

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

**MARCH
2018**

6 Years of Chikan: One Woman's Voice

Sometimes Less is More: Everything you need to know about Minimalism

"Go back to your country!" - Hafu Children in their Own Words

A look at the Nintendo Switch one year on

Training for Tokyo: What it takes to run one of the big six marathons



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

THE AJET PEER SUPPORT GROUP IS RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS!





THE AJET PEER SUPPORT GROUP (PSG) (THE JET COMMUNITY'S ANONYMOUS LISTENING AND REFERRAL SERVICE, IS CURRENTLY RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS FOR THE 2017-2018 JET YEAR.

ABOUT PSG

PSG is a confidential and anonymous resource provided by JETs, for JETs. Our volunteers are trained to listen and support callers through a wide spectrum of challenges, and put them in touch with the appropriate resources.

PSG operates from 8pm to 7am, 365 days a year, and is the only overnight support service designed to serve JETs nationwide. Contact us at 050-5534-5566, on Skype at "AJETPSG", or check out our website at www.ajetpsg.com.

WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR

Any re-contracting JET (ALT or CIR) is eligible to volunteer with PSG. We seek open-minded and dedicated volunteers with an interest in assisting other JETs, and a willingness to learn PSG's specific way of accomplishing this.

PSG volunteers are NOT counsellors, but peers who train to be effective listeners and a resource for other JETs. Prior training in psychology or counselling, or service in support roles may be helpful, but is not required. All selected volunteers will undergo approximately 25 hours of training and role-play exercises to understand PSG's mission and techniques.

All prospective volunteers must have reliable home internet service, e.g. via a landline. A smartphone or pocket WIFI alone is not sufficient.

TIME COMMITMENT

Flexible. Members typically volunteer two to three evenings each month. Volunteers must submit ten open evenings each month and two holiday/ weekend nights from which their shifts will be assigned.

Successful applicants will take part in mandatory training sessions throughout mid-May and June. While multiple sessions will be scheduled, in principle new volunteers will have to devote one full evening per week for five weeks to complete training, with individually scheduled practice role-plays to follow.

HOW TO APPLY

Interested JETs may apply via the 'Become a Volunteer' page on our website: www.ajetpsg.com. For further inquiries, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Rose Thompson at psgapplications@gmail.com. Please do not contact the hotline with recruiting-related questions. Applications will be open from February 16, 2018 to March 12, 2018.



RUN FOR NATIONAL AJET COUNCIL 2018-2019

Find out more about Appointed Officer positions, and how to apply [here](#).

Read the National AJET Council application guidelines [here](#).

Read the National AJET Council election rules [here](#).

Find out more about Executive Council, Block/CIR Representative positions, and how to apply [here](#).

Applications are open until Monday, March 19th, 2018 at 11:59 PM (JST).

Advice for Candidates

Questions?
elections@ajet.net



*Calling all artists!
Want to get your artwork an audience
in Japan?*

2018



submissions open

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Barbara Uemura
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Naomi Matsuda
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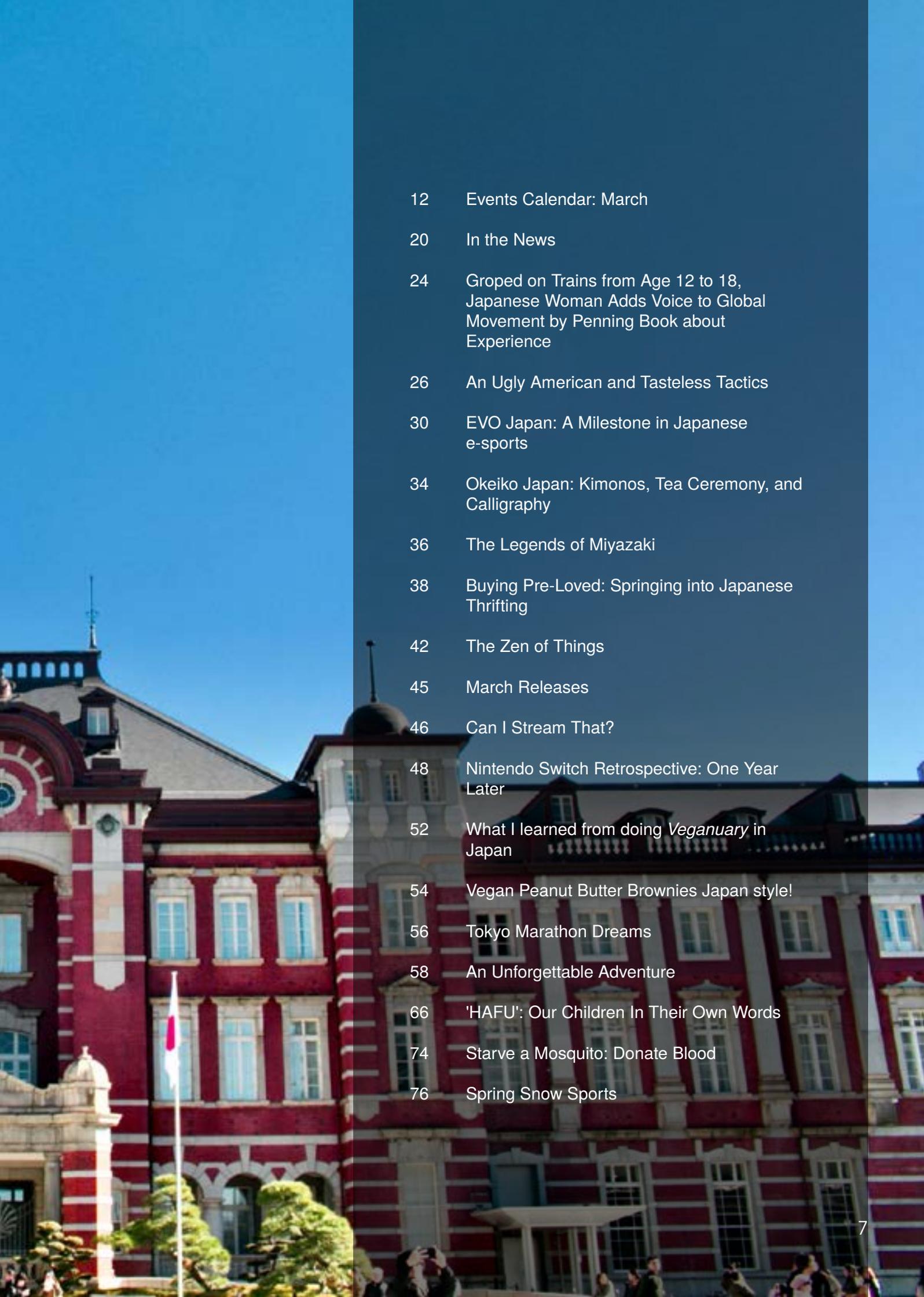
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- 
- 12 Events Calendar: March
- 20 In the News
- 24 Groped on Trains from Age 12 to 18, Japanese Woman Adds Voice to Global Movement by Penning Book about Experience
- 26 An Ugly American and Tasteless Tactics
- 30 EVO Japan: A Milestone in Japanese e-sports
- 34 Okeiko Japan: Kimonos, Tea Ceremony, and Calligraphy
- 36 The Legends of Miyazaki
- 38 Buying Pre-Loved: Springing into Japanese Thrifting
- 42 The Zen of Things
- 45 March Releases
- 46 Can I Stream That?
- 48 Nintendo Switch Retrospective: One Year Later
- 52 What I learned from doing *Veganuary* in Japan
- 54 Vegan Peanut Butter Brownies Japan style!
- 56 Tokyo Marathon Dreams
- 58 An Unforgettable Adventure
- 66 'HAFU': Our Children In Their Own Words
- 74 Starve a Mosquito: Donate Blood
- 76 Spring Snow Sports

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy March everyone! I hope your SAD is leaving you because SPRING. IS. COMING. Japanese sakura forecast calls for early April, which means it's almost time for Hanami! And allergies...

But first, we've got our March issue here for you to keep you in the know of the events and activities coming your way. We also delve into Japanese mythology! Are sports more your thing? How about veganism? We've got that too!

We know it must be a sad time for some of you because your students are graduating, but remember to feel the love with our Family Spotlight or reconnect with loved ones with online streaming, together! Connect always tries to bring a little bit of everything to make you feel Connected (sorry, I had to), so we hope that you enjoy this month's issue.

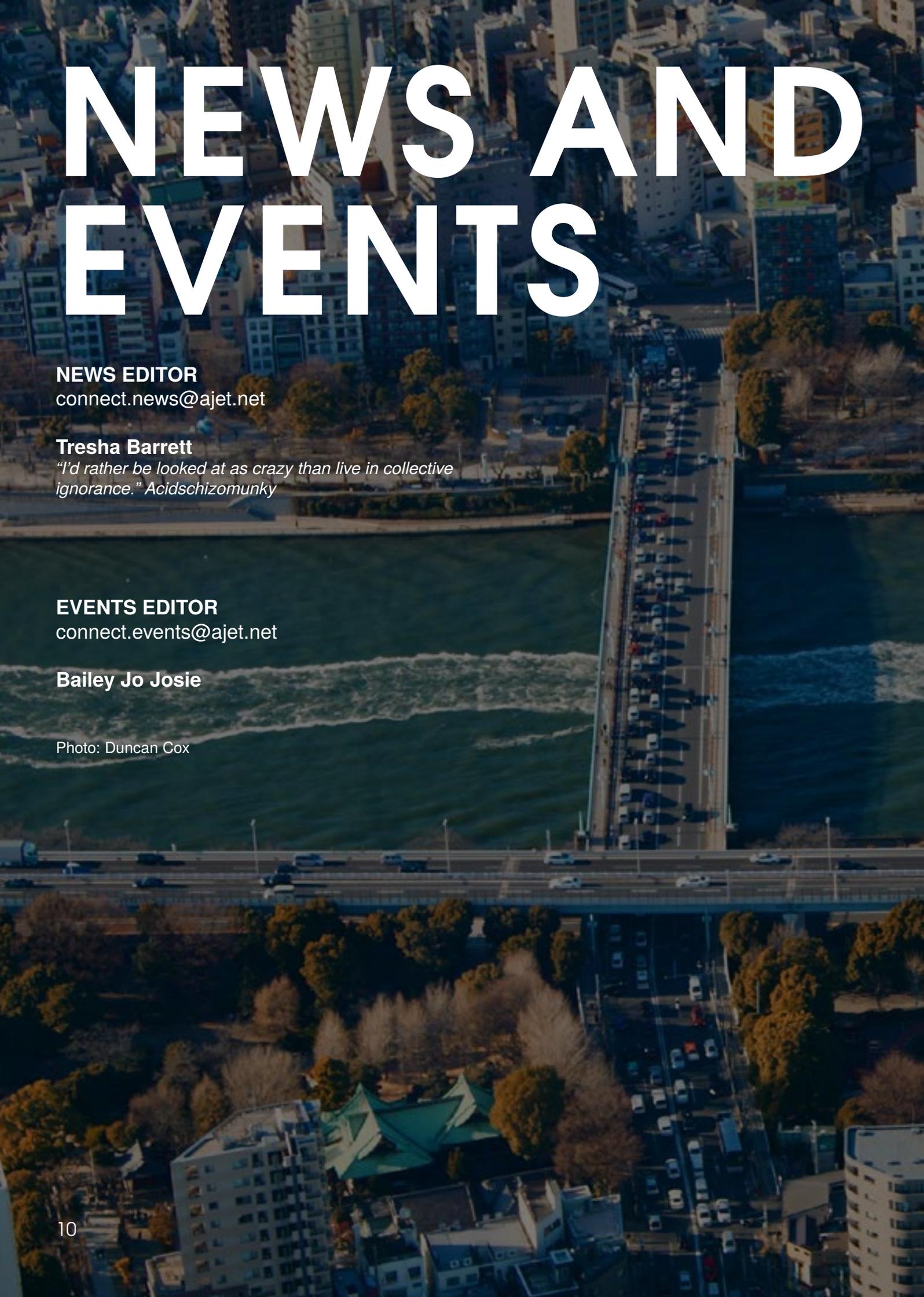
Lilian Diep
Head Editor
3rd Year Toyama ALT



Photo: Illaura Rossiter



NEWS AND EVENTS

An aerial photograph of a city, likely San Francisco, showing a bridge over a river and a highway in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

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Tresha Barrett

"I'd rather be looked at as crazy than live in collective ignorance." Acidschizomunky

EVENTS EDITOR

connect.events@ajet.net

Bailey Jo Josie

Photo: Duncan Cox



Events Calendar:

March

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

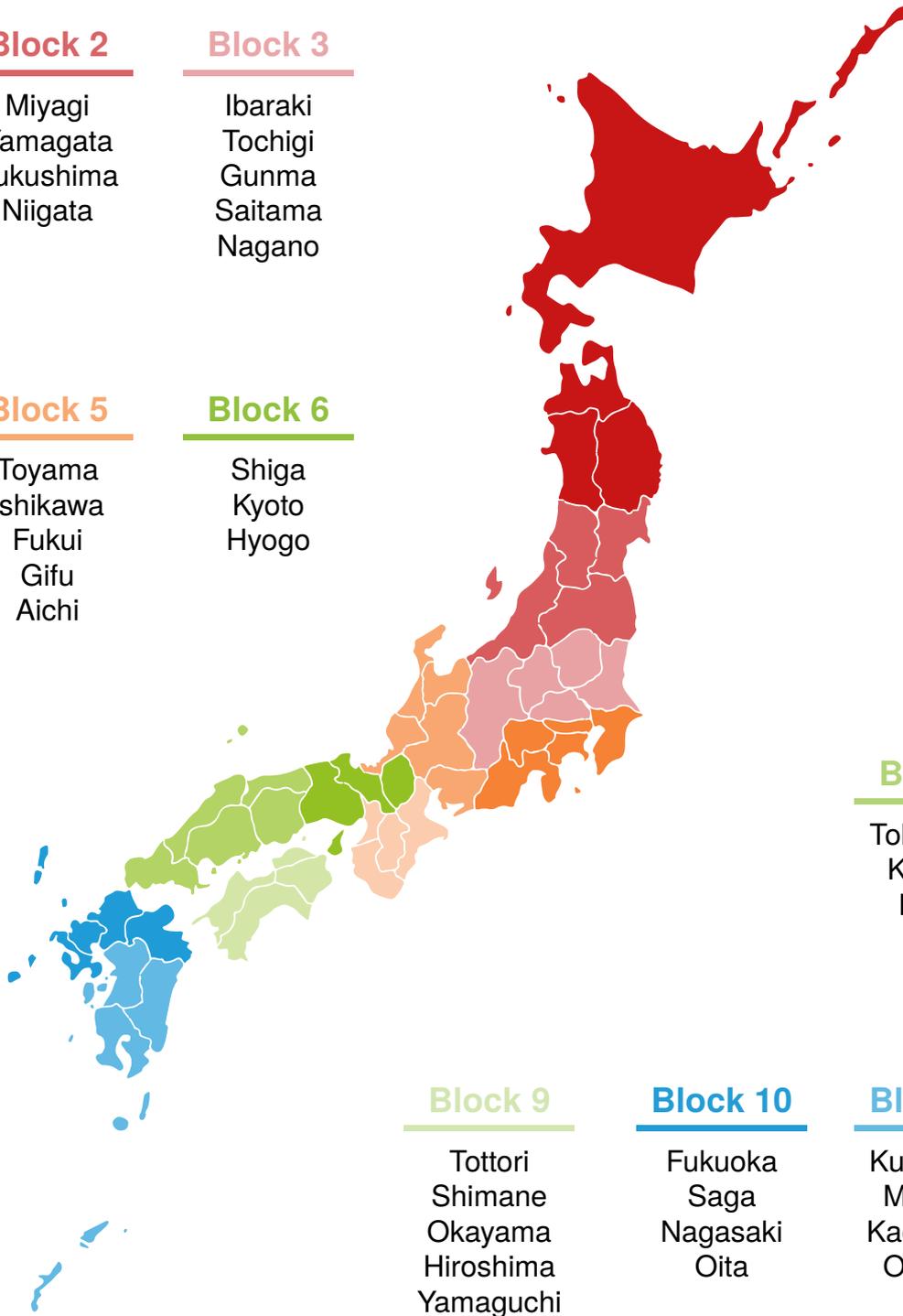
Tottori
Shimane
Okayama
Hiroshima
Yamaguchi

