

AJET

# CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

## TOKYO ORIENTATION 2018

There's more than just the big three! - Getting Connected in Japan

Language Study 101 - the tried and tested resources you need to hear about

Fun, food and fireworks - our top tips for summer festival fun!

"I can't eat that..." - Navigating your local supermarket and beyond

Ready to explore? *Ryokoushimashou!*

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



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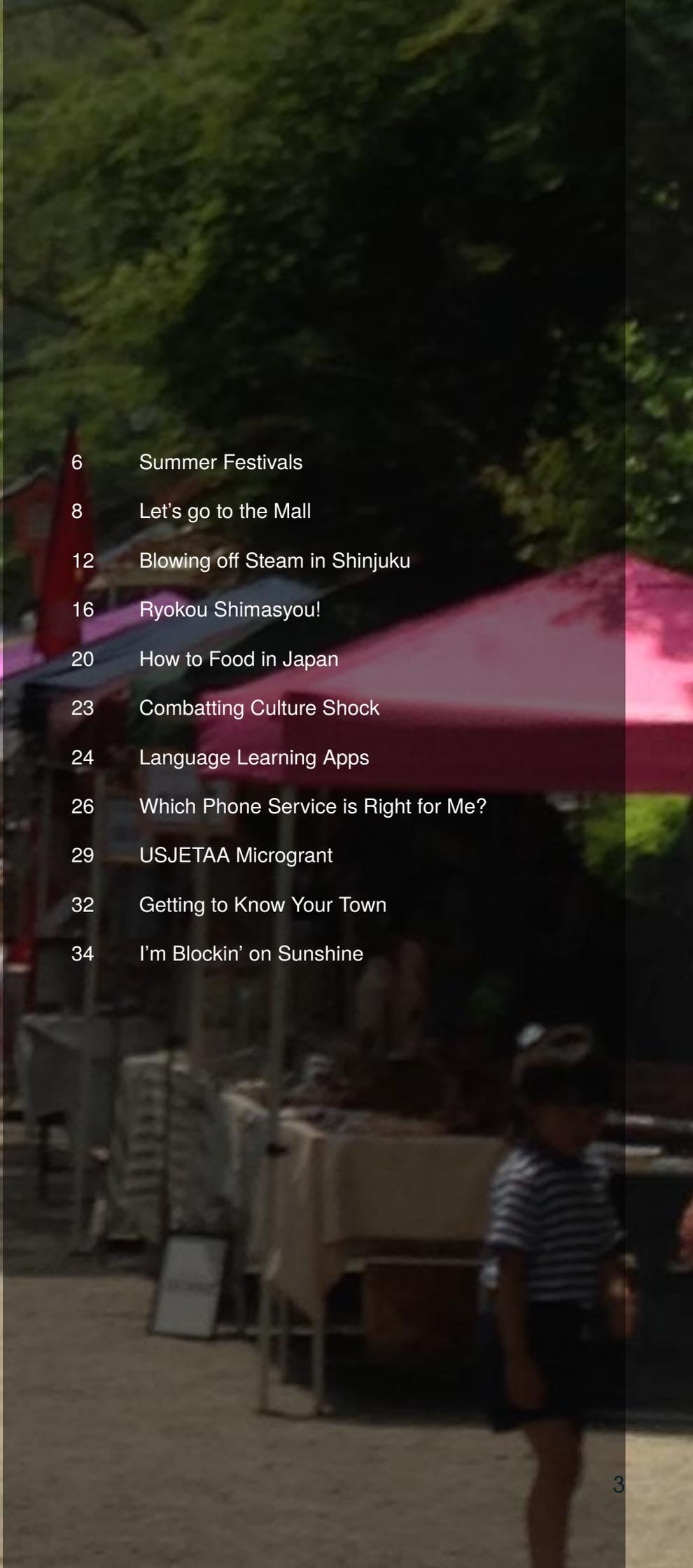
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

To all 2018 JET participants - a very warm welcome to Japan! I'm sure you're going to love your new home. Returning JET *senpai* — congratulations on starting another year with the JET Programme! Each month, *CONNECT* Magazine will bring you tips, tricks and resources to help you maximise your time here. From Events to Entertainment, Culture to Community, we'll keep you right up to date, so make sure to stay tuned!

We're kicking off the 2018-2019 JET year with this special Tokyo Orientation edition of *CONNECT*, packed full of guides to help you get settled into your brand new placement. Inside you'll find tips on surviving the relentless Japanese summer — *Sea Breeze*, *Sea Breeze* I tell you; the lowdown on clothes shopping for a wide range of body types; and what to do when you feel like it's all a bit too much.

Right now, you may feel overwhelmed, and I can't tell you it won't be a busy time the next few weeks. What I can say is that after you're settled, apartment found, phone contract signed (we've a guide for that, too!) — you can breathe a sigh of relief. The hard part is over, and now it's time to dive headfirst into a fascinating new culture. If you're lucky, you may even have a few weeks of free holiday time to get to grips with your new surroundings. "But what about key money?!" I hear you shriek. True, the first month isn't always one where you can afford to flash the cash, but there are countless experiences to be had for free. Take a walk around your new community, try out some introductions with your neighbours, and start to get a feel for your new life.

Here's to the start of a wonderful year!

Lauren Hill  
Head Editor  
3rd Year Tokyo ALT



Photo: Ashley Hirasuna







# Summer Festivals!

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## Fireworks, food, and fun!

Kirsty Broderick (Saitama)

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Lean into the summer heat and humidity by enjoying a festival or two! Whether you are a new JET, or a seasoned fifth year, summer is best enjoyed with festivals. Newbies, you are lucky to arrive in the middle of festival season. Let's be honest, you can't beat the heat and humidity, so you may as well embrace it and head outside. Japan is famous for large, colourful, joyous festivals in the summer. There is bound to be one (or several!) near you, look them up (I bet the *senpais* in your area have recommendations) and venture out. It's the perfect way to make new friends!



## Fireworks

Most summer festivals centre on fireworks, or *hanabi*. The displays are spectacular, full of flashy colour. The displays are often over water, rivers, lakes, or the sea (where the reflection improves the view). Some of the fireworks are released to create images – I saw some last year that showed Pikachu!

## Food

Where there are festivals there is festival food. It's plentiful, cheap, and delicious so take advantage! Typical offerings include such delights as, *yakisoba* (a noodle dish), flavoured shaved ice, *takoyaki* (deep fried octopus balls), and *kara-age* (deep fried chicken).

## Drinks

One of the great things about Japan for those who like to imbibe is liberal drinking laws. You can drink anywhere in public and on train. Alcohol is relatively inexpensive. You can either stock up on cheap drinks at a convenience store before heading out and avoid the queues at drink stands at festivals, or pick up some drinks when you're there. Beer is always available at festivals and often you will find sake too. At the convenience store beer is also a good choice, or the ever present strong zero range. Strong zeros are usually fairly sweet flavoured drinks, with no sugar and 9% alcohol. They're cheap and hit fast!

Photo: Illaura Rossiter



# LET'S GO TO THE MALL

Lilian Diep (Toyama)

Whether you're short or tall, stout or thin, muscular or athletic, you are you. And that's what makes you great. Coming to Japan, though, you might find it a little hard to shop for clothes if you aren't the average build of a typical Japanese person. Hell, sometimes Japanese people have a difficult time shopping for themselves.

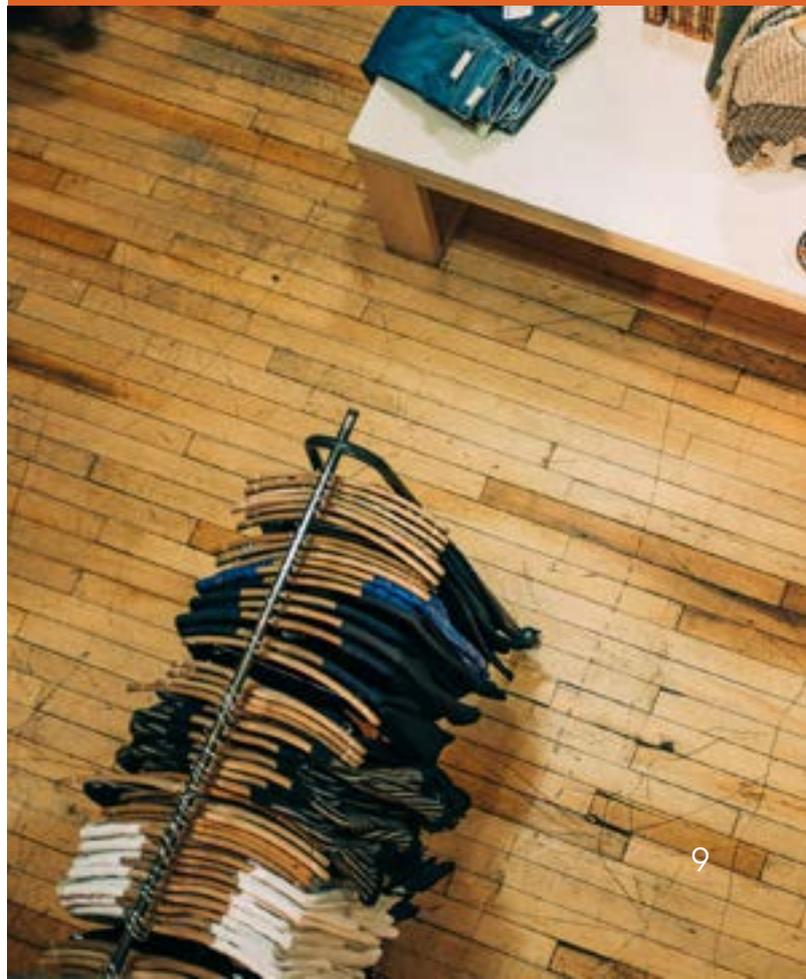
Japan has always been a leading influence in fashion, especially Tokyo. A lot of the times, Tokyo fashion seems to either be way into the future, or way into the past. That might just be why Japanese fashion is so interesting and unique; there's a lot of variety in fashion and you can't really just pigeon-hole Japan to one specific category.

