from the outside. The street front around the bell tower consists of historic buildings, enhancing the charm of the tower.

Photos: Kirsty Broderick



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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*, Lilian Diep, at 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.

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, Ashley Hirasuna, at ashley.hirasuna@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.

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.



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