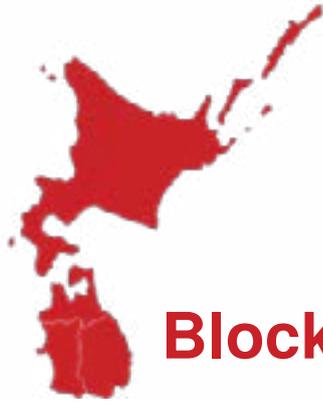
Block 10

Fukuoka
Saga
Nagasaki
Oita

Block 11

Kumamoto
Miyazaki
Kagoshima
Okinawa





Block 1

Aomori Lights and Paper Pageant

1 December - 4 March
Aomori City, Aomori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sanriku Railway Kotatsu Train

16 December - 31 March
Kuji City, Iwate Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Drift Ice: The Great Monbetsu Experience

10 January - 31 March
Monbetsu City, Hokkaido Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sounkyo Hot Springs Ice Fall Festival

25 January - 18 March
Kamikawa Town, Hokkaido Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hachinohe Bouillabaisse Festival

1 February - 31 March
Hachinohe City, Aomori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Akan Lake Ice Festival

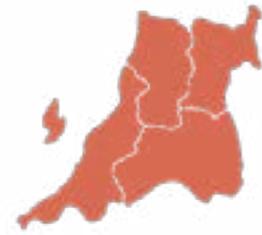
3 February - 4 March
Kushiro City, Hokkaido Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nagasaka Inari Shrine Bonten Matsuri

11 March
Nagasaka Town, Akita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Omagari Fireworks

24 March
Daisen City, Akita Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 2

Feast of Zao Festival

23 December - 4 March
Yamagata City, Yamagata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Shiogama Jinja Hote Festival

10 March
Shiwahiko Shrine & Shiogama Shrine, Shiogama City, Miyagi Prefecture
[Website](#)

Snowlight Music Festival

10 March
Naeba Ski Resort, Minamiuonuma Town, Niigata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Niigata Sake no Jin

10 March - 11 March
Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture
[Website](#)

Echigo Matsudai Winter Festival

10 March - 11 March
Tokamachi City, Niigata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Okura Snow Story

17 March
Hijiori Onsen, Mogami Town, Yamagata Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Tsurugajo Haruka Projection

23 March - 24 March
Aizuwakamatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)





Block 3

Yunishigawa Kamakura Festival

27 January - 4 March
Nikko City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website](#)

Mito Plum Festival

17 February - 31 March
Mito City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Oigami Onsen Bikkuri Hina Doll Festival

17 February - 1 April
Numata City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website](#)

Japan Umeshu Festa

2 March - 4 March
Mito City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Wine Fair Suzaka

3 March
Suzaka City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website](#)

The 35th Hanyu Sawayaka Marathon

11 March
Hanyu City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Snow Monkey Beer Live

16 March - 17 March
Shimotakai Town, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

The 28th Kumagaya Sakura Marathon

18 March
Kumagaya City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Spring Brewery-hopping Kamisuwa Way

23 March - 24 March
Suwa City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)





Block 4

Original Postmark Event “With all my Heart”

1 February - 31 March
Ashigarashimo Town, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Setagaya Plum Festival

10 February - 4 March
Setagaya Ward, Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Miura Kaigan Sakura Festival

5 February - 4 March
Miura City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Japanese Woodblock Print Exhibition

6 February - 1 April
Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Kawazu-Zakura Cherry Blossom Festival

10 February - 10 March
Kawazu Town, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Mikuni Musical: Inochi Tendenko (Life for Tomorrow)

10 March
Kamakura City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website](#)

Disaster Festa in Shimizu

11 March
Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Midtown Blossom 2018

16 March - 15 April
Tokyo Midtown Complex, Minato Ward, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

The 7th St. Patrick’s Day Parade in Chiba

21 March
Mihama Town, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Weeping Cherry Tree and Daimyo Garden Illuminations

21 March - 5 April
Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Vans Warped Tour Japan

31 March - 1 April
Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)





Block 5

Wakura Onsen Dessert Tour 2017-2018

1 October - 31 March
Nanao City, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Geisha Experience 2017-2018

10 June - 24 March
Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Studio Ghibli Layout Design Exhibit

8 December - 11 March
Fukui City, Fukui Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Fukuji Onsen Aodaru Illuminations 2017-2018

24 December - 31 March
Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Gero Hot Spring Winter Fireworks

6 January - 1 April
Gero City, Gifu Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Inazawa Plum Festival

3 March - 4 March
Inazawa City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Nagoya Omotenashi Bushotai Performance

9 March - 11 March
Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Hakusankikusake Tasting Party

17 March
Hakusan City, Ishikawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Marvel Exhibition

17 March - 10 June
Nagoya City Science Museum,
Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Suisen Misaki no Kagayaki

25 March - End of May
Nyu Town, Fukui Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ogaki Boat Trip

31 March - 15 April
Ogaki City, Gifu Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 6

The 67th Nagahama Blossoming Ume Bonsai Exhibition

10 January - 11 March
Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Kawanishi Machinaka Art Museum

18 February - 4 March
Kawanishi City, Hyogo Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nishiki Sake Festival

3 March
Nakagyo Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Omihachiman Sagicho Festival

17 March - 18 March
Omihachiman City, Shiga Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

2nd Oumi New Brew Sake Tasting Party

21 March
Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

12th Nihonshu Festival in Fushimi

24 March
Fushimi Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Springtime Special at Taizo-in Zen Buddhist Temple

31 March - 15 April
Ukyo Ward, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture
[Website](#)



Block 7

Osaka Camping Car Show

10 March - 11 March
Suminoe Ward, Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Kansai Collection Spring & Summer

21 March
Nishi Ward, Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Nabari Sakura Matsuri

23 March - 13 April
Nabari City, Mie Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Magoichi Festival

25 March
Wakayama City, Wakayama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Vape Expo Japan 2018

29 March - 31 March
Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture
[Website](#)

Wired Music Festival

8 April
Kuwana City, Mie Prefecture
[Website](#)

Spring Kemari Festival

29 April
Sakurai City, Nara Prefecture
[Website](#)



Block 8

Kairakuen Plum Festival

27 January - 4 March
Uwajima City, Ehime Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Big Hinamatsuri

18 February — 8 April
Katsura Town, Tokushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Nanaore Ume (Plum) Festival

20 February — 10 March
Iyo District, Ehime Prefecture
[Website](#)

Utazu Ohinasama

3 March — 4 March
Utazu City, Kagawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Tosa no Okyaku 2018

3 March — 11 March
Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Spring Uzu Festival

3 March — 30 April
Naruto City, Tokushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese Only](#)

The 7th Takamatsu Ireland Festival

21 March
Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture
[Facebook event](#)



Block 9

Chofu Doll Festival

4 February - 11 March
Shimonoseki City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Misasa Onsen Hina Meguri

15 February - 15 March
Tohaku Town, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Doll Festival

17 February - 18 March
Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Himeji Park Kamakura Festival

25 February - 4 March
Yazu Town, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Irish Festival

11 March
Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Hiroshima Harbor Festival

17 March - 18 March
Ujina Kaigan, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

All Sanin Arm Wrestling Championship Tournament

18 March
Kurayoshi City, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Yab Ramen Expo

21 March - 25 March
Kudamatsu City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kiyomori Festival

25 March
Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website](#)



Block 10

Yame Bonbori Paper Lantern Festival

11 February - 11 March
Chikugo City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website](#)

Hinamatsuri Doll Festival

11 February - 31 March
Saga City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Doll Festival

15 February - 31 March
Hita City, Oita Prefecture

[Website](#)

Goto Camellia Festival

17 February - 4 March
Goto City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Japanese Ume Apricot Festival

18 February - 18 March
Hita City, Oita Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Yufuin Horse Carriage

1 March
Yufu City, Oita Prefecture

[Website](#)

Umeshu Festival

16 March - 19 March
Dazaifu City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Kashima Sakagura Tourism

24 March - 25 March
Kashima City, Saga Prefecture

[Website](#)

Omura Flower Festival

25 March - 20 June
Omura City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)





Block 11

Okinawa Flower Carnival

20 January - 6 May
Kunigami District, Okinawa
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Hitoyoshi Kuma Hinamatsuri

1 February – 21 March
Hitoyoshi City, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Satsuma Hina Doll Festival

3 February — 26 April
Kagoshima City, Kagoshima
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Kyushu Gassai Kumamoto

24 March — 25 March
Kumamoto City, Kumamoto
Prefecture

[Website in Japanese Only](#)

Photos:
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Evashree Pillay
Colette English



In The News

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)



Photo: Evashree Pillay



Rigged Claw Machines At Game Centers Stealing Fun And Pocketing Tears

Many people have tales of being duped by a claw machine at least once in their life. I mean, it really shouldn't be so hard, right? I'm pretty sure the thought of them being rigged has crossed a few minds, like it does mine. Well, now, following a nationwide investigation, more than 300 claims of fraud have shown up in the legal system.

There have been a growing number of investigations into the rigging of arcade games. The recent arrest of the president of Amusement Trust, a company operating multiple game centers, is just the tip of the duplicity.

According to NHK, Osaka Prefectural Police re-arrested Takeshi Odaira, the 33-year-old president, after he allegedly swindled two women out of their prizes from a rigged claw crane machine.

In their efforts, the women spent

13,000 yen on the doctored machine at one of Odaira's game centers in the Dotonbori area of Chuo Ward, and were continuously left with an empty claw.

Police had previously arrested Odaira and six of his employees for tricking four women out of a whopping total of 470,000 yen.

The level of duplicity is quite sophisticated; the con artists even have a manual instructing employees on how to deceive customers. This manual informs the workers they should "target tourists, since they are unlikely to cause trouble," and give customers a chance to play without being charged.

Employees would even go so far as to demonstrate to patrons the possibility of winning a prize. Then before customers played, they would change the settings so the mechanical arm

would fail to do its rightful clawing duty.

At the beginning of the police investigation, which started in 2015, 30 cases of claw machine rigging at various game centers were uncovered, with an approximate total loss of 6 million yen. Now, with the growing number of fraudulent cases nationwide, the total amount lost is said to be 60 million yen.

Bearing that in mind, the next time you see a game center and feel compelled to chance 500 yen in a claw machine to win a stuffed toy, tablet computer or some quirky knick-knack, just think about the manuals.

Source:
<http://bit.ly/2BW1mmn>

Photo source:
<http://bit.ly/2nP6uUp>



Tokyo Elementary School Stirs Complaints With 80,000 Yen Armani Uniforms

When you think of high-end Italian brand, Armani, you most likely don't think of school uniforms, especially an elementary school uniform. However, a public school in Tokyo's upscale Ginza district is blazing a trail by having its uniforms designed by the prestigious brand.

Taimei Elementary School is understandably receiving complaints from parents for its move to adopt these new uniforms, which are priced at over 80,000 yen each. The inclusion of a hat and a bag in the ensemble did nothing to quell the protests of some parents who think the brand is just a bit much.

"I was surprised, and wondered why such luxury brand-designed uniforms have been picked for a public elementary school," an unnamed mother said.

"I'm worried that a wrong notion that something expensive is good and something cheap is bad could be imprinted on children," continued the mother, whose child is set to start attending Taimei Elementary in April.

According to the school board, the principal of the school had informed them of his plans to change the design

of the uniforms last summer and their advice was to consult with the PTA and local residents on the matter.

Nonetheless, the only explanation for the Armani attire was said to be provided in a leaflet last November, where it reportedly stated that the new uniforms would reflect the school's prestigious surroundings. The leaflet, however, did not come with the cost of these new uniforms.

The issue with the pricey uniforms was even taken up by an opposition party lawmaker at a Diet session — with it being stated that the prices seemed excessive for elementary school uniforms. Education minister, Yoshimasa Hayashi, also promised that the ministry will consider taking steps to lessen the possibility of parents being asked to purchase such pricey apparel.

According to the school board, students are not obliged to wear the uniforms as they are merely school-selected attire.

Source:
<http://bit.ly/2BOWZTi>

Photo Source:
<http://bit.ly/2BOWZTi>

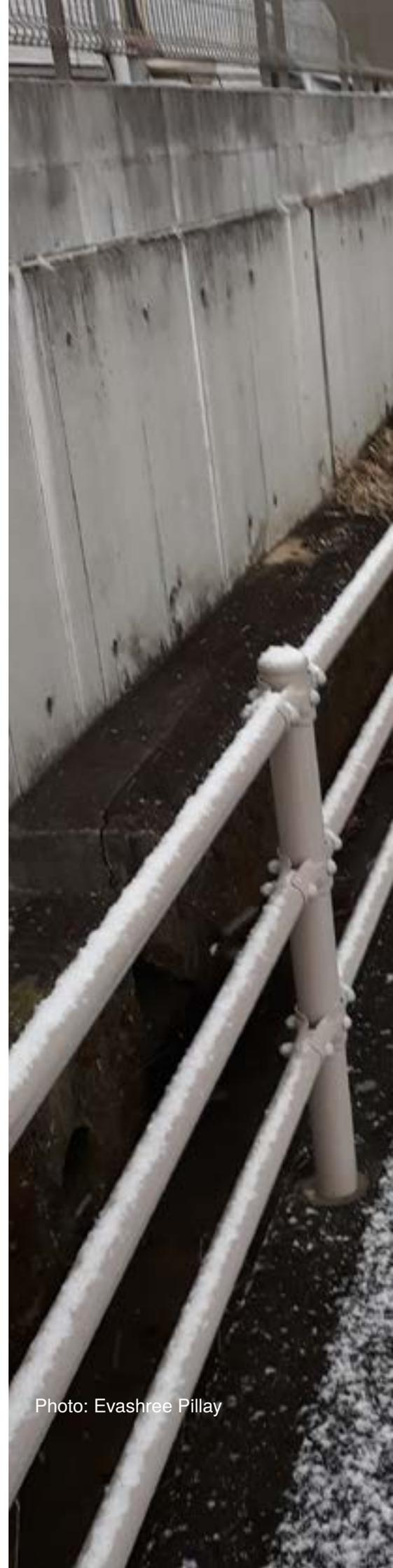


Photo: Evashree Pillay





GROPED ON TRAINS FROM AGE 12 TO 18, JAPANESE WOMAN ADDS VOICE TO GLOBAL MOVEMENT BY PENNING BOOK ABOUT EXPERIENCE

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)

In an age when phrases like “Time’s Up” and “#MeToo” resonate across social media platforms, podiums, and intimate conversations, women, not only in the U.S. but around the world, have been stepping forward to lend a voice to the fact that they are tired of being taken advantage of by men.