How will you shop? Where will you shop? What will you shop (for)? A lot of the incoming ALTs are experiencing Japan for the first time and might have no idea what or where to buy clothes. Hopefully this article can help you with that. At least help you start out.

# UNIQLO

First off, Uniqlo. Uniqlo is a staple — a staple I tell you — to all day to day fashion in Japan. They are practically everywhere. If you happen to be unlucky and to not have a Uniqlo within a train ride from you, then they have a [website](#) that you can order from. They also have another (cheaper) brand called [GU](#). Both Uniqlo and GU have basic pieces that you can mix and match for almost any outfit that you can think of. Plus, they also have sales to their already decent prices, which makes you think that you need to buy more. Uniqlo also has HeatTech to keep you warm in the winters and Airism to keep you cool in the summers. It might be a source of humor (or not) when you see your coworker and yourself wearing the same outfit from Uniqlo.

With the rise in popularity and the diversity and utility of their products, Uniqlo has expanded to international locations. It's obviously a trusted brand, even if you can only buy the bare necessities here.



# AEON

Aeon is a well known company name in Japan. [Aeon Mall](#) is located in many (if not every) prefecture in Japan and has what any typical mall you would think to have, including a grocery store. It's practically a one-stop shop for daily shopping. You will also get lucky and have international brands like Zara, Nike, or Sports Authorities available to you.

# ONLINE

If you're more of an online shopper, [Rakuten](#) is a global market based in Japan that you can buy almost anything you can think of (whether it's at a reasonable price for that [Secret Deodorant](#) is up to you). If you're looking to get a Japanese credit/debit card, Rakuten also offers a variety of [cards](#) to apply for.

[iHerb.com](#) is a great online store that offers natural or organic products. Available in English and has combini pay, it's a great site to get a lot of substitutes for cravings from back home or if you're unsure how to buy vitamins in Japanese stores.

[Amazon Prime](#) in Japan is different than your Amazon back in your country, mainly because you can't switch your Amazon accounts to a new country — although, [Costco memberships](#) are international. If you're an avid Amazon shopper, you might like what Japanese Amazon has to offer.

# SIZES

Alright, now it comes down to size. You'll hear that everything is smaller in Japan. It's actually kinda true, but you might luck out. Sometimes one size fits all (or "free" sizes) will be large and baggy for an average Japanese person, but it might fit you just fine.

One thing that you'll find rather quickly if you're a tall or long person is that the clothes you buy here won't reach the end of your limbs and it'll look like you hadn't bought any new clothes since your last growth spurt. I would *highly* recommend you bring all your tall and long clothing with you. Or if you have large shoe sizes. Bring it all with you or have it shipped by surface mail so it'll arrive by winter. Or embrace the elbow cuff roll or capri pants. They're fashionable, right? Right?

You might have to fumble through conversions if you're from the States. Here's a nifty [blog](#) that will go into a lot more detail and help you convert inches to centimeters. Or Google it. Google Sensei knows all.



GMONK



# eam in Shinjuku

## g for Day and Night!

ill (Tokyo)

!). It's your first day in the sweltering, dizzying crush that is  
time! For many new JETs, orientation is the longest stretch  
side to making the most of every moment, whether you land  
hts, or you just can't wait to clock off and head to an *izakaya*  
u covered!

## by Day

All that walking must have tired you out; time to hunt down some lunch, and you're in the perfect place! Whether you're craving ramen, curry, or a full *washoku* set, you're sure to find it somewhere in Shinjuku. Our recommendation is Kappo Nakajima, a one stop shop for traditional Japanese fare. Dinner prices start at a hefty 15,000 yen, but their lunch sets can be yours for only 800 yen. This is just one example of an unusual (and lucky, depending on your timing) phenomenon in Japan; even the most upmarket restaurants offer tempting, affordable lunch specials.

## Honourable Mentions - Daytime:

1. Hanazono Shrine: ancient Shinto heritage in the heart of Shinjuku!
2. Shin-Okubo: get your fill of cosmetics, fashion and syrupy *hotteok* pancakes in Tokyo's own Koreatown!
3. VR Zone Shinjuku: stay out of the heat and sample the latest in VR game technology!

# Shinjuku

If you've only got the evenings to cool off, don't worry. Shinjuku throws a party like no other. For the next three days you've got fantastically themed restaurants, cosy alleyway bars, and world class clubs right on your doorstep.

Let's start big (in more ways than one). Nothing says "Welcome to Japan" like an evening at Shinjuku's Robot Restaurant! There's no easy way to describe the show this place puts on. Think bright lights, dancing, drumming, acrobatics, contortionists, wrestling, and of course - robots. You really have to see it for yourself, but there are plenty of videos summing up the general idea. Tickets are 8000 yen, with the option to add a bento box for 1500 yen. Take our advice: do a bit of digging online; there are always discount tickets to be found (sometimes as much as 50% off!). Also, skip the bento and eat before arriving. If there's one thing reviewers agree on, it's that the food sucks.

Japanese restaurants know how to commit to a theme, and if you're keen to try out a few more wacky dining experiences, you may want to head to Zauo (catch your own fish, then take a seat in a boat to tuck in!); The Lockup (prison-themed fun, but definitely not for the claustrophobic); or

Alice in Fantasy Book (one of many Alice restaurants in Tokyo, with exactly the trippy decor and menu items you'd expect).

Dinner's done and dusted; time for drinks! It's a well known fact that Shinjuku plays host to at least one bar per person in the area at any given moment. That's a lie, but I'd be willing to bet we're not too far off. Much like restaurants, themed bars are a thriving business in Shinjuku. No matter the vibe you're looking for, there's somewhere that'll hit the spot. Some of our favourites include Dug (a spacious, sparse jazz bar of Murakami fame), Gravity (one of Tokyo's lesser known rock bars - come for the welcome, and you might catch a live show); Campy! (lively, inclusive drag show bar - with no table charge!); and Zoetrope (vintage cinema meets Shinjuku's largest whiskey collection in this relatively hidden gem).

Big, full-on establishments not your style? There's always a hole in the wall, or several hundred. Shinjuku is packed with drinking alleys, each home to its own particular brand of cosy, local bars, restaurants and

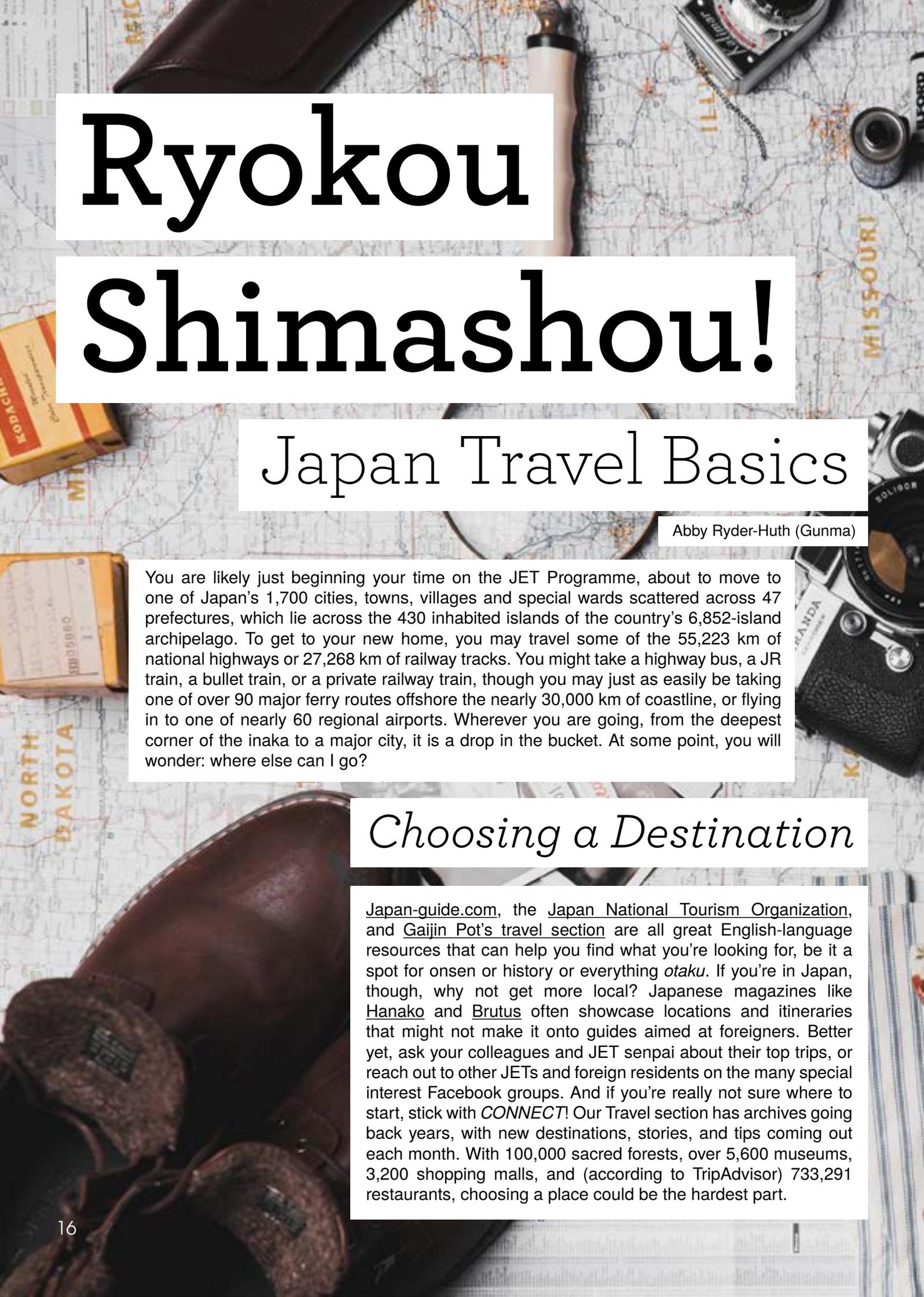
# by Night

izakayas. These places are *tiiiiiny*; there's often only room for the handful of regulars! If you can find a spot, though, there are some wonderful people to meet and some perfectly forgettable - a few glasses deep in the bartenders' recommendations, at least - memories to be made.