In Italy, the phrase #QuellaVoltaChe, which translates to “That time when,” has been used by some. Women in Spanish-speaking countries across the world use #YoTambien to highlight their experiences. Arabic speakers in the Middle East and Africa echoed a direct translation of the words “Me Too.” And in France, #BalanceTonPorc, which roughly translates to “snitch out your pig,” became a rallying cry against sexual harassment. (1)

It was while living in France that Kumi Sasaki decided to chronicle her ordeal of being continuously groped over the span of six years while riding trains in Japan. This form of harassment, which started when she was just 12 years old, is not an uncommon practice in Japan. In fact, several strategies have been put in place in order to try and restrict such abhorrent behavior.

Railway companies have created women-only cars, anti-groping posters are placed in some stations, lectures have been held at schools to inform pupils on how they can protect themselves, and anti-groping

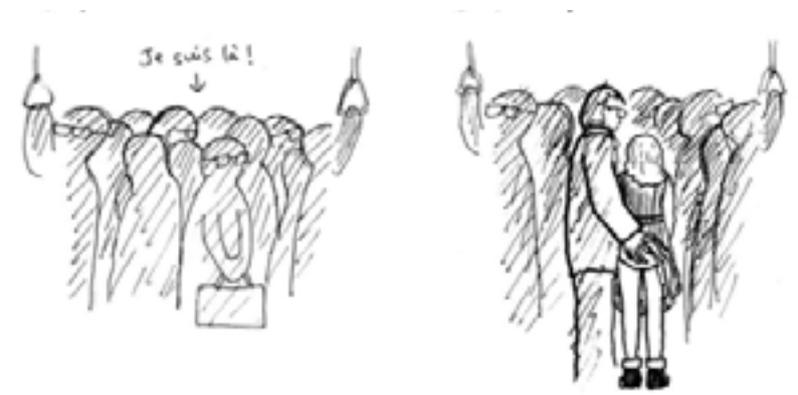
paraphernalia such as stickers and badges have been circulating. There is even an anti-groping function in the Metropolitan Police’s crime-prevention app, “Digi Police.” With the app, the words “Grope – please help me” appears when it’s opened, and when it’s tapped on, a voice saying “Please stop!” is repeatedly played. (2)

Nonetheless, despite the efforts to curb *chikan* (a Japanese term for both men who grope women and the act of touching someone without their consent on crowded trains), it is still quite prevalent.

Sasaki, who currently lives in Paris, published her book, titled *chikan*, last November. In it, she recounts her arduous experience of dealing with *chikan* from middle school to high school on an almost daily basis on her commute from home to school and back.

Recalling her first *chikan* experience while on Tokyo’s JR Yamanote Line, Sasaki recounts feeling a man’s hand rub against her – a hand that she thought would have stopped touching her when the train stopped jerking, but it remained.

“The fingers of this unfamiliar hand went inside the collar of my blouse. Then he touched my back, he touched my legs, my waist, even my butt. He placed his hand directly under the cheeks, quietly raising up my skirt by just moving his fingers, and he touched my



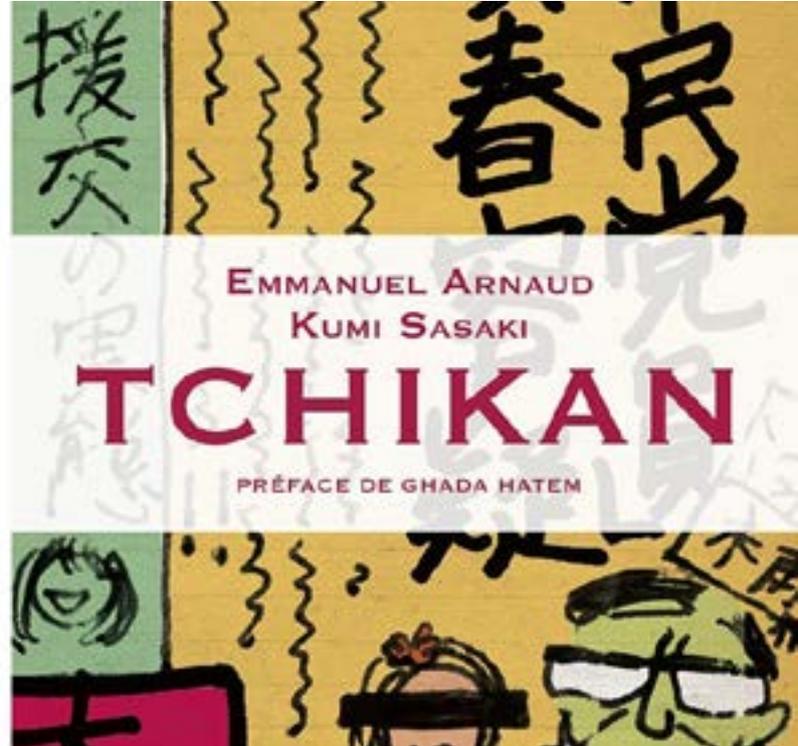
left thigh under my skirt.” she wrote. (3)

The vile intrusion sent Sasaki into shock, as at such a young age, she had no idea what was happening.

Unfortunately, that was just the beginning, and for the next six years, she continued to be preyed upon by men ranging in age from late teens to older men in their 70s. Sasaki also recalled an incident of being

followed home by one of the gropers – a married man in his 50s who apparently wanted her to have his children.

Under the strain of these continuous attacks, Sasaki’s psyche became fragile and she turned to self-harm and tried to end her life. Thankfully, however, she was eventually saved by a supportive friend.



JAPAN’S CHIKAN EPIDEMIC

Groping on trains has been an issue in Japan for decades. In a survey by Tokyo Metropolitan Police and the JR Railway Company which was conducted in the early 2000s, it was found that two-thirds of women aged 20-40 reported to have had some experience of *chikan*. It was this survey that prompted some railway companies to establish ladies’ cars at certain rush hour periods and others to offer “women only” cars all day long. (4)

The problem with *chikan*, however, proves quite difficult to overcome. Because even though there are such strategies, fines and even imprisonment for the offence, it still persists.

Recently, social media users began boasting of plans to grope high school girls who would be commuting to take the annual Center Test. This test is major exam in Japan and a high score is required for students to gain admission into many Japanese colleges. Unfortunately for the examinees, the Center Test can only be taken at a regional test venue on specified days, which means there are usually a lot of young train commuters on those days. Using the importance of the test and its strict policy of punctuality, these

sexual predators see the exam as an opportunity to commit *chikan* without fear of being reported by the victims. (5)

Sasaki’s goal in writing *chikan* was to raise awareness of how dangerous *chikan* really is, how it can rob girls and women of their sense of well-being and even worse. She states that many people in Japan think it’s not a big deal; and this almost nonchalant treatment of *chikan* had left her feeling isolated and unable to seek the help that she needed.

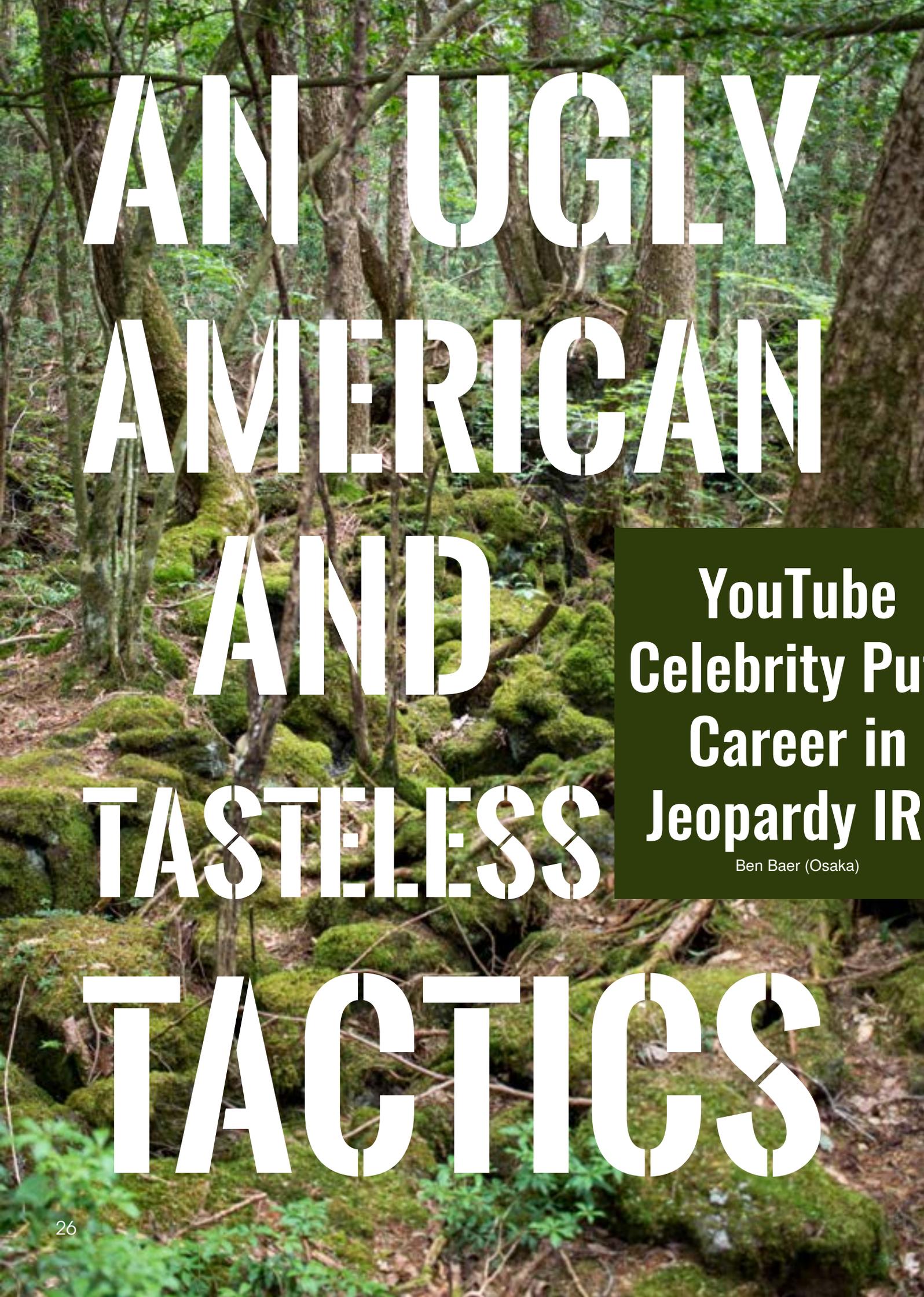
An essential introduction to a much wider issue, *chikan* is one woman’s way of adding her voice to the ever-growing conversation about the different forms of abuse that countless women endure on a daily basis. For each voice that is added, we can only hope that better facilities will be put into place to tackle these issues.

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AN UGLY AMERICAN AND TASTELESS TACTICS

YouTube
Celebrity Pu
Career in
Jeopardy IR

Ben Baer (Osaka)

The forest of *Aoikigahara*, Japanese for Blue Tree Wilderness, lies at the base of Tokyo's Mt. Fuji. Volcanic timberland covers the area in a vast, 30 kilometer blanket of dark green, despite its namesake. A popular destination for school trips and hikers, Aoikigahara is famous for its numerous trails and lush scenery. The forest is also well known for being home to a variety Japanese wildlife

including black bears, bats, mice boars, rabbits, and *yurei*: ghosts of the dead.

Because of its historical significance as a suicide spot, many consider Aokigahara to be haunted. The "Suicide Forest" is second only to San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge as the world's most popular area for individuals to take their own lives. Aokigahara has been featured in literature, music,

film, television, and even video games. With the emergence of social networks in the 21st century like Facebook and YouTube, the forest is also gaining exposure online.

Aokigahara has recently drawn media attention following a December 31 vlog post by YouTube personality Logan Paul. Unfortunately, the forest's verdant foliage and scenic beauty were not the focus of Mr. Paul's video.



Logan Who?

Logan Paul and younger brother, Jake Paul, rose to internet fame in 2013. The two Ohio high school students' zany, bite-sized uploads featured stunts like knocking over trash cans, setting off car alarms, burning mattresses, and jumping into frozen mud puddles.

Their groundbreaking work attracted over 20 million followers across various social media platforms by January 2016. (1)

The elder Paul's output has, until recently, been nothing short of prodigious: a video upload every single day from September 12, 2016 to January 1, 2018, totaling over four hundred entries in total.

The frequency of his work and quirky on-camera antics have, as of this writing, net Mr. Paul over three billion views, sixteen million subscribers, and a tidy income of approximately \$113,000 per month from his YouTube channel alone. He's a big deal. (2)

Think of the Children

If the average reader of *CONNECT* is anything like the average resident expatriate, they likely haven't heard of either Logan or Jake Paul until recently.

By his own admission, younger (and only slightly less popular) brother Jake claims that the average viewer of his YouTube channel is between eight to eighteen years old. (3) Since the

brothers Paul share many of these adolescent viewers, this becomes an important detail in discussing the recent outrage surrounding Logan Paul's Aokigahara upload.



“This Was All Gonna Be a Joke”

Despite its ominous nickname, Aokigahara isn't entirely off limits to the public. The forest's prohibited areas are restricted to those most likely to be used in a suicide.

Signs are posted requesting that potential visitors avoid entering these trails.

One in a series of Tokyo-themed uploads, *We Found a Dead Body in the Japanese Suicide Forest*, chronicles Paul and his motley crew traipsing through Aokigahara in preparation for a camping trip.

The controversial video begins with Paul assuring his audience that suicide is no joke and that he takes the issue very seriously. This is followed by his confusing Mt. Fuji with the country of Fiji and a wardrobe change.

“If I'm going to get haunted by

a ghost, I'm going to do it in my f—ing Gucci Jacket,” explains Paul, sporting a jean jacket and Toy Story hat. (4)

“I want to look good,” he elaborates. (4)

Paul and his crew advance through the woods, expressing concern that it may be haunted.