Two standouts are the Golden Gai area and Omoide Yokochō (literally, "memory lane"), famous for elbow-to-elbow concept bars and WWII-esque *yakitori* vendors respectively. You've likely heard horror stories of *yakuza* on every corner and muggings masquerading as cover charges. This is certainly true for parts of Shinjuku's alleyway scene, but as long as you travel in a group of your new fellow JETs, and make sure to clear up all prices before entry (or drinking!), you're in for the night of your life. One last tip? Try the raw pig testicles at Omoide Yokochō's Asadachi. You may very well regret it, but it comes with some pretty serious bragging rights. When in Japan?

## *Honourable Mentions - Nighttime:*

1. Shinjuku Copa Bowl: all night bowling in the centre of Kabukicho!
2. Don Quijote Shinjuku Branch: shop 24/7 for things you didn't know existed and don't understand why you need!
3. Wald 9 Cinema: catch the latest blockbuster well into the early hours!



# Ryokou

# Shimashou!

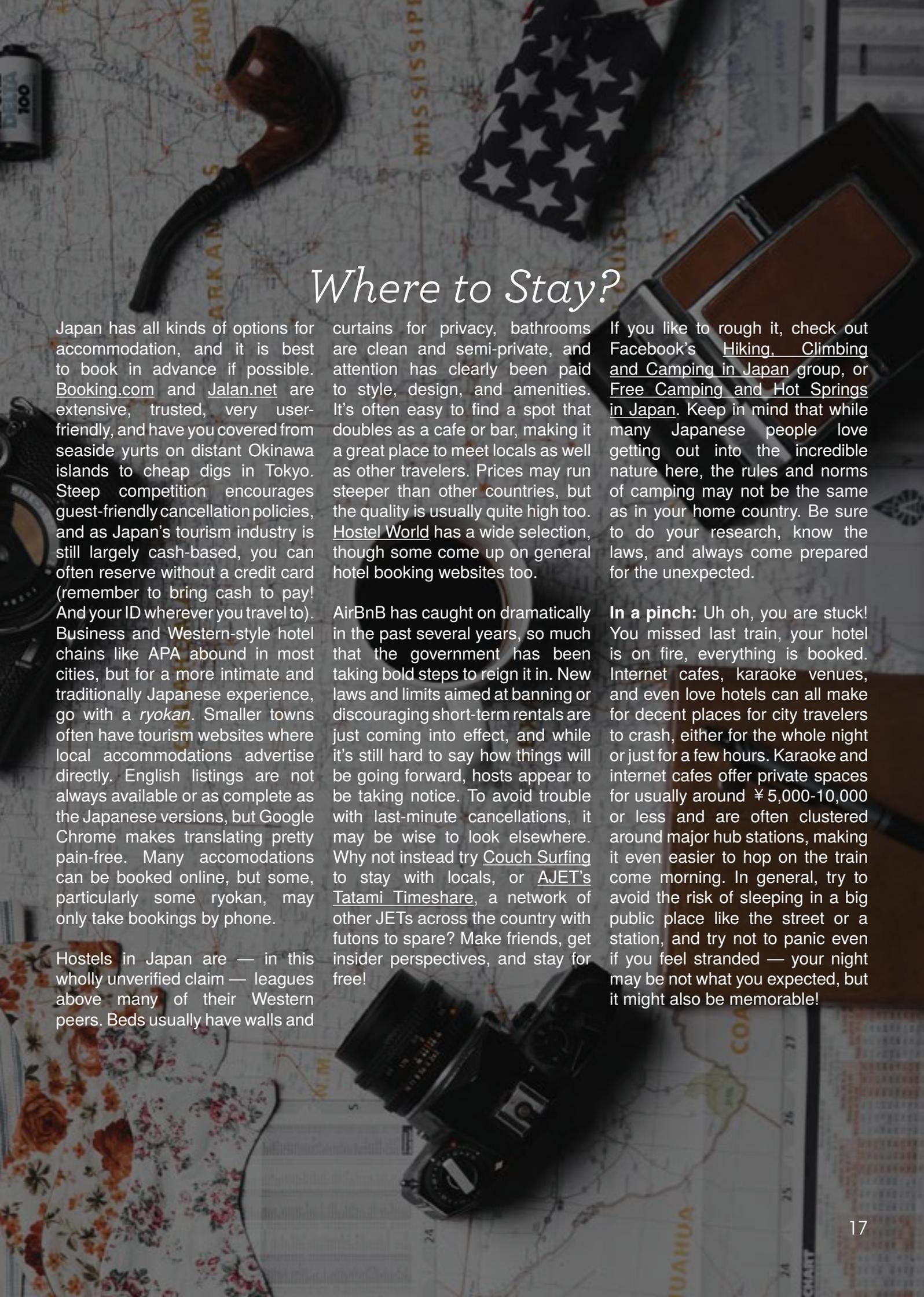
## Japan Travel Basics

Abby Ryder-Huth (Gunma)

You are likely just beginning your time on the JET Programme, about to move to one of Japan's 1,700 cities, towns, villages and special wards scattered across 47 prefectures, which lie across the 430 inhabited islands of the country's 6,852-island archipelago. To get to your new home, you may travel some of the 55,223 km of national highways or 27,268 km of railway tracks. You might take a highway bus, a JR train, a bullet train, or a private railway train, though you may just as easily be taking one of over 90 major ferry routes offshore the nearly 30,000 km of coastline, or flying in to one of nearly 60 regional airports. Wherever you are going, from the deepest corner of the inaka to a major city, it is a drop in the bucket. At some point, you will wonder: where else can I go?

## *Choosing a Destination*

[Japan-guide.com](http://Japan-guide.com), the [Japan National Tourism Organization](http://Japan National Tourism Organization), and [Gaijin Pot's travel section](http://Gaijin Pot's travel section) are all great English-language resources that can help you find what you're looking for, be it a spot for onsen or history or everything *otaku*. If you're in Japan, though, why not get more local? Japanese magazines like [Hanako](http://Hanako) and [Brutus](http://Brutus) often showcase locations and itineraries that might not make it onto guides aimed at foreigners. Better yet, ask your colleagues and JET senpai about their top trips, or reach out to other JETs and foreign residents on the many special interest Facebook groups. And if you're really not sure where to start, stick with *CONNECT!* Our Travel section has archives going back years, with new destinations, stories, and tips coming out each month. With 100,000 sacred forests, over 5,600 museums, 3,200 shopping malls, and (according to TripAdvisor) 733,291 restaurants, choosing a place could be the hardest part.



## Where to Stay?

Japan has all kinds of options for accommodation, and it is best to book in advance if possible. [Booking.com](#) and [Jalan.net](#) are extensive, trusted, very user-friendly, and have you covered from seaside yurts on distant Okinawa islands to cheap digs in Tokyo. Steep competition encourages guest-friendly cancellation policies, and as Japan's tourism industry is still largely cash-based, you can often reserve without a credit card (remember to bring cash to pay! And your ID wherever you travel to). Business and Western-style hotel chains like APA abound in most cities, but for a more intimate and traditionally Japanese experience, go with a *ryokan*. Smaller towns often have tourism websites where local accommodations advertise directly. English listings are not always available or as complete as the Japanese versions, but Google Chrome makes translating pretty pain-free. Many accommodations can be booked online, but some, particularly some *ryokan*, may only take bookings by phone.

Hostels in Japan are — in this wholly unverified claim — leagues above many of their Western peers. Beds usually have walls and

curtains for privacy, bathrooms are clean and semi-private, and attention has clearly been paid to style, design, and amenities. It's often easy to find a spot that doubles as a cafe or bar, making it a great place to meet locals as well as other travelers. Prices may run steeper than other countries, but the quality is usually quite high too. [Hostel World](#) has a wide selection, though some come up on general hotel booking websites too.

AirBnB has caught on dramatically in the past several years, so much that the government has been taking bold steps to reign it in. New laws and limits aimed at banning or discouraging short-term rentals are just coming into effect, and while it's still hard to say how things will be going forward, hosts appear to be taking notice. To avoid trouble with last-minute cancellations, it may be wise to look elsewhere. Why not instead try [Couch Surfing](#) to stay with locals, or [AJET's Tatami Timeshare](#), a network of other JETs across the country with futons to spare? Make friends, get insider perspectives, and stay for free!

If you like to rough it, check out Facebook's [Hiking, Climbing and Camping in Japan](#) group, or [Free Camping and Hot Springs in Japan](#). Keep in mind that while many Japanese people love getting out into the incredible nature here, the rules and norms of camping may not be the same as in your home country. Be sure to do your research, know the laws, and always come prepared for the unexpected.

**In a pinch:** Uh oh, you are stuck! You missed last train, your hotel is on fire, everything is booked. Internet cafes, karaoke venues, and even love hotels can all make for decent places for city travelers to crash, either for the whole night or just for a few hours. Karaoke and internet cafes offer private spaces for usually around ¥5,000-10,000 or less and are often clustered around major hub stations, making it even easier to hop on the train come morning. In general, try to avoid the risk of sleeping in a big public place like the street or a station, and try not to panic even if you feel stranded — your night may be not what you expected, but it might also be memorable!

# Planes, Trains, Automobiles

For train travel, [Hyperdia](#) is an excellent multilingual resource for quick local trips as well as cross-country ventures. You can organize your options by departure or arrival time, set parameters around transportation type, and even specify connecting stations. Watch out for some spellings, particularly with dashes and n and m sounds — Shinmachi may become Shimmachi, and Shin Misato may become Shim-Misato. For long distances or rush hour travel, the Green Cars, or first class carriages, are more comfortable and can help you snag a seat for an extra fee. Be sure to buy Green Car tickets in advance at the station, as they go for a premium once on board the train. For some useful train vocabulary, check out Japan Info's [list](#).

Those who choose to shell out for the shinkansen are not likely to be disappointed: it's impressive, and worth trying at least once if you can budget for it. Automated ticket booths with English options are in all JR stations that serve the shinkansen, and English is sometimes spoken at the ticket counter as well. Unreserved seats, or 自由席 (*jiyuuseki*), are slightly cheaper than reserved seats (指定席, *shiteiseki*), but can fill up quickly during peak travel times

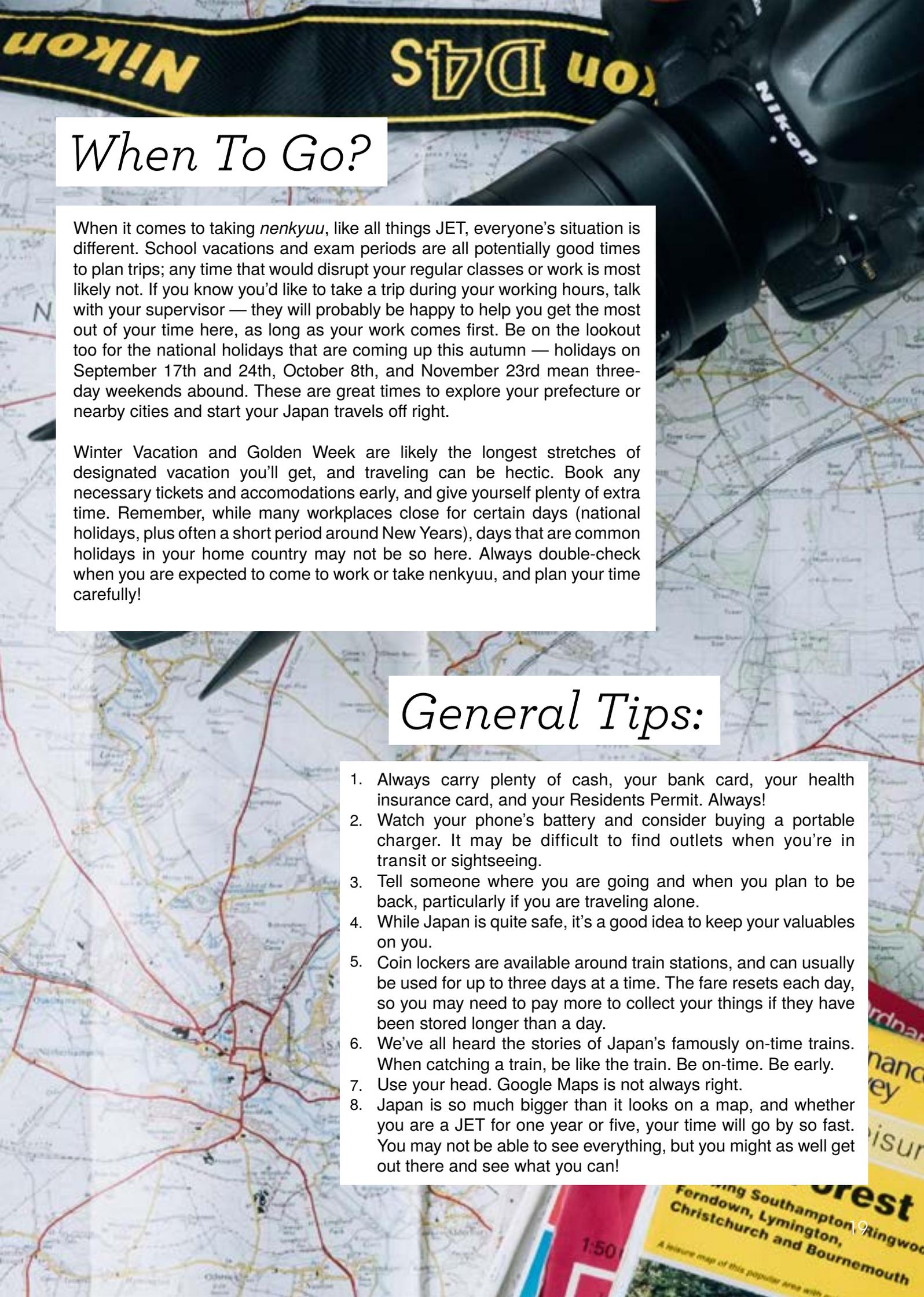
like Golden Week and leave many passengers standing. Like JR trains, there are also Green Car options, as well as the ultra-lux Gran Car.

[Peach](#), [Jetstar](#), and [Vanilla Air](#) are the three major low-cost Japanese airlines, which operate in most regions of the country as well as connecting to select international destinations. Like many budget-oriented airlines, they will try to get you with those hidden fees and extras, so watch out! [Skymark](#), [ANA \(All Nippon Airways\)](#), and [JAL \(Japan Airlines\)](#) have more extensive networks, cushier policies, and higher price tags — even still, plane tickets are still likely cheaper than shinkansen. That doesn't mean they are always the better option though — with check-in, security, and transportation to and from the airport factored in, bullet trains might save you time.

If you have an International Driving Permit or Japanese license, road trips are fun but potentially pricey. The national expressways, often called IC (interchange) roads, all carry tolls based on the distance travelled. ETC (Electronic Toll Collection) Cards automatically pay at the tollgate and get you some discounts, but the savings can be small. [Check here](#) to

calculate the potential cost of your trip, so you don't get sticker shock at the end. Bear in mind also that not all IC entrances and exits are equipped for cars without ETC, and this may not be reflected on the directions you get from Google Maps. If you are paying cash, look for the green sign that says 一般 (*ippan*), or general, before you try to get on or off the expressway.

Maximize your time and budget and hop on a (night) bus! Around 50 companies operate both day and overnight routes between many cities, often for cheaper than a shinkansen or flight. The seats might not beat a bed for comfort, but most are roomy and partially reclining. While large companies like [Willer Express](#) often have good English search options, you should otherwise expect to book your ticket in Japanese. Some companies may accept foreign credit cards, but others will have you pay and pick up your ticket at a *conbini*. Tickets should be booked and purchased in advance, and some routes may sell out quickly, particularly during holiday weekends. For more information, check out Japan Guide's handy [explanation](#) of highway buses.



## When To Go?

When it comes to taking *nenkyuu*, like all things JET, everyone's situation is different. School vacations and exam periods are all potentially good times to plan trips; any time that would disrupt your regular classes or work is most likely not. If you know you'd like to take a trip during your working hours, talk with your supervisor — they will probably be happy to help you get the most out of your time here, as long as your work comes first. Be on the lookout too for the national holidays that are coming up this autumn — holidays on September 17th and 24th, October 8th, and November 23rd mean three-day weekends abound. These are great times to explore your prefecture or nearby cities and start your Japan travels off right.

Winter Vacation and Golden Week are likely the longest stretches of designated vacation you'll get, and traveling can be hectic. Book any necessary tickets and accommodations early, and give yourself plenty of extra time. Remember, while many workplaces close for certain days (national holidays, plus often a short period around New Years), days that are common holidays in your home country may not be so here. Always double-check when you are expected to come to work or take *nenkyuu*, and plan your time carefully!

## General Tips:

1. Always carry plenty of cash, your bank card, your health insurance card, and your Residents Permit. Always!
2. Watch your phone's battery and consider buying a portable charger. It may be difficult to find outlets when you're in transit or sightseeing.
3. Tell someone where you are going and when you plan to be back, particularly if you are traveling alone.
4. While Japan is quite safe, it's a good idea to keep your valuables on you.
5. Coin lockers are available around train stations, and can usually be used for up to three days at a time. The fare resets each day, so you may need to pay more to collect your things if they have been stored longer than a day.
6. We've all heard the stories of Japan's famously on-time trains. When catching a train, be like the train. Be on-time. Be early.
7. Use your head. Google Maps is not always right.
8. Japan is so much bigger than it looks on a map, and whether you are a JET for one year or five, your time will go by so fast. You may not be able to see everything, but you might as well get out there and see what you can!