“If you're a ghost in this forest, please, please, please leave us alone,” he implores. (4)

The group marches on, but stops when one camper spots a man further along the trail. Another member of the entourage lets out a frightened “Oh my God,” and observes that, “He's hanging.” (4)

Paul loudly enquires, “Yo, are you alive?” and asks the man, “Are you f—ing with us?” (4)

He reflects, “I've never seen a

dead person... What the f— am I looking at?” (4) Presumably in order to get a better angle on what he's looking at, Paul and his cameraman approach the body. Both comment on how purple the man's hands are, speculating that he must have taken his life very recently.

Mr. Paul goes on to assure his audience that, “Suicide is not a joke,” further adding, “Depression and mental illness is not a joke.” (4)

Paul, perplexingly, concludes his reflection with, “This was all gonna be a joke.” (4)

Before packing up and heading back into Tokyo proper, the host addresses his followers and says he's choosing to forego any profit from this particular video.

“I'm already getting flagged for demonetization, bro. F— it.” (4)

Sorry Not Sorry

Following the removal of his video, Paul responded to critics on January 1 with an apology that also drew criticism for being disingenuous.

“This is a first for me. I've never faced criticism like this before, because I've never made a

mistake like this before.” (8)

Paul's tweet goes on, “I didn't do it for views. I get views. I did it because I thought I could make a positive ripple on the internet... I intended to raise awareness for suicide and suicide prevention.” (8)

Paul certainly made a ripple, but not in the way he hoped.

After the January 1 apology, Paul ceased creating new content for several weeks. On January 28, a new video

appeared on his YouTube channel featuring a haircut, no Gucci jacket, and several specialists discussing suicide and its prevention.

In response to the mounting backlash against one of its golden geese, YouTube pulled Paul from its money-making Google Preferred advertising tier and cut the controversial star from all of its upcoming YouTube Red films.

Still, many felt that the effort was too little too late.

Japan's Shrinking Suicide Statistics

Fortunately, the current suicide situation in Japan is markedly less bleak than the situation with Logan Paul's reputation.

The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare released statistics on January 19 showing that Japan's suicide rate (suicides per 100,000 people) has dropped for the eighth year in a row. This puts the country's current rate at 16.7 – the lowest it's been since data collection began in 1978.

From a peak high in 1998 amidst a bursting economic bubble, Japan's suicide rate slowly declined until bottoming

out in 2017, ultimately decreasing forty percent over nineteen years.

“On top of [improved] economic conditions, efforts to prevent suicides by municipalities and groups concerned seem to have produced fruit,” a ministry official said. (9)

While Japan doesn't have Logan Paul to thank for an increased awareness regarding suicide, it does owe him a debt.

Anyone entering Aokigahara in the hopes of becoming internet famous will probably think twice from now on.

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Illaura Rossiter

Ben is a fifth year ALT from the United States. When he's not wiping chalk off his pants, he can be found loitering outside of convenience stores, watching Star Trek with a bowl of cereal, or trying to find the kebab tent at a matsuri. He can be contacted at Fukuiben89@gmail.com. He also has a twitter page with nothing on it and no idea how it works @ [BenBaerWasTaken](https://twitter.com/BenBaerWasTaken).

On January 26, 2018, the Evolution Championship Series fighting game organization hosted its long-awaited first event in Japan. Known as EVO, the event has been slowly growing its reputation as one of the most prestigious fighting game tournaments in the world over the last couple of decades. Since its humble beginnings as “Battle of the Bay” in 1996, the annual EVO event in Las Vegas now brings in thousands of top players from all over the world to compete for the coveted title of EVO Champion. Top Japanese players have been travelling to the tournament since 2001, which is not surprising considering many of the games played at EVO originated in Japan. What IS surprising is that despite the country’s consistent and considerable presence, EVO has never hosted an event in Japan.



COMPLICATIONS

This isn’t to say that attempts to host EVO in Japan have never been made; organizers tried it back in 2010 with the announcement of a spin-off tournament to be held in Japan the following year. Unfortunately, the Tohoku earthquake in early 2011 forced the event to be tabled. Many assumed that it would simply be postponed until the following year,

but years went by with not so much as a whisper about the fate of EVO Japan.

There are, of course, other factors that make hosting a substantial tournament in Japan difficult, including Japan’s own laws pertaining to event prize pools for e-sports. Japan’s law against unjustifiable premiums and misleading representations puts a 100,000JPY cap on cash prizes for events deemed to be aimed at selling specific products. In the



case of an e-sports tournament, the products in question would be the video games being played.

Having third-party sponsors supply the money is one way around this, yet another regulation states that e-sports prize pools cannot exceed 20 times the admission fee. Tickets to attend EVO’s main tournament in Las Vegas generally run between 50-70USD; meaning the prize pool would still be capped at around 100,000JPY. The solution here is to remove the entrance fee, and fortunately for me, that’s exactly what they chose to do.



EVO JAPAN: A MILESTONE JAPANESE E



A SMALL STEP FORWARD

It's not difficult to see why it is necessary for top Japanese players to travel abroad for prestige. Events with larger prize pools attract a larger number of players; and Tougeki, Japan's own major fighting game tournament, ceased operation in 2012. It's truly a shame, because the prevalence of arcades in Japan mean the fighting game community continues to thrive. There is something immensely satisfying about playing against people locally, learning their characters and habits over time, and helping each other grow as players by sharing information. Online play simply cannot offer

that. Unfortunately, many of the local arcade superstars never get their chance in the spotlight due to the prohibitive cost of travel.

This is exactly what made EVO Japan such a special event. Players from across the country who never had their chance in the spotlight were able to compete with the best in the world, unburdened by travel. Spectators watching live or at home saw new faces emerge that may very soon become the next Daigo, Tokido, or Fuudo. They'll certainly have more chances, as the EVO organizers announced that EVO Japan would be returning next year. The annualization of EVO Japan is not only a major step forward

for fighting games, but also for e-sports in Japan as a whole. As an enthusiast for both e-sports and fighting games myself, feeling the energy of the EVO crowd during each game's grand finals is a feeling I won't soon forget. I can only hope that Japan continues to relax its strict laws on e-sports so that there can be more events like this in the future.



IN E-SPORTS

Photo source: Ben Holschuh

ARTS AND CULTURE

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Sabrina Zirakzadeh

Spring brings bittersweet good-byes and new beginnings, but best of all, it brings limited-edition sakura-flavored EVERYTHING!

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Abby Ryder-Huth

Fashion in Connect this month is all about getting rid of excess. Now, about my closet...

Photo: Hannah Martin



OKKEIKO JAPAN! Kimonos, Tea Ceremony, and Calligraphy

Miyajima's one-stop-shop for authentic Japanese cultural activities

Melissa Swan Furter (Tokyo)



Being a first year JET comes with many interesting experiences, especially if you've never been to Japan before. One of these great experiences was visiting Miyajima Island. Miyajima is one of Japan's most popular tourist places to visit and there is so much to do there. I was able to visit during my first few months in Japan. I looked around the market and climbed the mountain but there was so much more to do and see on the Island!

So I decided to go again when my boyfriend visited from South Africa. As it was a new experience for him to go to the island as well, I wanted to make sure that we would be able to get the most out of the cultural experience. One of my English teachers had mentioned *Okeiko Japan*, a place where we could learn about many Japanese traditions. She also mentioned that we could wear *kimonos* while we're having these experiences, free of charge. So I looked on their website and saw that they had multiple things to do there like *sake* tasting, cooking, and various hand crafts. I chose one of the packages which included teaching us about the Japanese tea ceremony as well as teaching us how to write *Shodo*, or Japanese calligraphy.





The day came and we headed to Miyajima in the morning. It was a five minute walk from the ferry and when we got there we were amazed to see how beautiful the location was. As we walked through the entrance gate, there was a scenic garden and a walkway that took us to the entrance of the two-story building. We were greeted by the staff there, who were all dressed in stunning winter kimonos. We were then ushered into our changing rooms where they helped us get dressed in our kimonos. We could choose which kimonos to wear, which made it extra special for me.

After that we went to the tea room where we drank some tea and ate some traditional sweets. We were then shown how to perform the tea ceremony ourselves, which was such an interesting experience for us. After that we went upstairs to

learn some Shodo. We were able to do some practice rounds and then we chose a specific kanji to write. We then wrote our names in *hiragana* and finally put a stamp on to make it official.

To commemorate the experience, the staff took some lovely pictures of us outside in the gardens. As we were leaving they also gave us our Shodo work from earlier and a parting gift of special Okeiko Japan sweets. It was truly an informative and fun experience for us. We learned so much about tea ceremonies, calligraphy, and other Japanese cultures which inspired me to learn more about them and even take part in my schools calligraphy and tea ceremony classes.

Melissa Furter is currently a first year JET who enjoys learning about culture and life improvement.

YBHYHO:

THE LEGENDS

The prefecture where Japan



It might be common knowledge that the Emperors of Japan are regarded to be direct descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu. The three Imperial Regalia (a sword, a jewel, and a mirror) are steeped in myth, having supposedly been gifted by the goddess herself, and handed down through the generations. Now, the Imperial Palace is situated in the heart of Tokyo, but the origin of the Imperial family takes place somewhere much different.

"THE ORIGIN OF THE IMPERIAL FAMILY"

Long before Emperors and Imperial

Palaces, there was a sun goddess and a cave. Amaterasu hid herself away inside the cave, and the world fell into darkness. When she reemerged, dawn was created. You might have heard this myth before. But did you know that the cave in which she hid is in Miyazaki Prefecture in Southern Kyushu? Small stacks of stones cover the floor and pour out from the mouth of the cave; carefully placed there by shrine-goers of Amanoiwato Shrine in Takachiho, Miyazaki.

Perhaps you've also heard how Amaterasu's grandson, Ninigi-no-Mikoto, was sent from the heavens to rule over the earth. But did you know the mountain where he alighted is also in Miyazaki? Atop Mt. Takachiho, in

the southern part of... a rusted spear stuck... the peak; something... make the trek to see...

Maybe you also know... Mikoto's son, Howo... princess Toyotama... went into labor, she... climbed into a cave... steep, rocky coast. ... not to look at her w... but curiosity overca... he caught sight of... creature-like form, ... ashamed, returned... cave is now Udo S... you guessed it: ... come to pray for sa... can throw clay pebb...



Karalee Ripley (Miyazaki)

of the prefecture, is
ck upside-down into
g countless people
e.

now that Ninigi-no-
ori, married the sea
. When Toyotama
e came ashore, and
e on the face of the
She warned Howori
hile she gave birth,
me him, and when
f her natural, sea
he fled. Toyotama,
l to the sea. This
Shrine, which is in,
Miyazaki. Couples
fe birth, and visitors
oles from the cliff. If

one of your pebbles lands in a certain
hollow in the rock below, it's said that
your wish will come true.

"COUPLES COME TO PRAY FOR SAFE BIRTH"

The baby born at Udo Shrine later had
a son of his own. This son was Jinmu,
the first Emperor of Japan. Jinmu was
born in Takachiho, Miyazaki, where
his great-great-great grandmother
Amaterasu had hid in a cave how many
hundreds or thousands of years before.
With his brothers, Jinmu left Miyazaki
out of Hyuga, and sailed eastward
through the Seto Inland Sea to what is

now Osaka, on a mission to claim the
throne, and Japan, as rightfully his.

From this quiet prefecture in southern
Kyushu, came the creation of Japan
as we know it. Visiting the caves,
mountains, and seas of Miyazaki, it's
not hard to imagine that perhaps at one
time, there might have been a greater
story happening here.

*Karalee Ripley is a second year JET living in
Miyazaki Prefecture. She spends her days
taking BuzzFeed quizzes, transposing her
everyday experiences into hand-drawn comics,
and reading random Wikipedia pages.*

Size Doesn't Matter

As you may have already guessed from the size of complementary *wagutsu* slippers in one generic length, what's considered average here may be on the smaller side in your home country. The same applies to clothing; as a women's US dress size 6, or medium, I have trouble fitting into most "free-size" pants in Japan and size L bottoms. When thrifting, use the variety of goods to your advantage. Rather than letting size tags be your guiding compass, consider the flowiness, restriction of the fabric, or the particular cut of the item to inform your shopping choices.

Read Between the Lines

An unfortunate reality of Japanese shops—both resale and retail alike—is that they are flooded with mass-produced cheaply-made fabrics and loose seams. You can avoid making an unwise investment in a rough and rigid polyester coat by reading the labels. The katakana or kanji for fabric terms like polyester, wool, fur, and acrylic are easy to learn. As a resident of northern Japan, my ability to discern a down coat from the sea of synthetics meant extra warmth and one less layer of *de rigueur* HeatTech in my daily suit of armor.

Buying P Spring Japanese

Springtime in Japan not only brings bloom, but also holds much significance for graduation and new job prospects. Capturing this spirit of change, and Japan's pace of life, it's easier in our spring overhaul to find visually appealing, Japanese thrift items you're used to back home. Here are some tips for embarking on your shopping and se



Pre-Loved: Diving into Thrifting

As the fleeting beauty of the sakura
passes, our wardrobes can also benefit from
the plethora of resale shops that make our
thrifting endeavors. Clean, organized, and
well-stocked stores may be a far cry from what
you see on TV. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when
embarking on your thrifting adventure.

Sareen Palassian (Sendai)



Forget Social Constructs

It's generally thought that women shop more often than men. This, however, does not stop fashionable Japanese men from sifting through the racks at your local Book Off, and with good reason. The men's section of Japanese resale shops might be the cheapest places on Earth to find notoriously elusive streetwear brands like Supreme and Thrasher. Furthermore, you can be sure these products are the real deal, as employees inspect their acquisitions for condition as well as authenticity. Ladies who may not feel daring enough to sport an oversized Adidas windbreaker can content themselves with a decent selection of "gendered" accessories like beanies, backpacks and the occasional pair of sneakers that actually fit.



Be A Follower

You may already own point cards for your favorite shops. Take your loyalties one step further by following them on social media platforms like Instagram and LINE. This way, news about flash sales or new pieces up for sale will be right at your fingertips. The store Don Don Down on Wednesday even notifies shoppers when they have a "30% Up" campaign, meaning customers who wish to sell will be compensated thirty percent more than usual. Shops also post about certain pieces they are looking to buy in preparation for the upcoming season, so take these as a clue that your bag full of short-sleeved blouses is ready for the counter. And at the very least, the social media blasts are a good way to practice your Japanese.

Go Out On a Limb

From Gwen Stefani's pop hit "Harajuku Girls" to the colorful spreads of *Fruits Magazine*, Japanese trends have had a grip on the global fashion scene from the 1990s onward. Resale shops are an ideal place to dip one's toes into the Olympic-sized pool of Japanese style. Why not try your hand at the Japanese "mom look" with a floor-length hoodie, complete with a kangaroo pouch pocket? Or, go against your instincts by layering a turtleneck under a spaghetti strapped camisole. If you're willing to invest, any vintage shop worth its salt will have quirky brands like Ne-Net and Comme des Garçons on the racks— a perfect omiyage for yourself that will last for years to come.