# How to Food in Japan

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)

One of my biggest concerns when I moved to Japa— Actually, scratch that, my *biggest* concern when I moved to Japan was food. Over the years I've become more aware of the things that I consume and I like having a certain level of control over what goes into my body. Yes, I'm one of those people who spends hours in a supermarket reading the ingredients and debating to myself over the most minute things. So you can imagine my mini-panic when I went into a Japanese supermarket for the first time and had absolutely no clue what anything was made of.

That's why I wanted to write this article - to help those who are like-minded, those who want to stick close to the diets they had back home or have dietary restrictions, and of course, those who may likely go into a supermarket and buy white sugar thinking it's salt.

# What does that mean?!

For the latter set of individuals, there are quite a few apps out there that would work well in your case. I'll only be recommending a couple of these apps though, since there are so many out there and I wouldn't want to recommend anything I haven't personally used. The first one is [Google Translate](#), naturally. This is arguably the most popular app for translation. It offers a wide variety of options, which include instant camera translation – just point and shoot and the Japanese text will magically turn into English.

And for those who want to remain a bit inconspicuous with their translations, I personally like the [English Japanese Translator](#) app by BK Translate. It's a free app that smoothly and pretty accurately translates Japanese to English and vice versa via text or voice. The features of [English Japanese Translator](#) are similar to the Google Translate app, but I prefer it nonetheless. One thing I really like about this app, aside from its translation accuracy, is the fact that it not only provides the text written in Japanese but *rōmaji* as well. *Romaji* is basically the representation of Japanese sounds using the 26-letter western alphabet. So if you want to practice speaking Japanese when asking where to find various items and you can't read the written Japanese translation, you can just use the *romaji* as a guide. As I said though, you can do this with Google Translate but somehow my preference lies with the [English Japanese Translator](#) app for that particular function.

To help you even further along, there's this [very detailed guide](#) that can help you if you wish to learn how to read product labels; and there's also an extensive glossary of Japanese foods listed [here](#).

# Sorry. I Can't Eat That

People with dietary restrictions and allergies will definitely come across some problems while trying to navigate the food world in Japan. Many people here have no idea what being gluten free means (although recently I've seen a few snacks labeled as such in a supermarket so that's awesome start); and although the typical Japanese diet does include a lot of plant based food items, finding a vegetarian restaurant can be a challenge in its own, especially if you don't live in one of the more popular cities. Still, there are some ways you can get around these issues.

First, it is highly recommended that if you have specific food allergies to carry around with you some kind of documentation written in Japanese that explicitly states what your allergy is. Maybe you could ask your immediate supervisor or an English teacher at your school to help with this document. Or, you could get a card from [SelectWisely](#), an online business that provides a variety of food allergy and diet restriction cards in more than 60 languages.

Additionally, for those with celiac disease (gluten allergy) or wheat allergies, keep in mind that almost all soy sauce brands that are sold in Japanese supermarkets contain wheat. Luckily though, if you will be eating out, there's a Japanese gluten free restaurant card that you can download for free from [here](#) and use on your restaurant ventures.

Regarding other allergies, there are seven ingredients which are legally required to be clearly signposted on any product. These ingredients are eggs, milk, wheat, buckwheat, peanuts, shrimp and crab.

For in depth information on how to traverse food allergies in Japan, you can check out this [how-to guide](#).

Aside from allergies, if you follow a halal diet but you'd still like to enjoy the occasional perk of eating out, this site ([Halal In Japan](#)) offers a comprehensive list of suitable restaurants throughout Japan.

乳	卵	小麦	そば	落花生	えび	かに
Milk/Dairy	Egg	Wheat	Buckwheat	Peanuts/Tree Nuts	Shrimp	Crab

## Home and International Shopping

People who reside in major cities are more likely to find an array of supermarkets carrying international food. The international items that you'd find in these supermarkets, though, are usually a bit limited; if you're bent on cooking up your usual dishes from back home, you'd need to find a place that focuses on international products. The good thing is that many of these food stores are chains so you may be able to find one (or two) in your area.

- [Costco](#)
- [Meidi-ya](#)
- [Jupiter Coffee](#)
- [KINOKUNIYA International Store](#)
- [National Azabu](#)
- [Nissin](#)

There are also a number of online shopping options, which would definitely come in handy if you're in a rural area. My personal favorite is [iHerb.com](#). They offer a huge selection of natural and organic products at amazingly reasonable prices.

Several other online shops include:

[Hilo Market](#) - Features foreign groceries, and resells products from companies like Costco.  
[The Foreign Buyers' Club](#) - Sells U.S. groceries, some of which are from Costco.

[Expat Express](#) - Based in the U.S. and ships common, everyday grocery items.

[The Flying Pig](#) - Offers products from Costco Japan.

[The Meat Guy](#) - Features all kinds of meat, as well as other food items.

[Tengu Natural Foods](#) - Sells imported organic and vegetarian foods.

[HealthyTokyo.com](#) - Focuses on natural and organic products.

[Amazon Japan](#) - Offers a decent amount of grocery items.

Keep in mind that things can get a bit overwhelming at first. Fear not, though, as you can become an eventual pro at navigating your way through the world of food in Japan. Just take any misstep as a lesson learned and soon you'll find out what works best for you.

Sources:  
[Surviving in Japan](#)  
[The Japan Times](#)  
[Japan Visitor](#)

# COMBATTING CULTURE SHOCK

## Tips and Tricks

Kirsty Broderick (Saitama)

Probably the furthest thing from the minds of new JETs as they are full of excitement about their new lives, culture shock, is nonetheless something many JETs end up facing. It's a good idea to have a list of ways to cope in your pocket in case culture shock hits you!

### Reach Out

One of the great things about JET is that you get plopped right into a readymade circle of support! Many of your *senpai* will have experienced culture shock before and can be a fantastic resource for you. They will have their own suggestions on getting through it – ask them!

Spending time with people in the same situation as yourself can be hugely beneficial. You don't have to deal with a language barrier. You have plenty of things in common. It is simply *easier*. However, don't spiral into a complaint circle of doom with your JET buddies as that will only make everyone feel worse.

Don't feel you have to go through this, or anything else, on your own. Make friends in your prefecture, attend AJET events, utilise your AJET Facebook group. People want to support you – let them know you need it!

### Stay Connected

It is hard to imagine how different it must have been for those early JETs, before the internet was prevalent. It is now super easy (kind of, you're still going to have to navigate contracts) to stay connected to friends and family back home.

It can be hard to strike a balance between going out and enjoying your new home – festivals! food! *nomihoudai!* – and keeping in touch with those you left behind. However, do your best to stay connected. Send your mum a quick good morning instant message, Skype your best friend and watch your favourite movie together, when you have nothing to do at school write a postcard to your tech-phobic grandmother.

### Join Groups

Are you sensing a theme? The best way to battle culture shock is with the support and friendship of others. Don't become isolated. While this may take more effort for those of you with *inaka* placements and limited Japanese, there are groups for almost anything you could think of, from cooking and sculpture to martial arts and *taiko*. The more immersed you are in your community the better placed you are to handle culture shock.

### Food

Sometimes a taste of home (literally!) is the best cure. Eat something familiar and comforting. I am fortunate to be a stone's throw from Tokyo where there are myriad foreign eating opportunities, however, the internet is here to save those in the *inaka!*

Costco does not offer online shopping but if you live near a store you are lucky! Share a membership with a friend and stock up on salad greens that aren't iceberg lettuce, and frozen meals for when you need an urgent pick-me-up.

Kaldi is a fabulous source, and while I frequent the brick and mortar stores they also have online shopping! Kaldi's sell a wide range of foreign goods, from Thai seasonings to British biscuits, French cheeses to Mexican ingredients, American candy to Indian sauces. The range changes regularly and includes special items for Christmas, Easter, and other holidays.

The Meat Guy is an online only store with all your foreign meat needs. Kangaroo steaks for the Aussies, turkey for the Americans, and good steak, bacon and sausages for all.

### Remember the Positive

One of the best ways to help is simply to remember the positive points about living in Japan, and I promise, no matter how down you are, there *are* positives. Make a list if it helps! Convenience stores that open all the time, private karaoke booths, amazing festivals, new places to visit, vending machines everywhere with hot drink lines in winter, reliable transport, little towels handed to you on arrival at restaurants, and fancy toilets are just a few of things that make me grateful to call Japan home.

# LANGUAGE LEARNING APPS

Amanda Muller (Kyoto)

Now that you're living in Japan, you may be interested in learning the language. Learning Japanese is no easy task, but luckily there are a number of resources out there for you to easily study at home (or at your desk during those long summer months without classes).

## HIRAGANA AND KATAKANA

First order of business if you want to learn Japanese is learning hiragana and katakana, the two syllabaries of the Japanese language. Unfortunately, learning these characters require pure memorization (and you have to learn two characters per phoneme!), but there are a number of ways to learn and practice using the internet or apps on your phone.

For me, the best way to learn hiragana and katakana was to simply write and rewrite the characters until I knew them. However, after learning the characters, you'll need to practice. You can use flashcards (or a flashcard app like Anki, which we'll talk more about later), and Duolingo's hiragana course, but there are also many gamified ways to review online, like the [Hiragana Quiz](#) website, and [Hiragana Drag and Drop](#), both of which are also available for katakana practice. Also make sure to check out some [guides](#) on how to differentiate between those tricky katakana characters that look super similar.

## KANJI

Now that you know hiragana and katakana, it's time start climbing the kanji mountain. My preferred method of studying kanji is through the website [WaniKani](#). WaniKani teaches you kanji by starting with kanji that are simple to read, and moving on to ones that are much more complex. They start by teaching you the radicals that will make up the kanji in your particular level, then move to common readings of the kanji in that level, before eventually progressing to vocabulary that uses the kanji you've learned. With each meaning and reading, the app gives you a unique mnemonic to help you associate the new material you've learned to a memorable story, thereby helping you remember the kanji. The mnemonics are fairly weird, which is actually really helpful in being able to recall it. The app also works on a spaced repetition system (SRS), which quizzes you on learned radicals, kanji, and vocabulary at appropriate intervals depending on how well you know that particular kanji. WaniKani does require a subscription, but the first three levels are free so you can try before you buy.

# VOCABULARY

For me, learning new vocabulary is the hardest part of learning the language, so I personally use two apps that help me remember a bit better.

The first app is [Anki](#), which can be used on your phone or downloaded on your desktop. Anki lets you create your own deck of flashcards for words you find in your textbook, in vocabulary lists, or even just words you hear out in the wild and want to remember. After Anki quizzes you on a word in your deck, you choose how well you remembered the item from a list of choices (easy, okay, hard, etc.). The choice you make determines how long you wait before you see that card again—if you remembered it right away you might not see that card for a few days, but if you had trouble they'll show it to you again in ten minutes.

However, if you, like me, can't be trusted to tell the truth about how well you remembered the vocabulary, you might want to try [Memrise](#) instead. Memrise works similarly to Anki—you can make your own course based on words you want to know (or you can choose courses made by other users), and the system will quiz you. Unlike Anki, you have to type in your response, and the app itself judges whether you were correct or incorrect, and change the SRS level of that word from there.

# GRAMMAR

If you don't have access to a traditional textbook, don't worry, because you can use [Bunpro](#), a website that breaks down grammar points by JLPT level and provides resources for each grammar point. Bunpro tells you the meaning and structure for each grammar point, gives a few example sentences, and provides multiple links to further explanation of the grammar point. The paid version of Bunpro also includes further example sentences, the ability to add notes, and an SRS system to study the grammar points. Even if Bunpro itself doesn't explain something well enough, the external links provided mean that you don't have to go through the trouble of looking it up yourself, and it's always good to save a little time.

# OTHER

If you came to Japan with absolutely no language ability, there are a few apps that will make your life here a bit easier.

The app [Kanji Lookup](#) allows you to draw a kanji you see onto your phone screen, and it will find the kanji and define it for you. This is a very handy resource, especially for that first trip to the grocery store after you get settled.

When you find yourself needing to communicate with someone who doesn't speak any English, [Google Translate](#) often doesn't cut it. I find that the app [Papago](#) has much more accurate translations, and it allows for text, audio, and picture translations, just like Google. You can also use the [English to Japanese Translation Friend](#) on LINE, which sends you a fully translated transcript of anything you text to it.

Learning Japanese is not easy, and sometimes it's a pretty frustrating process, but hopefully some of these language learning recommendations can help get you on your way. Good luck, and don't forget to have fun learning!



# WHICH PHONE SERVICE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

## 10 Japanese phone services you need to know about

Hayley Closter (Miyazaki)



**Application:** In-store  
**English support:** None  
**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Must be iPhone 6 or newer  
**Requirements:** Credit Card or bank book, ID or Residence Card  
**Monthly Bill:** ¥7,000-¥10,000 per month  
**Senpai Endorsement:** No

**Pros:**

1. Able to use data and phone service as soon as departing the store

**Cons:**

1. Expensive
2. Japanese language required for set-up
3. Most likely have to buy a new phone unless you have an unlocked recent phone
4. Set up process can take up to 4 hours in store
5. Expensive cancellation fees if you cancel within a year
6. Hidden catches can increase the price of your bill drastically

**Application:** In-store  
**English support:** None  
**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Must be iPhone 6 or newer  
**Requirements:** Credit card, Residence Card, Inkan seal  
**Monthly Bill:** ¥7,000+  
**Senpai Endorsement:** No

**Pros:**

1. Able to use data and phone service as soon as departing the store

**Cons:**

1. Expensive
2. Complicated and lengthy set up with many hidden traps
3. Minimum 2year contract
4. Most likely have to buy a new phone unless you have an unlocked recent phone
5. Internet speed slows down late at night
6. Unnotified changes to your contract after 2 years of use
7. Expensive cancellation fees
8. No rollover data



**Application:** In-store  
**English support:** None  
**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Must be iPhone 6 or newer.  
**Requirements:** Credit card or bank details, passport, Residence Card, Inkan seal.  
**Monthly Bill:** ¥7,000+  
**Senpai Endorsement:** Yes

**Pros:**

1. Service everywhere in Japan
2. Able to use data and phone service as soon as departing the store

**Cons:**

1. Expensive
2. Japanese language required for set-up
3. Expensive cancellation fee if you cancel within a year
4. Most likely have to buy a new phone unless you have an unlocked recent phone

**We recommend:** Data and Voice 8GB Plan, ¥7,000 per month (2)



**Application:** Online  
**English support:** Yes  
**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Yes (unlocked)  
**Requirements:** Credit card, ID or Residence Card  
**Monthly Bill:** ¥3,000-¥4,000 per month  
**Senpai Endorsement:** Yes

**Pros:**

1. Easy online application completely in English
2. Fast delivery of SIM
3. Affordable service
4. English phone support line
5. Rollover data option on 3GB and 7GB plans
6. Opening month is free while you earn your first pay check
7. You can change your data usage plan up to once a month
8. You can use your foreign unlocked phone

**Cons:**

1. ¥10,000 cancellation fee if you cancel within a year
2. Doesn't accept VISA cards or direct deposit from bank accounts. Credit Card only

**We recommend:** Asahi Net LTE (Voice SIM Card) 7GB plan, ¥2,680 per month (3)



**Application:** Online  
**English support:** None  
**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Yes (unlocked)  
**Requirements:** Credit card  
**Monthly Bill:** ¥2,500-¥4,000  
**Senpai Endorsement:** Yes

**Pros:**

- 1.
  - 2.
  3. SIM card is delivered in 3 days
  4. Affordable service
  4. Easy online application
- You can use your foreign unlocked phone

**Cons:**

1. Japanese language requirement

**We recommend:** Single Course Data and Voice SIM 8GB, ¥2,560 per month (4)



**Application:** In store or online  
**English support:** Yes  
**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Yes (unlocked only)  
**Requirements:** Credit card (not VISA), Residence Card  
**Monthly Bill:** ¥2,000-¥3,000  
**Senpai Endorsement:** Yes

**Pros:**

1. Contract is written in English
2. Only takes about an hour to set up
3. The store lets you insert the SIM card to check whether it's compatible with your phone before signing the contract
4. Affordable service
5. You can use your foreign unlocked phone

**Cons:**

1. Must have a credit card to sign up

**We recommend:** Data and Voice SIM 6GB Plan, 2,200 per month (5)

Sources:

1. <https://nerd.me/2JQR3b8>
2. <https://bit.ly/1BGVevm>
3. <https://bit.ly/2y5bMmY>
4. <https://bit.ly/2IR7p35>
5. <https://bit.ly/2t19D63>
6. <https://bit.ly/2fmvP3p>
7. <https://bit.ly/2JJrOHX>
8. <https://bit.ly/2JQRReDk>
9. <https://bit.ly/2HFuj98>



## LINE Mobile

**Application:** Online

**English support:** Yes

**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Yes (unlocked only)

**Requirements:** Credit card, Residence Card

**Monthly Bill:** under ¥3,000

**Senpai Endorsement:**

**Pros:**

1. SIM card is delivered in as little as 3 days
2. No lock-in contract
3. Unlimited use of LINE, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
4. You can use your foreign unlocked phone

**Cons:**

1. Must have a credit card to sign up

**We recommend:** 音声通話SIM 7GB plan, ¥2,880 per month (6)



**Application:** Online or in store

**English support:** Yes

**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Both new phone and SIM only plans available

**Requirements:** Credit card, Residence Card

**Monthly Bill:** under ¥3,000

**Senpai Endorsement:** Yes and No

**Pros:**

1. SIM card delivered quickly after online application is approved
2. In store set up at electrical stores like BIC Camera and Yamada Denki
3. English information pack available
4. Only pay for what you use in regards to voice calls  
Pocket WIFI service available
5. Extremely affordable
6. You can use your foreign unlocked phone

**Cons:**

1. Online application is only in Japanese
2. Minimum 2year contract
3. Expensive cancellation fees if you cancel within 2 years
4. Credit card requirement for the first few months before you can connect your bank account
5. Monthly bill increases after the first year

**We recommend:** High-Speed Data + Voice Call Plan 3G, ¥1,680 per month (9)



## Mobal

**Application:** Online

**English support:** Yes (not Japanese owned)

**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Yes

**Requirements:** Credit card, passport

**Monthly Bill:** ¥3,000-¥5,000

**Senpai Endorsement:** Yes

**Pros:**

1. You can apply for and receive the SIM before arriving in Japan so that you have internet from day one
2. SIM is shipped internationally to any country
3. SIM card can also be picked up upon arrival in Japan
4. Full English support every step of the way
5. Easy and transparent set up process, no hidden catches
6. No lock-in contract
7. No cancellation fees
8. 7GB flat rate no matter what plan you choose
9. Students and language teachers receive a monthly ¥1,500 discount (that's you!)
10. You can use your foreign unlocked phone

**Cons:**

You must maintain a credit card account at home. You cannot use a Japanese bank account to pay the bill

**We recommend:** Ongoing Text + Call + Data Plan, ¥4,500 per month (7)



**Application:** Online

**English support:** Yes

**Acceptance of Foreign phones:** Yes (unlocked only)

**Requirements:** Credit card, Residence Card

**Monthly Bill:** ¥3,000-¥5,000

**Senpai Endorsement:** Yes

**Pros:**

1. Convenience store payment option for those without a credit card
2. Full English support every step of the way
3. SIM card is delivered within one week
4. Rollover data option
5. Contract can be cancelled at any time without charge
6. Low cost international calls at 15yen per 30seconds
7. You can use your foreign unlocked phone

**Cons:**

1. Difficult cancellation process

**We recommend:** Voice+Data Standard Plus 7GB Plan, ¥4,980 per month (8)

# USJETAA

# Microgrant

## Fostering friendship between the peoples of Japan and the United States through grass-roots initiatives

Shantel Dickerson (Oita)

from strangers.