Wearing

Dare I claim that thrifting in Japan will be a game-changer (beyond the allure of retail therapy!), brows Japanese resale shops will foster a new level of care for your own clothing so as to last a lifetime. The impeccable care put into their clothing is a testament to the Japanese practice of air-drying clothes, their best life, as most fabrics don't require a tumble dry cycle. Most of all, you'll find an aversion to wastefulness. When you see Off or Second Street standards, you'll see them through Facebook clothing swaps like repurposing them as cleaning rags.

At first glance, these thrift stores can seem like a maximalist's paradise with their shelves overflowing with goods. But you can turn them into your own personal training ground for minimalism à la japonaise— a lesson in moderation for mundane goods, and the desire to build a smarter, more intentional wardrobe.

Sareen Palassian is a second-year ALT in Sendai. Her passions include fawning over vintage clothing and exploring the hidden gems of Japanese culture.

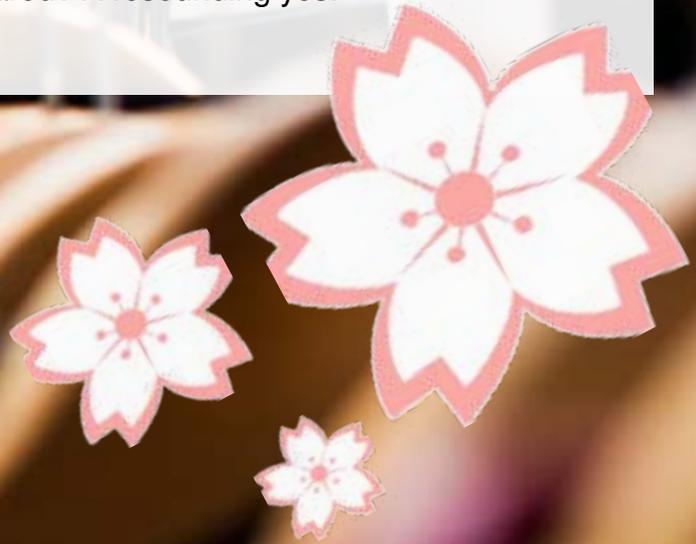
Photo by Artificial Photo

Beyond the Closet

When combing through belongings to sell, don't stop at just clothing. Larger retailers like Book Off and Second Street often have separate floors dedicated to household appliances, sporting goods, vinyl records, toys and other knick-knacks. They accept even the smallest of *gachapon* keychain baubles, which is one less reason against tossing them in the trash when you've had your fun with them. On the buying side, these sections of the store can come in handy for one-off occasions. Tasked with finding a school-appropriate athletic outfit for Sports Day, I took to the sports section where I found a 300 yen pair of nylon track pants. Did I wear them more than once? No. But, did they come in handy for a culturally specific event for which I was unprepared? A resounding yes.

is Caring

improve your life skills and relationship
approached the right way (don't give in
ing and carefully selecting products in
newfound appreciation for daily fabrics.
used products will inspire you to better
lengthen its lifespan and resellability.
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ou can still give your clothes new life
ke JET Clothing Exchange, or simply



heer variety in trends, brands and price points. But, by keeping these tips in mind, you
- characterized by the focus on quality over quantity, the appreciation and gratefulness
more evergreen wardrobe in the face of mercurial spring.

r dogs, attending Japanese shows, and embroidering fruits on the collars of white shirts.

ography on Unsplash



The Zen of Things

Nika Bereznoj (Yamagata)

A couple of years ago I decided to “go green.” Looking for inspiration, I stumbled upon the blog “[Zero Waste Home](#)” by a mother who has reduced her family’s waste to almost zero in an attempt to live a more healthy and environmental friendly lifestyle. The more I learned about their lifestyle, the more I liked their home: the minimalistic, airy rooms and the lack of décor were very appealing. I was surprised to learn that the family’s decision to opt for a “Zero Waste” lifestyle originated in their realization, upon taking some old possessions out of storage, that they hadn’t actually missed any of them. More than that: having less possessions to take care of resulted in the family having more energy for immaterial things such as picnics, hikes and other activities they could do together.

I liked the idea of having less stuff to clean and mend and have started to declutter my own apartment. Luckily, I was a student and didn’t own much anyway. Before moving to Japan for JET last year I had reduced my household to a few pieces of furniture,

some kitchen supplies and only about half of the clothes I formerly owned. All of this I could store at my parents’, and took only the bare essentials that could fit in one suitcase and a carry-on with me to Japan. Because my position was new, I was presented with an empty apartment upon arrival. The space I encountered in my new home-- what a pleasant surprise! Thanks to the internet, it was easy to stay motivated and keep clutter out of my new apartment. There are many blogs and Youtube channels out there dedicated to decluttering and downsizing. Whether it’s a video on “5 things you don’t need”, or an article about somebody moving into a “Tiny House” (not more than a room with an integrated kitchen on wheels) — minimalism and decluttering have a strong online presence.

Now, the term “minimalism” is not new. Minimalist design has been a strong part of the late modernism aesthetics in the 1970s. As a countermovement to overly adorned and expressive visual trends, it has influenced every facet of visual culture, such as architecture, fashion

and graphic design. And today, as we are bombarded with a never-ending stream of imagery through new technology and our portable devices, [minimalism](#) promises a welcome breather from all the visual noise around us.

However, minimalist design has flourished mainly in consumer capitalist societies and is often expressed through reducing one’s possessions to a few very high end and expensive pieces. This minimalist aesthetic has been criticized for being rather a compressed materialism than a form of post-materialism, which it is supposed to be. It has been called out for being nothing more than “a way of aping the connotations of simplicity and even, to a degree, asceticism, without actually having to give up those [sweet, sweet class signifiers](#).” In a world where the gap between poor and rich is widening, the conscious “practice” of minimalism can be seen as a pretentious act that only wealthy people can afford.

But this is not the minimalism that I’m here for. What I want to talk about is a

concept also known as “simple living” or “voluntary simplicity,” which opposes high consumption lifestyles. What is inspired by Ghandi and can be also found in Hippie culture emphasizes how creating simpler outer conditions can lead to richer inner conditions — how living by the “Less is More” premise can not only benefit our style but our lives in general.

The focus on our inner self through the reduction of outer distractions is also an important part of the simplicity and austerity of Zen Buddhism. The Japanese aesthetics linked to it is known as “*wabi-sabi*”, which shows us the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and humble, and is demonstrated best in the tea ceremony. Wabi-sabi opens opportunities for spiritual richness among the self-imposed isolation and voluntary poverty of the hermit and ascetic. It indicates that minimalism can be more than clean chic — it can be the “Zen of things”.

Several minimalists have pointed out the difference between the chic “aesthetic”

minimalism and the “functional” minimalism of their everyday lives. Even a “minimalist wardrobe” does not need to focus on creating a particular look involving basic colour tones or gender-neutral design – it can be warm and eclectic and simply reduced to the few items that you really love and wear. It is about getting rid of the impulse purchases and misfits in your cupboard in order to be met with only your favourite items every morning.

So what is a minimalist lifestyle? For me and many others it is the conscious and mindful reduction of consumerism. However, definitions vary, because the goal of minimalism is not just decluttering but re-evaluating what possessions mean to you. This is what authors like Fumio Sasaki, whose book “Goodbye Things” was published in the US last year, try to do. Sasaki, who owns only the bare essentials – such as four pair of socks and three shirts, is known for his “extreme” form of minimalism.

But what is more interesting is the reason for the decision he made: owning as

few things as possible has “given [him] a chance to think about what it really means to be happy.”

This pursuit of happiness through simple living consists of letting go of what is felt to be unnecessary or even a burden to us. Famous minimalists like Michael Kelly Sutton and Leo Babauta (and many others since) have written about how adapting a life with less has helped them to gain more physical and mental space to do what makes them happy.

They see this lifestyle as a way to maximize their lives by removing things that are negative or just not adding to them in any way. Along these lines, several minimalists have adapted the more positive term “maximalism” in order to describe their lifestyle. For Miss Minimalist blogger and author Francine Jay, “being a minimalist isn’t only about white walls and empty spaces. It’s about eliminating the distractions that keep us from fully appreciating life. The less stuff we have cluttering our homes (and the less “to-do’s” cluttering our time), the more energy we can

devote to the things that are truly important to us.”

This is how I define minimalist lifestyle and how for me “Less” turns into “More.” What do I really need? It is not about social status markers or high end consumerism, but about cherishing immaterial values more. What makes me happy? This is the question Japanese author Marie Kondo wants us to ask ourselves while decluttering after her popular *Konmari* method: keep whatever “sparks joy” and get rid of everything else.

The process and goal of downshifting behind this “functional” minimalism is what separates it from the mere aesthetics of minimalist design and what allows us to go further. In the words of Francine, clearing out the physical clutter “gives us the time and space and focus to clear out our *inner* clutter.”

Upon moving to Japan and starting my job as a JET I have encountered many challenges and felt overwhelmed at times. I’m still tempted to overcome my small and big frustrations by one or another way of

treating myself. But I try to steer clear of buying my way out of misery and focus on the immaterial things that make me happy instead — spend time with new friends, enjoy new hobbies, and catch up with my loved ones back in Germany.

Whenever I wonder why I should keep denying myself some sort of instant satisfaction, I think of a passage from Sasaki’s book: “After what I’ve been through, I think saying goodbye to your things is more than an exercise in tidying up. I think it’s an exercise in learning about true happiness. Maybe that sounds grandiose. But I seriously think it’s true.”

Nika Bereznoj is a German CIR in Higashine, Yamagata Prefecture, who thinks that a second-hand space heater is the best housewarming gift for a new Tohoku JET.

MARCH RELEASES

MUSIC

7 Mar. *Whiteout*, Nocturnal Bloodlust (J-Rock)

14 Mar. *Mugen Mirai*, Perfume (J-Pop)

17 Mar. Victor Rock Festival 2018 (Japanese mixed genres)—Tokyo

21 Mar. *Sang*, Kamijo (Visual Kei/J-Rock)

25 Mar.-30 Apr. FLOWER FLOWER First National Tour—Sapporo City, Hokkaido, Tokyo, Nagoya City, Aichi, and Osaka City, Osaka (Pop/Rock)

27-28 Mar. *Katy Perry's Witness: The Tour*—Saitama City, Saitama (Pop)

OTHER EVENTS

2 Mar. Japan Baseball 2018 Season Begins—Nationwide (Baseball)

20, 21, and 23 Mar. *Jekyll VS Hyde*—Tokyo (Musical Theater)

MOVIES

1 Mar. *Black Panther* (Superhero, Action): Starring Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, and Lupita Nyong'o

1 Mar. *The Shape of Water* (Dark Fantasy): Directed by Guillermo del Toro, starring Sally Hawkins, Octavia Spencer, and Doug Jones

16 Mar. *Coco* (Animated Adventure): Starring Anthony Gonzalez, Gael Garcia Bernal, and Benjamin Bratt

21 Mar. *Tomb Raider* (Action): Starring Alicia Vikander and Walton Goggins

30 Mar. *The Post* (Drama): Directed by Steven Spielberg, starring Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks

GAMES

1 Mar. *Dragon Quest Builders: Revive Aalefgard* on Nintendo Switch (Fantasy Role-Playing Game)

CAN I STREAM T

Lilian Diep (Toyama)



By now, you've probably realized that there are things you can and cannot do in Japan, digital entertainment-wise. To start with, you're not allowed to download media illegally(1) (and copyright laws may differ from your home country in regards to educational purposes as well, so be careful what you use)! So how do you go about enjoying media entertainment legally?

Well, you're gonna have to pay for that.

Your Streaming Options

N

Options such as Netflix offer content viewable in Japan that might be the same as the one back home. Netflix offers different plans to suit your needs and you can get others to hop on to help ease the payments each month. Ranging from \$7.99-13.99 USD, you get access to loads of content with Japanese captioning (if you're keen on practicing while watching) and a constant stream of Netflix Originals with English subtitles (2). If you're running Windows 10, you're also able to download titles to your laptop for those times you want to show movies to your students. This could be a deciding factor if you enjoy using pop culture and native materials in your lessons.



Alternatively, Hulu Japan and Crunchyroll offer content almost immediately after it's aired for monthly fees for American and Japanese programming. Crunchyroll often offers free trials, especially if you're following small artists or performers and they give you their access discounts. It's worth noting that Hulu Japan's library of Western programming is the smallest of the legal streaming services, but it does include the option to change audio between English and Japanese and English subtitle options on most shows (though they are auto-generated and not in perfect English). Crunchyroll has the most substantial library for anyone wanting to study by watching Japanese shows with subtitles, but it doesn't offer much if you want to watch your shows from back home.

But What if I Don't Want to Pay?

I hear you, I do. Money can be tight if you're like me and have student loans, or are saving for upcoming trips. These services are all legal, safe options that you can use while living in Japan, but they do add up. Some other free options like YouTube are becoming more viable options for keeping up with media, guaranteed to fill up a good few hours in bed under the covers; nowadays, you can get clips AND full length shows

(depending on what you're into), though some are still region-blocked. Another option I really enjoy using is Rabb.it, a website that allows you to share content online with family and loved ones within your own "room". Popular websites such as Twitch and Vice Video are available as well as open rooms to watch things like *Game of Thrones*, *Die Hard*, or *Jimmy Kimmel*. You can also take advantage of free trials

HAT?



Photo: Charles Deluvio from Unsplash

amazon

Amazon Japan has Prime membership with access to similar programs as back home, which means it also includes perks such as Free Expedited Shipping, Prime Video, Prime Music, and Prime Reading. For ¥400 a month, you get access to as much media as you can watch(3). Like Netflix, some shows and movies you're used to back home won't be available here in Japan, but as far as music and reading goes, my content and preferences seemed to have carried over without a problem.



If Amazon doesn't quite satisfy the audiophile in you, Spotify has joined Japan and has allowed expats to keep in touch with what's trending back home and globally. With a membership you can access Premium to be able to download and listen to songs ad-free. Another great perk is the Family plan; you can have up to six people on the same account, making the monthly \$14.99 USD way more affordable. If you happen to have access to your university email, you can use it to create a student account (which you can also do with Amazon Prime) (4). Another popular music streaming company is Line. Yes, Line, the messaging app you use on the daily. If you're into Japanese music, Line offers a wider range that Spotify doesn't have access to. Aside from games, comics, and news, Line also offers music streaming so you can know what's hip among the voun'uns.

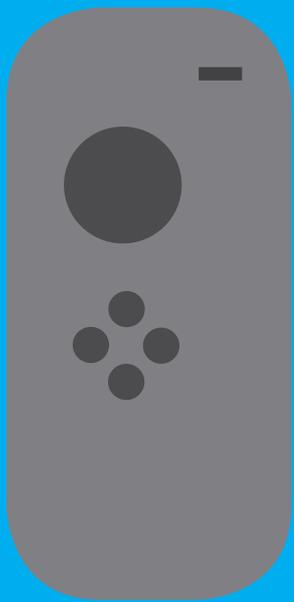
and streaming options through your game consoles or other smart devices, especially for interactive viewing with other fans.

There are other sites out there that allow you to illegally stream just about anything you want. But I'm not here to tell you that, nor will I encourage you to look for them through Google. Nope, no I won't. It's up to you whether the risk of being caught is worth it for

keeping up to date with your favorite pop culture. But for those of you who want to keep things one hundred percent on the legal side of things, these services should give you a good place to start!

Sources:

1. <http://bit.ly/2C3nPIT>
2. <http://bit.ly/2Bx5f4y>
3. <http://amzn.to/1R93dXg>
4. <http://spoti.fi/2HqDbRa>



Zero to A Nintendo R

The Nintendo Switch is now the fastest-selling video game system in U.S. history in its first ten months, according to Nintendo's January announcement, and has broken sales records worldwide. In other words, the Nintendo Switch bested the lifetime sales of the Wii U.

Nintendo has caught lightning in a bottle, and now has the game industry's attention in less than a year? Their recipe for success was three-fold: a launch game that was a masterpiece and giving fans access to high-quality titles they might have missed out on.

A Breath of Fresh Air

The key to a successful console launch lies in the depth and breadth of its initial game line-up. Why spend your hard-earned money on a brand-new toy when there is nothing to play on it? Fortunately, Nintendo had their bases covered with over ten games available on launch day, led by their flagship title *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. Originally announced in January 2013, *Breath of the Wild* was met with universal acclaim upon its release, with numerous journalists calling it a masterpiece and "one of the best video games of all time." The game went on to win countless year-end awards, including top honors at the 2018 Game Awards.

Last April, Nintendo reported that *Breath of the Wild* for the Switch and the console itself held a consumer attachment rate of over 100%. Put differently, copies of the game outsold the device needed to play it on. Could you imagine paying full price for a car before earning your driver's license? Nintendo triggered such a phenomenon within its fandom. While the game was also released for the Wii U system, the company stated that *Breath of the Wild* sales for Switch far exceeded those of its predecessor system. Boasting a title as popular and celebrated as this one helped steer the Nintendo Switch onto a path for success during its infancy.

Let's Get the Third-Party Started

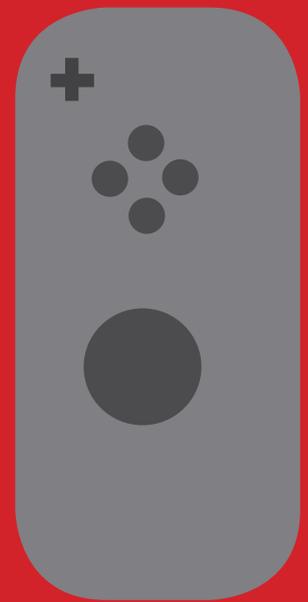
Lack of support from major third-party publishers, such as Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, and Activision, was the final nail in the Wii U's coffin. When gamers purchase a new console, they do so under the assumption that its entertainment value will exceed its physical cost. To accomplish this, new and exciting titles for said console must be produced at a reasonable rate. While Nintendo excels in the first-party department by consistently delivering high-quality software developed by its internal teams, the company has always struggled to secure steady third-party support from major publishers. Part of this can be attributed to Nintendo's insistence on maintaining a clean, family-friendly image, which does not mesh with the mature, M-rated games other publishers often churn out. Another factor is Nintendo's reliance on gimmicky hardware as

a selling point, like the Wii's motion controller and the Wii U's GamePad. This creates more work for third-party developers, who must then tailor their games to an extraordinary, less mainstream control scheme. These two issues have been at the heart of tertiary publishers' less-than-rousing support of Nintendo previous platforms.

However, the past is the past, and in 2017, Nintendo showed us a glimpse of its future. The company struck a deal with Ubisoft, one of the world's leading publishers, to bring two of grittiest games in recent memory, *Doom* and *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*, to the Switch. Additionally, Nintendo gave Ubisoft their blessing to develop a crossover game featuring characters from the *Mario* and *Raving Rabbids* franchises respectively. The result was

Hero: retrospective

Chad Grover (Tokyo)



U.S. history. The hybrid console sold more than 4.8 million units within its first year, and they also estimated the hot commodity exceeded more than 14 million units in sales of its predecessor, the six-year-old Wii U, in less than one year.

Nintendo's attention once again. How did they manage such a high turnover in a market that no one could afford to miss, correcting the mistakes of their past, and doing it on before.

Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle, and it was one of the highest critically acclaimed games (as well as the biggest surprise) of the year.

Nintendo also embraced the indie scene by offering a plethora of titles through their digital distribution service, the Nintendo eShop. Many of these independent works are placed at the forefront of the store, on the same promotional level as some

of the company's high-budget exclusives, which permeates a sense of fairness and equality for struggling developers. The Switch has breathed new life into classic indie games such as *Super Meat Boy* and *Stardew Valley*, enhancing the experience by allowing players to bring them anywhere and everywhere. In short, Nintendo has eliminated their cumbersome controller gimmicks and attracted third-party investment once again.

One More Time

The Wii U was a failed experiment. Sure, it had plenty of endearing and engaging games to enjoy, but the system's main selling point of changing between playing on your TV and Wii U GamePad seems dated by today's standards. Does that mean that the first-rate Wii U games deserve to be buried under the console's neglect? Absolutely not. It turns out all Nintendo needed to do was re-release them on a platform fans care about. The Nintendo Switch, for instance.

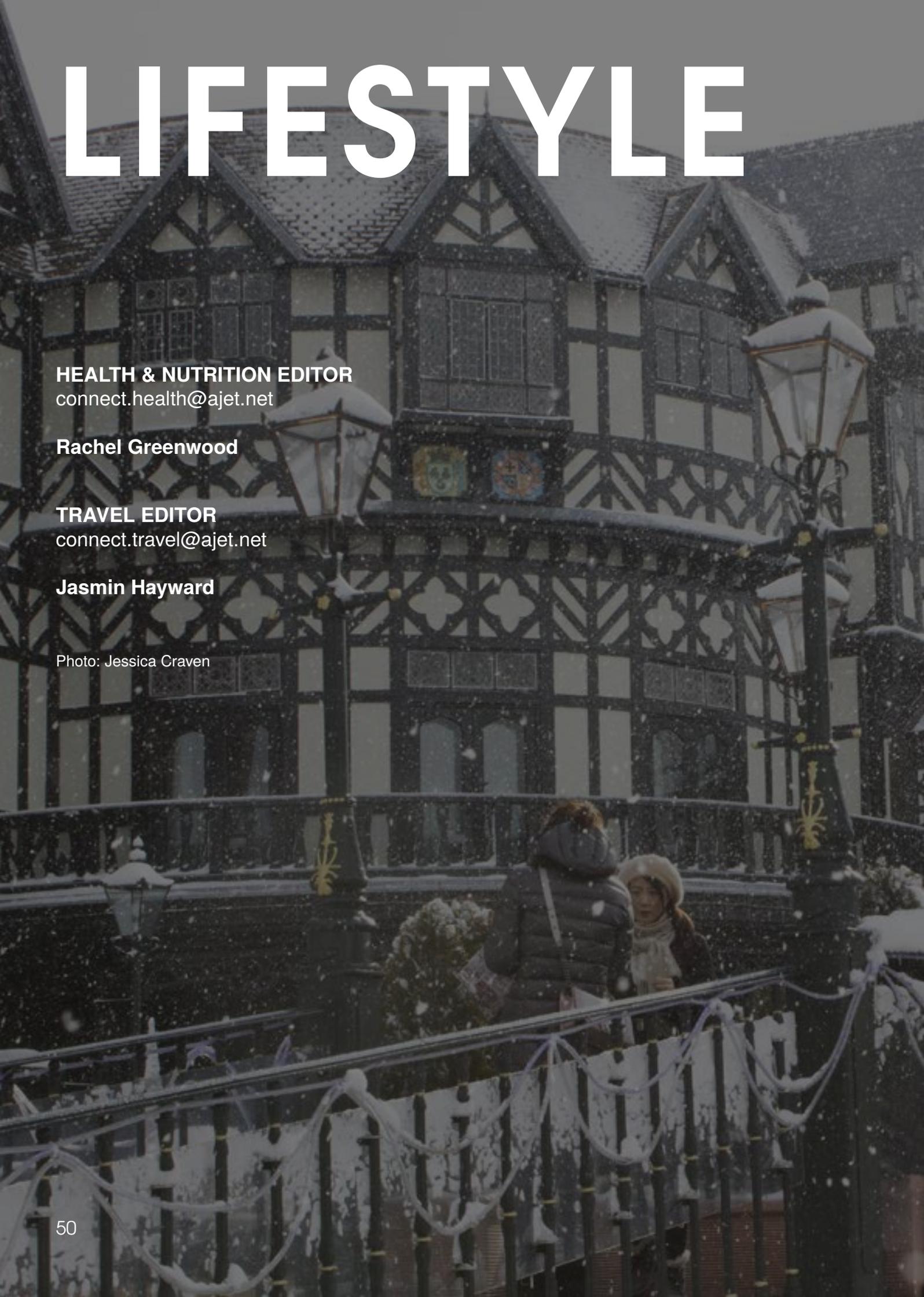
Mario Kart 8 Deluxe for Nintendo Switch released during the console launch-window last year. The enhanced version of *Mario Kart 8* (previously released exclusively for the Wii U) went on to become one of the best-selling games of 2017, as well as the fastest-selling entry in the *Mario Kart* franchise. These are incredibly impressive statistics for a game that was released three years ago. Taking this anomaly into account, Nintendo has announced plans to rebrand more classic Wii U games for the Switch, including

Wii 2 and *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze* in 2018. Such a move allows Nintendo to double-dip on already-finished titles while continuing to bolster the Switch's game library at the same time.

At the end of the day, it is impossible to determine whether this high level of interest in the platform will last. Still, when we consider how well the device is selling, especially compared with other systems, both from Nintendo and competing consoles, and the continued hype for new releases in the future, a slump seems unlikely. With a slew of upcoming third-party games in 2018 (*Dark Souls Remastered* on the go? Yes, please!), the future looks as bright as Mario's Super Star.

Chad Grover is a fourth year ALT based in Tokyo. His hobbies include video games, professional wrestling, and getting told he looks like Seth Rogen a lot. You can ask him which brand of canned coffee he's currently addicted to on [Twitter](#).

LIFESTYLE



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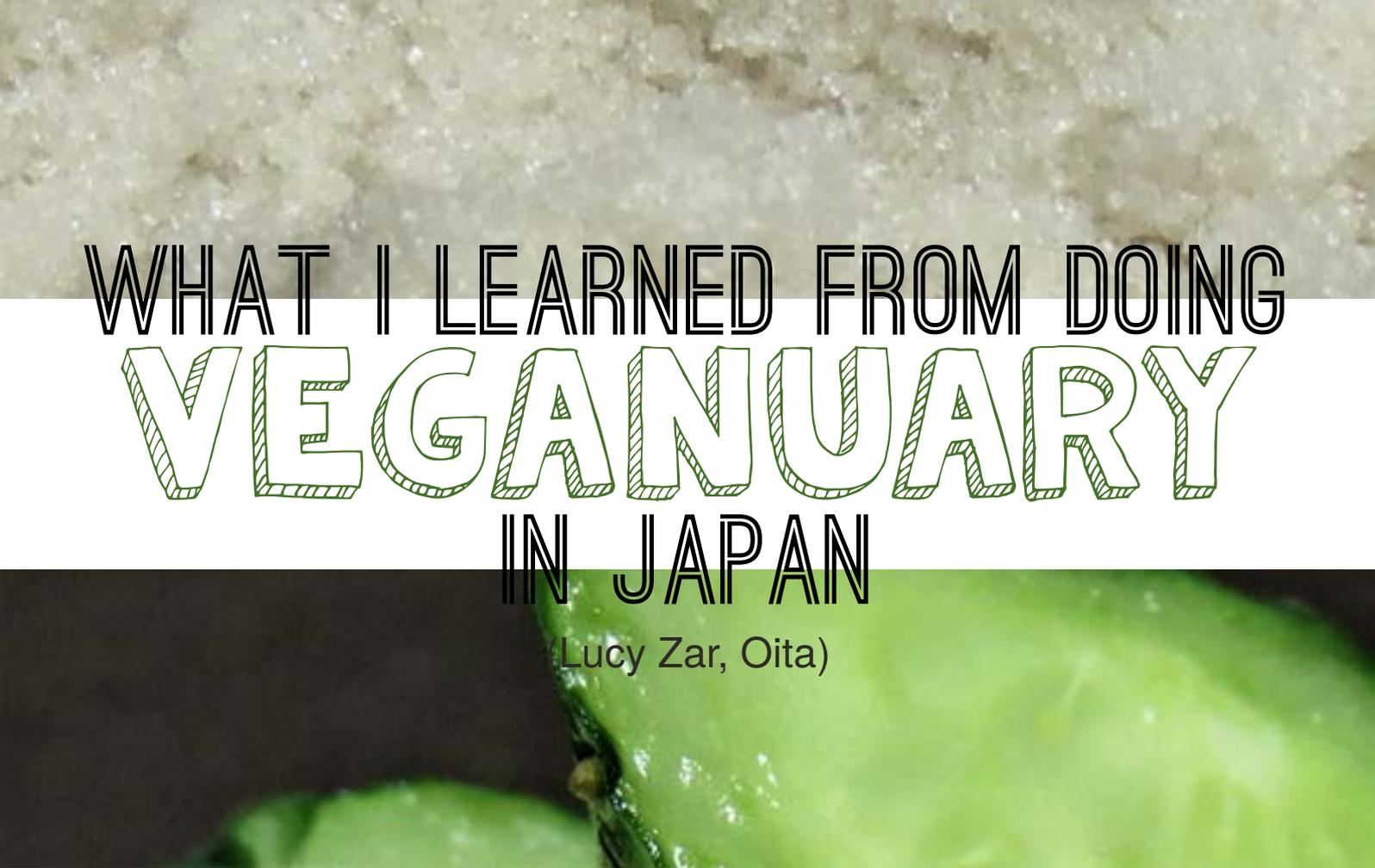
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Jasmin Hayward

Photo: Jessica Craven





WHAT I LEARNED FROM DOING VEGANUARY IN JAPAN

(Lucy Zar, Oita)

Upon stepping out of Fukuoka Airport in the dark, on a late October evening, and being whisked around in my boyfriend's *kei* car through the quiet roads of rural Japan, I knew absolutely nothing about my new host culture. As I settled in over the following few months, I incessantly questioned every aspect of the culture I saw, heard, or read about. However, my inquiries were (and still are) often met with arms thrown wide open and, with a hearty laugh and a raised eyebrow, "Oh, that's Japan!" One facet of this still unfamiliar society that has puzzled me more than once is the Japanese relationship with Buddhism.