The stars were twinkling overhead as I gazed out over Beppu City from my own little corner of *Tanayu onsen*. Sitting high up on the mountainside of Beppu, the outdoor hot spring offers a special evening view which encompasses the glowing city below, enormous mountains casted in silhouette to the left, and to the right, the moon reflects off the abyss of darkness that is the Beppu Sea. Dazzled by the city lights and soft chirping of crickets in the nearby forest, I was lulled into complete relaxation.

Then, SPLASH!

I was abruptly awoken from the dreamland I had so vulnerably slipped into. As I spun around in the terrace bath to see what was going on, I was met with the shocked face of a five-year-old boy pointing his finger at me and exclaiming, '*Gaijin!*'

I realized two things in that moment: (1) I had never felt so exposed as I stood up, completely naked, in front of that boy and his mother; and (2) no matter how long I live in Japan, my foreign face still elicits outward shock and surprise

His mother anxiously waded over to us and profusely apologized with a number of *sumimasens* and *gomennasais*, but the weight of difference lingered on my shoulders as I escaped into the locker room to cover my foreign body with a towel.

For foreigners new to Japan, or even those who have been here for decades, that feeling of difference permeates most day-to-day interactions. Sometimes it is subtle and shows up in rather innocent, discrete ways, such as when the convenience store clerk asks you if you prefer a fork instead of chopsticks as they are heating up your pasta. Other times, it is more blatant and downright hurtful, such as the case when a Japanese man told my Japanese-American friend that Japanese men would never want to date her because she is 'too foreign'. No matter how innocent or malicious the intention is, the feeling of difference is palpable.

In speaking with expats who have lived in Japan for a number of years, this feeling of difference

is nowhere near as strong as it was 'back then'. The number of foreigners living in Japan has been increasing due to initiatives like the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) which, from 2017-2018, saw 4,712 ALTs from over 40 countries come to Japan with the aim to increase cultural understanding between Japanese culture and their home cultures. In accordance with this, the Japan Times featured an article last March saying that, 'the number of foreign nationals who lived in Japan as of the end of 2017 grew 7.5 percent from a year earlier to hit a record high of 2,561,848'.

In many ways, Japanese society is successfully adapting to this rapid influx of foreign culture, values, and way of living. For example, english can be found on many restaurant menus, and many City Halls provide a lot of their bureaucratic forms in English. In Beppu, there are Muslim Friendly maps that highlight onsen, restaurants, and places of worship that suit the needs of Muslims visiting or living in Beppu. Most recently, a local newspaper featured an LGBTQ Friendly onsen that was created in response to the struggle of transgender folk who would like to use an onsen that does not match the physical features of their body. There are endless examples of the strides Japan is taking to be more welcoming and inclusive of culturally diverse residents; however, the experiences I highlighted at the beginning of this article demonstrate that there is quite a lengthy road yet to be travelled.

The role of JETs as cultural ambassadors is critical to creating understandings that will ultimately make 'different' seem more 'normal', and thereby create a more comfortable living environment for those in Japan from diverse



a small Opening Ceremony. The chaperones introduced themselves and talked about their own experiences in America. We then had icebreaking activities which included lining up by name, birthday, number of siblings etc. After that we played two team games, Pictionary and Taboo. For lunch, we had oven-baked pizza. We also had drinks and chips imported from America. After lunch we resumed Team Activities. We did "Mystery Word", Christmas Trivia, Team Origami, and Christmas Song Dictation. At the end we totaled the points and awarded 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes. Our 1st place prize was an American candy gift bag as well as their choice of a famous children's book (written in English of course). Our 2nd and 3rd place prizes were also given gift bags.



**Name, Prefecture, year on JET:** Sarah Bullwinkle, Nara Prefecture, 2nd year

**Name of your event:**

*Eigodeohanashikai* (English Story Time)

**Date it was held:** May 19th, 2018

**Summary of the event/project:**

Children come to the local library for English/Japanese story time every other month. We sing English songs, do crafts in English, and play games together. Our goal is to foster an interest in English learning while introducing American and global values through children's literature. The library staff and I will often prepare two books to read (one Japanese and one non-Japanese) which are connected by a common theme. In this vein, adults and young children alike gain the ability to distinguish cultural differences and similarities. Our library project offers a fun, friendly way to create global bonds through literature.

**Name, Prefecture, year on JET:**

Teresa Fong, Tokyo, 3rd Year

**Name of your event:** "Free Scholarship Money for International Education in the U.S."

**Date it was held:** April 14th, 2018

**Summary of the event/project:**

In this project, I give out candy bags filled with chocolate coins with a small flyer explaining the difference between "scholarships" and "loans" in Japanese. This project's main goal is to distinguish the difference between what scholarships and loans are since in Japanese, there is one word that means both types of funding. On the flyer is also a website containing all the resources I found for Japanese students. This project will hopefully open my students' and their parents' eyes to the millions of dollars waiting for them to claim. The Watanabe Scholarship program, for example, has a \$10 million endowment supporting students from Japan to study in the United States. There are many more scholarships available to help Japanese students receive an education abroad, whether it's in STEM or art. The products of this project, such as the resource database, are shared with professionals in the international education field.



**Name, Prefecture, year on JET:** Matt Wong, Hyogo, 3rd year

**Name of your event:** English Immersion: Providing Authentic Reading Opportunities

**Date it was held:** December 15th, 2017 - June 15th, 2018

**Summary of the event/project:**

The project aimed to buy authentic English books and create a book report system to record student

progress. Books were bought via Amazon.com (US site) and shipped to the school where they were eventually integrated into the library electronic checkout system. The students have been introduced to the project and have read one or two books, but have not yet checked out the books from the library.



**Name, Prefecture, year on JET:** Giuliana Alfinito, Wakayama-ken, 1st year

**Name of your event:** Pre-Departure Training for the Shingu-Santa Cruz Business Internship Program

**Date it was held/will be held:** May, 2018 (exact date is TBD)

**Summary of the event/project:** I, together with the Shingu Sister City Committee and Santa Cruz Sister City Committee, will organize and provide the pre-departure training needed for the Shingu-Santa Cruz Business Internship Program. The Shingu and Santa Cruz Sister City Committees are in the process of selecting a highly motivated Shingu City resident for this internship program. During the summer of 2018, the individual will have the opportunity to stay in Santa Cruz, California for three months with a host family, and will intern at local organization in order to learn about American business practices. The intern will require pre-departure training to ensure a smooth transition into the American workforce. This training will include weekly lessons in English, an online course in American business culture, and training seminars given via Skype by the organization accepting the intern. It will last for five weeks, and will be held at Shingu City Hall.



# Getting to know Your Town

Sabrina Zirakzadeh, Osaka

Congratulations! You've finished the paperwork, made the journey across the world, and survived orientation training with hundreds of other lucky new JETs, and now you're ready to take on your new life. You set foot into your new hometown for the next year or more, take a deep breath, and think to yourself—

Now what?

Whether you're in a biggest city in the country or the tiniest *inaka* village ever, getting to know your new town can be intimidating. Being in a different country and immersed in a different language makes it even more difficult, even if you already understand some Japanese or lived here before. But have no fear! We're here to help you with some handy-dandy tips for getting to know your new home!

Take Advantage  
of JetLag



Tokyo Orientation and moving to your placement don't really give you enough time to fully recover from jet-lag. The urge to crash into bed at 8:00 P.M. and the struggle to fall back asleep when your body drags you away at sunrise because it hasn't gotten the memo you're in Japan yet can be daunting, but rather than fight to acclimate immediately, try using your weird hours to your advantage!

If you're up two or three hours before you need to leave for work, why not go for a walk on hop on your

bike and explore the area nearby for a bit? Get an idea of where any interesting or important shops and restaurants are, find some hidden parks to relax in later, or discover some good routes for future exploring or daily exercise without the pressure of traffic, midday summer heat, or post-work burnout. You'll also get the additional bonus of avoiding any locals who might wonder why this new foreigner is standing in front of their shop trying to read the signs in the middle of the work day.



## Your Local JET Community

While you are always welcome to ask your co-workers for advice, chances are most of them will not actually live in the same town as you do, even if you are placed at the municipal level. Japanese teacher placements work differently than in the West, so often your co-workers commute in from out of town. Therefore, your most valuable resources for getting settled in Japan are your fellow JETs.

If you are in touch with your predecessor, ask them for tips about favorite restaurants and cafes, shops, and any emergency services you may need to know about. Chances are, they will be happy to share with you! Even if they aren't, there will always be other current local JETs who will be. If you're lucky enough to live near other JETs, ask if they have tips to share or if they want to meet up to explore and show you around (and feel free to ask any new JETs near you as well—they may have found something that you haven't yet)! If you feel friendly enough with your co-workers, try asking them as well. From the best places to buy any appliances or housewares you need to the local farmer's market that pops up once a month in the most remote part of town, the people who live here will know where to go and what to do better than anyone else.

Even if you are the only JET (or indeed, the only foreigner) for miles around, your fellow JETs can help you. Your PAs should be able to find information on how to get involved with your hobbies in the area, your nearest place to find Japanese lessons, English-speaking doctors and dentists, and more—usually they have this information already on file! And of course, once you've met and connected with other JETs in your area, even if they live hours away, you'll have a support network when you feel blue and a group of friends to ask to come visit and get to know your new town with you!

## Find the Local Community Center

Your community center, or *kuyakusho*, is your best friend if you want to start getting involved with the local community. The *kuyakusho* is where the city hosts local events (sometimes even related to your schools, such as concerts or demonstrations), gives inexpensive classes in a variety of areas, and sometimes even houses a local library. The classes and activities will usually include things such as yoga, singing groups, amateur instrumental ensembles, martial arts, cooking, art classes, Japanese calligraphy, or *ikebana* (flower arranging) lessons. Larger centers sometimes even have Japanese lessons run by volunteer teachers, or English classes you can join in to make connections in the community.

English resources are limited, but the take-home fliers for different classes can be a good way to practice your Japanese and are simple enough that your co-workers should be able to help you understand the important points without you feeling like a bother. The cost of joining anything is low, and if the schedule doesn't work or there's something you want to try that isn't offered at the *kuyakusho*, the staff will often be able to tell you where to find something that suits your needs and interests. If you can overcome the language barrier, it's a great resource for getting involved with your community and keeping up your hobbies and interests in a new place!

## Welcome Home!

There you have it; some easy tips to help you get a handle on your new life in your new home. Learn about it, live in it, love it, and no matter how loud or quiet, how sprawling or isolated, how whatever it is, the next year or so will be that much better if you can get to know your town and find your place within in. Good luck, and welcome home!

# I'M BLOCKIN' ON SUNSHINE:



## Protecting your skin in the Land of the Rising Sun

Bailey Jo Josie (Miyazaki)

Skincare is extremely important in Japan. People here wear huge hats and visors to protect their faces and necks, they wear long gloves to protect their arms and hands, and they carry parasols and umbrellas for added protection.

As a new ALT, I felt exhausted by just seeing people go about their day in the sluggish, summer heat with all these extra layers. I would ask myself, why?? Well, I quickly learned understood why they go to such lengths to protect their skin. I live in one of the sunniest prefectures in Japan

and I honestly thought that I had this whole sun figured out...until my long dormant freckles appeared, and my shoulders and knees turned beet red after a day at the beach on Mountain Day. I was devastated by my hubris and arrogance, and found that I had to re-learn how to take care of my skin.

And now, I wish to pass some knowledge on to you.

## When in Rome Nippon

Honestly, you don't have to go all out like a Japanese person to protect your skin here; you may like the warm sun on your skin (can't relate) or maybe even feel that the rays don't affect you like they do everyone else. But I tell you, it's worth buying a brimmed hat, some rash guards for

swimming, and keeping a parasol on hand. But if you're not into all of that, a baseball cap may be enough.

Oh, and a lot of sunscreen. Every day. All day. No joke.

## Just Rub It In, Baby

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation website, you must look for a sunscreen that falls under the following criteria:

- Protection against both UVA and UVB rays
  - ✧ UV stands for UltraViolet, referring to ultraviolet radiation. While UVA rays cause long term skin damage (aging and skin cancer), UVB rays cause initial sunburns, skin damage, and can lead to skin cancer.
  - ✧ You need to protect your skin against both types, so only use sunscreen that says "Broad-Spectrum".
- Water-resistant
  - ✧ Especially important in Japan because you will sweat.(1)
- An SPF of 15 or higher
  - ✧ SPF measures your sunscreen's ability to prevent sunburns and skin damage from UVB rays.
  - ✧ Short for "Sun Protection Factor", SPF should never be any lower than 15. However, much higher SPF doesn't necessarily mean better protection.
  - ✧ The amount of protection from an SPF 100 has minor differences from an SPF 50. Don't feel that you must buy the highest SPF possible to fight UVB rays.
  - ✧ If your SPF is between 15 and 50, you'll be okay.

Keep in mind though, there's more to sunscreen than protecting against sunburns and skin cancer. There's also protecting yourself...from your sunscreen. Let me explain: There are two main types of sunscreens – ones with chemicals that absorb UV rays and ones that deflect UV rays, which are also known as physical or mineral sunscreens.

# Animal, Vegetable, Mineral or Chemical?

UV absorbing chemicals include Avobenzone, Oxybenzone, and Octinoxate among others. UV deflecting chemicals are Titanium Dioxide and Zinc Oxide.

According to the non-profit organization Environmental Working Group – which researches and displays existing data on ingredients and chemicals found in everyday products – the use of certain UV absorbing chemicals in sunscreens can cause allergies, disrupt hormones, and disrupt human endocrine systems.(2)

Though most of these concerns are based on suggestive

evidence, the main take away from the EWG's website is that these chemicals should be avoided if possible:

“Laboratory studies indicate that some chemical UV filters may mimic hormones, and physicians report sunscreen-related skin allergies, which raises important questions about unintended human health consequences from frequent sunscreen application.”(3)

The EWG isn't the only group that warns against the use of certain UV absorbing chemicals in sunscreen. What about an entire U.S. state in the middle of the Pacific Ocean?

## S.O.S. for Save Our Seas

In early May 2018, Hawaii passed a bill banning the sale of non-prescription sunscreens that contain Oxybenzone and Octinoxate, two UV absorbing chemicals that are used in top sunscreen brands like Banana Boat and Coppertone.(4)

Citing a 2015 study conducted in Hawaii and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Hawaiian lawmakers found that the two chemicals harm the corals reefs surrounding Hawaii.(5) The bill states:

“Oxybenzone and octinoxate cause mortality in developing

coral [...] and cause genetic damage to coral and other marine organisms. These chemicals have also been shown to degrade corals' resiliency and ability to adjust to climate change factors and inhibit recruitment of new corals.”(6)

According to NPR, researchers in 2015 estimated that roughly 14,000 tons of sunscreen bombard the coral reefs annually – that's a lot of nasty chemicals! And with Japan's own coral reefs in jeopardy, I would think twice before reaching for the Banana Boat when you visit the local *umi*, or sea.(7)

## What now?

Fear not, as there are many great sunscreens that will protect your skin as well as protect all the fishies and coral reefs in the sea. I personally use Alba Botanica's Very Emollient Mineral Sport SPF 45 and Very Emollient Pure Lavender SPF 45. Both contain Zinc Oxide and Titanium Dioxide, are water resistant for up to 80 minutes, have no parabens, and haven't been tested on animals. I brought these with me when I came to Japan but they are available for less than ¥1,000 on iHerb.com, a popular personal care shopping website among JETs.(8)

Other great mineral brands can be found on iHerb.com and Amazon.com like Kiss My Face, Nature's Gate, and Jason Natural.

And though mineral sunscreens may be a good alternative to the chemical ones, they're not without their own risks, as described in a 2017 article for inChemistry magazine:

“Sunscreens aren't perfect. For example, zinc oxide and titanium dioxide scatter both UV and visible light; they are even used in many household products to provide a whiter, brighter appearance (check the ingredient list for your toothpaste, headache medicine, Kool-Aid, etc.). To prevent sunscreens from looking opaque, manufacturers

turn to nanoparticles smaller than the wavelength of visible light. But these smaller particles can accumulate in hair follicles and penetrate the skin. The impacts of such effects are still under investigation.”(9)

As for Japanese sunscreens, I haven't used any but my Japanese friends get through each summer with gorgeous, unburnt skin (though I'm more inclined to owe this to their clothes rather than just their sunscreen). If you're interested in venturing into the world of Japanese sunscreen, SurvivingNJapan.com has a great article that walks you through all of the kanji and katakana you'll have to know to go shopping as well as other helpful information.

Here's a hint: don't buy any sunscreen that says オキシベンゾン.(10)

Sources:

- (1) <https://bit.ly/2s1VLZD>
- (2) <https://bit.ly/25jK6EJ>
- (3) <https://bit.ly/298F8SF>
- (4) <https://n.pr/2joi6f4>
- (5) <https://bit.ly/2sl68ao>
- (6) <https://bit.ly/2kVM9vq>
- (7) <https://bit.ly/2kVBGAd>
- (8) <https://bit.ly/2sETu7a>
- (9) <https://bit.ly/2uYNICB>
- (10) <https://bit.ly/2sIITZK>

Photo:  
Ashley Hirasuna

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Contact the Head Editor of *CONNECT*, Lauren Hill, at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net) with your submissions, comments, and questions.

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## 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](mailto: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](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net).

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