I spent my first month here in a household that was in the process of mourning a deceased relative, and so I partook in the Buddhist tradition of receiving guests in mourning, at any time of the day or night, who had come to pay their respects. At our obligatory weekend visits to temples, I couldn't help noticing that the number of Japanese people who pray regularly at temples far surpasses the number of Brits who manage to drag themselves to church once a year. And the ubiquity of Buddhist imagery and architecture that embellishes the landscape rivals that of Catholic churches in any Italian city. So, the Japanese culture is, despite claims of secularism, Buddhist to some extent.

But aren't Buddhists supposed to be vegetarian? ("I undertake the precept to abstain from taking life" is one of the five main precepts of Buddhism.) Yet, I haven't seen a single meal at a restaurant since my arrival that doesn't contain something that requires taking the life of an animal, at some point along the line. My curiosity was ignited once again, and I started asking around. From most people, I got the rather un insightful response of, "Oh the Japanese aren't *really* Buddhist, they just do some Buddhist stuff." One friend told me that the most popular sect of Buddhism in Japan, *jōdo shū* (Pure Land Buddhism), simply removed the vegetarian aspect of their religion in order to attract more followers. Another source informed me that the increase in meat consumption started in the eighteenth century: the Japanese concluded from the height and strength of the Dutch traders in Nagasaki that eating meat must make you blonde and strong. Clearly, the fruitlessness with regards to the former didn't the final reason for the Japanese appetite for meat is self-evident: on looking at the fast-food outlets available in any Japanese city, it's hard to argue against the fact that the American occupation after WWII laid the commercial and cultural foundations for a meat-dependent society. Before 1940, the average Japanese man ate just 2.8 grams of meat per day. Nowadays, it's 130 grams — that's 50 times the quantity! (but still only half of what the average US citizen eats...)



It saddened me to learn that Japan had lost sight of its herbivorous history, and I wanted to see how easy it would be to go plant-based in Japan in 2018, so I joined the thousands of others around the world in attempting “Veganuary”.

Vegans have a well-earned reputation for preaching the benefits of their diet (of which I can’t deny there are many – see Netflix documentary *What the Health* if you’re interested), and moralistic snobbery. And if you’re not put off by the obnoxious personality a plant-based diet appears to give you, you’re probably intimidated by the esoteric ingredients lists and complex recipes. This is the case today more than ever, in a world where we learn how other people nourish themselves through our Instagram feed. We don’t get to see what they eat for lunch when they don’t have two free hours to curate a “Rainbow Buddha bowl”, or they choose to watch another episode of *Terrace House* instead of painstakingly preparing the elements of a “3-Minute Bounty Breakfast Bowl” the night before. Or, God forbid, when all the bowls are in the washing up pile and they have to eat their “Quinoa Green Goddess Bowl” from a plate, which just isn’t as photogenic.

Being vegan in small-town Japan was a challenge. While it was fun and relatively easy (as someone who enjoys cooking) to experiment at home with new ingredients — testing the versatility of tofu, trying natto on toast (recommended!), and making my own bread — eating out was a different story. When I was invited out to restaurants, I was faced with a dilemma: do I try my best to be as close to vegan as possible and choose a meal I’m probably not going to enjoy, or do I forego the vegan ideals and enjoy myself? I opted for the latter pretty early on. One trip to Sushiro, where I tried the natto-maki and then filled up on fries, made me realise that being vegan at restaurants here undermined the health aspect of doing Veganuary in the first place.

Veganuary also coincided with the making of a new (in fact, my first) Japanese friend. He invited me over for dinner on day three, and telling him I was vegan was just not an option. And I didn’t take this hiatus by half measures. We had a piece of rare local beef, followed by a cheesy, creamy, eggy, prosciutto-y carbonara, finished off with chocolate truffles. As my host, comically oblivious to my current situation, quipped about how he could just taste the happy cow frolicking through the fields, enjoying the grass, and then — in his words — slit at the throat, I felt surprisingly good about it. The beef we were eating was local and organic, and we were eating a modest amount. This was the type of meat-eating I could justify, and doing this once in a while is far less impactful on both my health and the environment than eating processed or mass-farmed meat and eggs on a daily basis.

So you could say that Veganuary revealed my priorities to me. I like the idea of veganism for its benefits to our health and its lower impact on the planet. But I don’t like its behaviour when taken out. Not in Japan anyway. So I decided to treat veganism as a nabe: take the bits I want and leave the rest for others. I’ll be a fair-weather vegan, and what’s wrong with that?



Source: <http://read.bi/1pubOeV>
Photos: Hannah Martin





Vegan Peanut Butter Chocolate Brownies

(Lucy Zar, Oita)

Japan

Notes:

If you have a blender, make your own peanut butter – it's cheaper than what you can find in the shops. Just chuck a bag of roasted, unsalted (slightly salted is fine) peanuts into the blender, and blend until creamy (persevere – it looks funny and crumbly in the middle of the process!). If it gets too dry, add a little cooking oil.

Okara is one of my favourite Veganuary discoveries. It is the by-product of making soy milk (and thus tofu), and so much of it is produced that it often gets thrown away. Because of this, it's super cheap to buy in most supermarkets. Sometimes it's even free if you go to a specialist tofu shop. It's available wet or dry, but this recipe uses wet, which is found in the refrigerated tofu section.

Ingredients

- ¼ cup peanut butter
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup cocoa powder
(the Morinaga one is my favourite)
- ½ tsp baking powder
(膨らし粉 or ベーキングパウダ)
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup sugar
(any is fine, but browner = fudgier)
- 1 cup fresh *okara*
- 90 grams dark chocolate
(Meiji Cacao 72% is as good as vegan)
- ¼ cup soy milk
- ½ cup canola oil
- If you have it, 2 tsp vanilla essence
(available in Daiso)



Method

- 1 Preheat oven to 160°C.
- 2 Mix peanut butter and honey until smooth (unless your PB is crunchy, obviously).
- 3 Mix flour, cocoa powder, baking powder and salt in a bowl.
- 4 In a pan over a low heat, mix the sugar, *okara*, chocolate and soy milk. Stir until completely melted and all ingredients are incorporated (but careful not to burn the chocolate!)
- 5 Remove chocolate mixture from the heat and add the oil and vanilla essence if using. Mix.
- 6 Add the chocolate mix to the bowl of dry ingredients and stir until everything is incorporated.
- 7 Pour/scrape/plop into an oiled 20x20cm pan, and dollop drops of the peanut butter/honey mixture on top. Use a knife to swirl it in so it looks like marble.
- 8 Bake for 30 minutes.

Photos:
Lucy Zar

style!

Vegan PB brownies made
using only ingredients you can
buy for *normal* prices in a *normal*
supermarket in Japan!



tokyo

marathon

dream



**Pick out a runner
and I'll show you
a dreamer.**

In August, I began a new life in Japan. Buoyed by the excitement of moving halfway across the world, I applied in an online ballot for one of roughly 30,000 amateur places in the 2018 Tokyo Marathon. With over 300,000 applications annually, only 10% of amateur runners secure a place. Six weeks later, against the odds, I opened an email telling me that on February 25th 2018 I would be running the Tokyo Marathon. I ran my first, and only, marathon in Berlin in 2015; I was thrilled at the prospect of running a marathon in another of the world's great cities.

I'd been running consistently for a decade, yet in the six months before moving to Japan

I hardly ran at all. So with a new move, the time seemed ideal to get back into the sport properly again. And what better place to do so than in Japan, a country famous for its love of endurance events? Japanese people love running so much they have an event called *Hakone Ekiden*, a 135-mile run from central Tokyo to the foot of Mt Fuji and back, that draws thousands of participants every year on January 2nd. Japan is ultramarathon country, with a variety of long distance running events going on at a stone's throw from wherever you are in the country at any time. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Japanese companies set up running clubs to boost employee morale, with running fever gripping the country thirty years before the running explosion in the West. Running in Japan is a national past time, and I was excited to explore the country's relationship with the sport while rejuvenating my own.

Long-distance running is not a sport that thrills: it doesn't attract extroverts, and rarely seems to involve the high-stakes drama

(Josh Ma

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and cash-rich adverti
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man from heaven for runners. I take multi-vitamins in the morning. I eat almonds and bananas before a run. I consume the skins of apples and red onions because they are rich in antioxidants, the stuff that banishes muscle soreness. In training for a marathon I am becoming a scientist of my own body, and I enjoy the mythology around diet and preparation, often more than the reality of running.

I hate running. I follow a 20-week training plan I find online. I have to run first four, then five times a week. The mileage goes up every week. A marathon is 26.2 miles long, and at the height of my training I am supposed to be running 43 miles in five runs spread across a week: three 5-mile runs, one 8-mile run and a Sunday 20-miler thrown in at the end of the week. I must have run close to 500 miles in preparation for Tokyo. The training has worn me down, and in January things start to go wrong.

Up until the beginning of January, the running is going well. I mostly keep to the training schedule. At the start of the month though I am struck down with a bad cold that leaves me unable to speak. Training is suspended for a week. Then at the end of January, I succumb to a tendon injury in my left foot, and after six days off I run again but gingerly, with the pain returning the next day. I find myself cursing the winter – Japan's coldest in five years – that has left me wondering if I will be able to finish what I signed up for six months ago.

At times like these it can be hard to self-motivate. The solitude of this pursuit gnaws away at me; I wish I had someone to run with. Someone who will cajole me outside, after a full day's work or on a Sunday morning, in these winter days when it is dark, snowing and -1 °C. I don't remember having to work this hard for the Berlin marathon, when I trained through the infamously cool British summer.

Amidst this sado-masochism, I remind myself why I am doing this. I remind myself that it is my ambition to run the six world marathon majors: Berlin, Tokyo, London, Chicago, New York, and the Boston. Injuries, illness and cold aside, if I finish this one I'll be a third of the way there.

Why is this important to me? I don't know.

I suppose there are logical reasons for running: the building of fitness, resilience and routine could be argued for. But that's not it. Imagination and emotion brought me to Japan, not reason.

And when I think of running through Tokyo with 35,000 other sado-masochists – packed tight like sardines in a can at the start line in Shinjuku, running past the Kaminarimon Gate and Tomioka Hachimangu Shrine, and finishing in (hopefully elated) exhaustion at the Imperial Palace – I start to feel the same dreamer's craving. Participants will wear a variety of ludicrous costumes, and 10,000 volunteers from across the country will descend on Tokyo to perpetuate the great Japanese tradition of rigorous organisation. I am told that *shochu* is a not unusual pre- and post-race gift.

The thought of the support and atmosphere – there should be two million spectators on February 25th – is pushing me to make it to Tokyo. I have a finishing time in mind – I think all runners do – but now I just want to finish. I know if I do it will be one of the highlights of my time in Japan.

I start to think again of the months of running leading up to the marathon. You see things when running, even in the dark of winter. An early morning dash through snow-covered Hiroshima. An abandoned car, tilted, two wheels dangling in the air and two in a drainpipe cover, in the forest. Crisp evening runs by Yamakuni River, too numerous to count, the sunset framed by Oita's famous mountains. Students cycling back from after-school activities in chattering herds. The old service attendant at the gas station, who never fails to spot you with a huge smile and a wave. I have come to know my town and Japan through these runs.

I don't think about much when I run. I run, breathe, and look around. I don't know why I run. What has brought me to Japan is the same thing that compels me to run. Perhaps that's enough.

Josh is a first year Junior High School ALT in Nakatsu-shi, Oita Prefecture. Seven months into life in Japan he is still amazed by everything about 7-11 conbinis, and outside of school he enjoys watching late night Premier League football and searching for the perfect ramen joint. After some initial resistance he now rates natto.

An Unforgettable

The Go M.A.D. Thailand Vo



Bible Adventure

Volunteering Trip 2017-2018



“And you’ll be staying in this building here,” Didi smiled, motioning to a western-looking two-story building that was built into the hillside. We were all inspecting it when, suddenly, one ALT let out a cry of surprise. Turning to look at her, we saw that the cow that had been standing a few meters away had left its perch to give her a welcoming headbutt.

Yes, this was how we started our week at the Baan Unrak Children’s Home in Sangkhlaburi, rural Thailand. Over the New Year’s vacation, eleven JET Programme participants flew to the warmer country to be a part of the Go M.A.D. Thailand Volunteering Trip. With Joni Longden leading the way as the only returnee to the Home, the rest of us were not quite sure of what we would be doing — or how much we would treasure the memories of this wonderful experience.

We were put in charge of about 60 orphans of varying ages, from about 4-14 years old. There are younger children and older children at the home, but they were being taken care of by the women of the home or keeping to themselves, respectively. Starting on the evening of December 30th, we were given a loose schedule to follow that went like this: Since school is on holiday until January 4th, play with the kids each day. In the evening, some of you will go to the Night Market to help sell baked goods from the Baan Unrak Bakery in town or woven goods made in a workshop at the Children’s Home. Meditation is about an hour in the morning and an hour at night, mandatory for all members of the Home and optional for volunteers. From there, we were given the slightest of pushes into what I would call an unforgettable adventure, filled with ups and downs, easy and difficult events, but overall a whole lot of fun.



Morning at school



Picking up trash in the neighborhood



A student explaining about recycling

Those days were a blast, even though they started out a little hectic. Initially, we scrambled to think of what to do with so many children from morning to evening. We rummaged through gifts we had brought for the kids and brainstormed group games. Looking back on it, it turned out that we hadn't needed to stress so much. We did so many things that we were almost too busy. We played duck duck goose for hours, created origami cranes and butterflies, and (once we bought paper at a store) drew pictures with blue pens, markers, and pastels. Some of the volunteers played musical instruments, gave karate and yoga lessons, or offered their hair to be braided daily. In the afternoon, anyone who wanted to cool off had the option to hop in the truck to go splash in the river or drift to sleep at the Home while watching the Korean drama "Rooftop Prince" with Thai subtitles. As night fell, it was time for some to head to the Night Market to work, followed by volunteers who wanted to do some crazy shopping or buy a refreshing Thai Iced Tea. There was also an amazing card game craze two of the volunteers created on the second day. The game "Spoons" was a big hit with the younger boys who played for days until the cards had become battered and bent.

Each day seemed to have some events. Some were big, like the special New Year's meditation and ceremony with a pizza dinner, as well as yoga and singing performances. Then there were small ones, like a morning where children could pick up trash for spending money, an evening of badminton, and a volunteer-only painting of a walkway. Now, this painting actually needed more effort than we originally thought. We took our time covering the peach walls and railings with white before mixing a different color for each surface. Eventually we realized it was more than a single afternoon job, and running out of red made most of our walls varying shades of blue and green. We spent four days painting, including both school days!

Now on the topic of school, January 4th was the children's first day back after the New Year. The truck that we used to go to the river doubled as a school bus to the nearby Baan Unrak School. Before arriving to Thailand, we were told that our two days at the school would consist of picking up trash. Unfortunately, that was not the case. The first day was spent playing games we had to think of on the spot about the importance of not littering, and viewing students' information booths on the subject. We were then surprised by an impromptu presentation we had to perform 5 minutes after learning about it... The next day was much better, with trash pick-up actually on the agenda. We walked out of the school grounds, past the main part of town, and all the way to Sangkhlaburi's Mon Bridge in the heat of the morning. We then separated the many bags of litter we collected, amazed and a bit saddened by a society that seems to consider the ground one big trash can.



Enjoying the swim in the river

Once the weekend came, we had one more full day with the children. It was calm and, like clockwork, we played cards and colored pictures, went to the river, and visited the Night Market. But, before the sunlight faded and we went to drink our final Thai Iced Teas, the Home hosted a goodbye party for us. That evening was an emotional one, with some dance routines incorporating motions and games we had taught, a shy boy band performance, and a group of kindergarteners singing like little angels. Each volunteer was given a card before all the members of Baan Unrak sat in a circle to sing a song that brought many of us to tears. Then, we had a dance party filled with high school-aged DJs blasting beats off of YouTube, cookies and juice, and a whole bunch of Mentos candy I had bought. Though it was a night full of energy, we couldn't help but see it as the end of a week in Thailand that had actually been an amazing experience. "There was a child crying in each of my arms," one volunteer said as the party was ending, "even though we only stayed for a week, I know we have been made a special part of their lives."



Joni Longden teaching karate



Yoga with the kids



Even though I covered the basics, there was so much more to do. The male volunteers each had their own set of fangirls. Some of the sports had Thai elephant designs. Some kids would take pictures. Some of the vegetarian meals were delicious and filling. Many of the kids did meditation. There was no hot water and half the time I had to go to the market by myself and got chased up a hill by some dogs. I had to relax and chat. One of the volunteers had a portable heater. The atmosphere was just so many things that made it special. We will always treasure it.

On the morning of the 7th, we dragged our bags to the van. Although the sun had not yet risen, some of the children were saying their final farewells. As we packed our luggage into the van, we said goodbye. After vegetarian lunches were passed out, it was time to go home. In Japan, we all agree we had a lot of fun. If any of our friends want to participate in, keep on the lookout for next year's Go Nippon!

so much more to this trip that made it extra special.
The female volunteers all bought clothing that
our smartphones to take pictures and videos. All
any of the children would fall asleep during morning
the running water was turned off. I tried to go to the
bogs. We visited the bakery after the Night Market
the speaker that we played music on to set a fun
made this an unforgettable adventure in Thailand; I know

the van that would take us back to Bangkok. Even
n waited for us, holding plastic carnations to wish
n, more tears were shed and hugs were plentiful.
for us to leave. Though the eleven of us returned to
adventure sounds like something you would want to
M.A.D. Thailand trip to experience it for yourself!



Last night at Baan Unrak

Photo: Susan Duong

COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY EDITOR

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Shantel Dickerson

This month's section is bloody fantastic...

SPORTS EDITOR

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Kirsty Broderick

Current state: daydreaming of a tropical vacation...

Photo: Micah Briguera

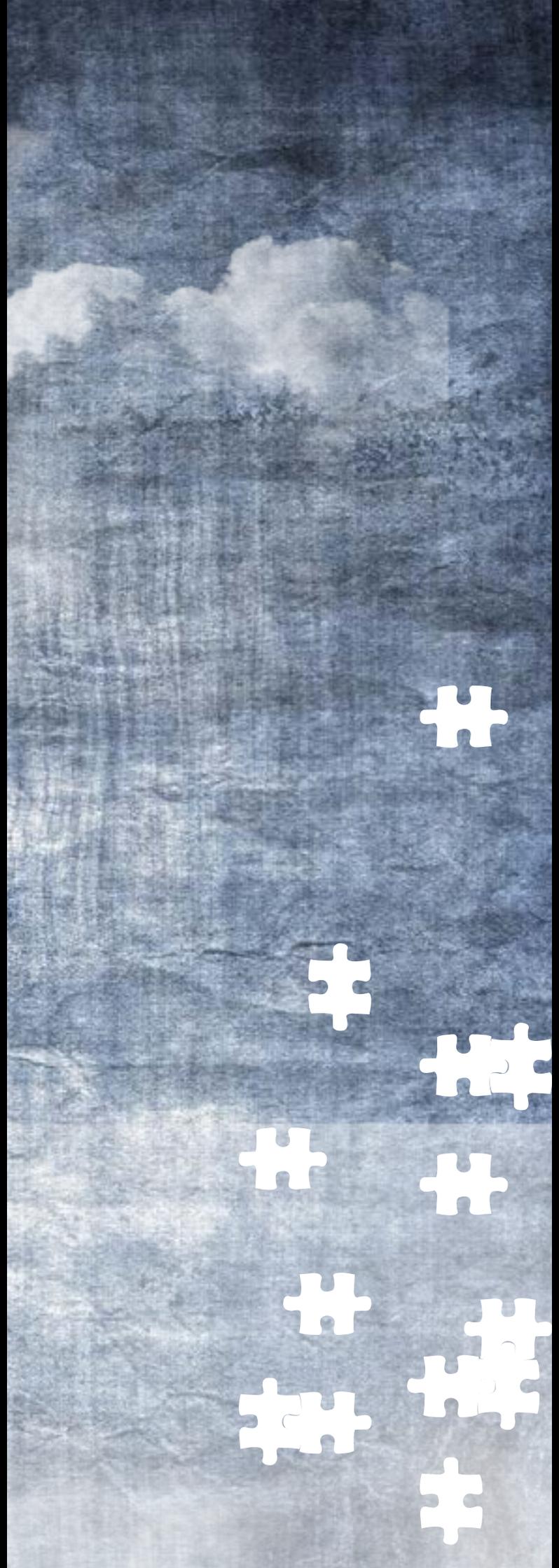




'HAFU': Our Children In Their Own Words

Rachel Greenwood (Oita)

There's a lot of discussion about people with mixed heritage in Japan. Megumi Nishikura's 2013 movie *Hafu*, and Tetsuro Miyazaki's photography workshop, profiled in this magazine last December, highlight the experiences of adults in Japan. But how about the kids we raise and teach? I thought I would let the kids speak for themselves:





Max Maruyama



“Being a “Hafu” in Japan means to never become or never to be recognised as Japanese, and to deal with hafu stereotypes and misconceptions of the hafu community.”

— Max Maruyama, Australia/Japan, 23, student



Barbara Uemura

“I’m hafu and my daughters are 1/4... but Ai growing up in Japan could only speak English, since she was born in America. Ai looked Japanese so when she started *yochien* (kindergarten), she didn’t know Japanese and the *yochien* girls wouldn’t play with her because she didn’t answer them in Japanese when spoken to. She didn’t know what they were talking about, so she had a hard time and I couldn’t help her with studies, so her test scores were very low from elementary school to junior high school. But, she was ok. Always happy and super genki!

Sachi was born in Kagoshima so she could speak Japanese from the beginning. But she looked *hafu*. She was always smiling, so she got along well in Japan and everyone wanted to be her friend because she was so cute. Her studies were average, but she didn’t want to speak English for a long time. Although she knew English, she was embarrassed when she did speak English. All the Japanese kids would make a big deal.”

— Barbara Uemura, US/Japan/Italy and daughters Ai and Sachi. Ai is a recording artist (Big Hero 6 theme song) and Sachi is a photographer and children’s clothing designer.





Yuji

“Lots of people say ‘gaijin’ or ‘ha-fu’ to me but I don’t really care now. I used to care though. When I was in *hoikuen* (daycare), I hated being ‘strange’ and I just wanted to be normal. But now I think being different is good. And speaking two languages is cool.”

— Yuji, 12, UK/Japan

Reina Kittaka

“I know that it used to bother my mum when people called us ‘hafu’ when we were little, but it doesn’t offend me because it isn’t really used in a derogatory way. Now if it was ‘gaijin’, I’d be upset. If people wanted to tease me at school, they would use *gaijin*. But *hafu*, on the other hand, tends to be associated with *kawaii* (cute). So for me, I guess it depends in what context the term is being used. When I was in elementary school, for a few years I did feel self-conscious about looking different from my Japanese classmates and speaking English. I used to secretly wish I had black hair. But lots of kids want to look different from how they are. It isn’t just a *hafu* kid thing. When you’re a kid, it’s difficult to realize what a privilege it is to learn two languages, especially because you only start to realize the benefits when you’re a young adult. It becomes your identity and strength. I couldn’t be luckier.”

— Reina Kittaka, 20, New Zealand/Japanese, university student



Tsunagi



Naomi Matsuda

"I do have some bicultural friends who get upset about being called *hafu*, and I get that. But for me, it's just a word. It doesn't define me, so I don't let it bother me. I feel fortunate to have grown up with two cultures, two languages and probably a wider range of experiences than most people are exposed to. I also think that being a minority in Japan—if you can consider being *hafu* a 'minority'—has helped me develop empathy and respect for other people who are also 'different' from the majority in some way.

— Tsuyoshi Kittaka, 22, New Zealand/Japan, university student

Tsuyoshi Kittaka

"I don't like it the older I get, because people assume things about me like that I can speak or read or write in English perfectly because I am 'half', but I get tired of telling people that being half has nothing to do with your ability to read or write or understand the culture that one of your parents comes from. I tell them I was born, raised and schooled in Japan, in Japanese schools, and speak, read and write Japanese as my main language and that I have no interest in learning English or speaking English. When I tell them that, they are often disappointed with me. I say I only speak English to my mother and not everyone else, especially if they are able to speak Japanese. The problem is people have a natural curiosity about me being 'half' and constantly try to practice their English or American cultural understanding with me and end up frustrated when I have no idea what they are saying to me. For this reason I have to go out of my way to prove my *Japaneseness* with everyone. Actually, I've started becoming a recluse at school and only choose friends who I can identify with (kids from foreign families mostly). In America, I get tired of people expecting me to act like an American. This is not natural for me. One thing is being expected to smile all of the time or people assume I am depressed or unhappy. I want people to know me for who I am not what they think I should be. I am by nature an introvert who is shy initially but will warm up to people on a one to one basis."

— Naomi Matsuda, 13, US/Japan



Lina

“I don’t really think about it but I think other people think about it. If I lived in a big city, people probably wouldn’t think about it so much. Sometimes I wish I looked the same as everyone else. Other times I think about what I can do or have because I’m a *hafu*, and I’m glad. But most of the time I’m not thinking about it.”

— Lina, 13, Australia/Japan



“Hello. My name is Kaito Nakamichi. I am half Australian and Japanese, and live in Japan. My education has been at a Japanese elementary school and the international class of a Japanese JHS. I am now in yr 10. I have been bullied due to my "unusual" identity by people around me. People in Japan like to be the same as the people around them. Therefore, if they see somebody who is unusual, they like to pick on them. (This does not account for every single Japanese person, however, from my perspective and experience, these people exist in almost every community in this country.) Very small things that put an emphasis on my "unusual" identity, such as teachers asking me for the answer to a question in English class, can easily trigger the people around me to suddenly look at me as a "different" person. (Of course, many people are not able to achieve an English level to the extent of fluency I have at this year level.) Even though I may be different from everybody else does not mean that I can deceive them or they could deceive me. Hence, my wish to every teacher is to treat "half" as they treat other Japanese students. I believe that this will help half people, but should not be limited to half people, since everybody is unique, and putting an emphasis on a single person is not a plausible action to me.”

— Kaito Nakamichi, Australia/Japan, student

Malyn Nakamichi

"Being a half, there are positives and negatives. I am a half Australian and Japanese, and speak both English and Japanese. Being a half, people say I'm pretty and mostly they are jealous of me. On the other hand, when I go on the train, people stare at me, and talk about me in front of me. Even when I go to school some people say I'm foreign, and discriminate against me. I feel sad when I hear or look at people saying such things. Even sometimes I get stressed and wish I had a normal family. Although I get stressed sometimes about people talking about me, and how I look different compared to normal Japanese people, I also feel happy because I'm one of the people in the country that look different, and half is a very special thing to be."

— Malyn, 13, Australia/Japan

Kaito Nakamichi



Linden

"Being Hafu in Japan doesn't always mean you stick out. Think about how many people there are in Japan. Then, think about how many hafu people there are in Japan. Think that you are special because there are not so many hafus in Japan, but being special in your own way doesn't mean you will stick out. If you do stick out, be glad that you are special."

— Linden, 10, UK/Japan



“My name is Lena and I’m 15 years old. I’m a normal teenage girl and I’m a mixed race of Asian and white. I was born in my mother’s country New Zealand, and raised in my father’s, Japan. Yes, I am a “*hafu*”. When you’re born mixed race, some things that are normal to you are very different to others. For example, being bilingual is very interesting to those who are not. Growing up in Japan, I have been asked the same thing over and over again, “Say something in English!” It gets tiring because you have to think of a sentence easy enough for you to translate to Japanese because 99/100 they’ll definitely ask you “What does that mean?” I usually just introduce myself because that’s easy to translate, but after a while I just give up and say something random and then translate it to something nice. It is the same here in New Zealand where I chose to go to high school. People ask me to speak Japanese so I do the same and introduce myself. Some dumb kids would even ask me to speak Chinese because they think that’s the only country in Asia! Also being bilingual, I did really well in English tests. In junior high school, about 90% of my English tests were 100/100 because I could speak English. Another difference is what I look like. When I was younger, I was teased in school for looking foreign. Kids would say to me that I didn’t belong in Japan or I should go back to New Zealand and never come back TO MY OWN COUNTRY. They also called me names such as “*gaikotsu jin*” which means skeleton person. They called me this because the sound is close to “*gaikoku jin*” which means foreigner. EVEN THOUGH I LIVE IN JAPAN. I didn’t like it. This wasn’t just in school. When I’m walking down the street some kids would shout “Hello!!” to me in English because they think I can’t speak Japanese. Sometimes I talk back to them in Japanese and they’ll be surprised, which is quite funny but otherwise I just ignore them. In shops people sometimes speak to me in English. I think this happens to a lot of Japanese citizens from foreign countries and I find it hard to decide whether to go with it or tell them I could speak Japanese. Most of the time I just go with it. Although some people still talk to me in English on the streets or in shops, I don’t get teased anymore and life is going fine. Through it all I love being a “*hafu*” and if I could choose who I can be in my next life I’ll want to be a “*hafu*” again.”

— Lena, 15, New Zealand/Japan





Amy



“I am a *hafu*. Everybody sees me as one. They call me a *Hafu*. Although many people think that the word *Hafu* means half and is a mean word, to me the word *Hafu* isn't a bad one. The fact that they sell *hafu* makeup proves this. *Hafu* talents and models are very popular in Japan. However, it is disturbing when people expect you to be dumb and happy all the time because you look one of them. A *Hafu*. The definition of *hafu* probably means something like beautiful, sweet, tall, but dumb, uneducated and happy, very happy. The thing I find most *hafu-ish* about me though, is me thinking there is always an escape, always another better place waiting for me. That this isn't all there is. Especially when I was in elementary school and I didn't have many friends. The fact that I had friends in another country always saved me.

(However when I went to my mother's home country - the 'better' place - I realized it wasn't that different in the ways that I wanted. Girls are still girls wherever you go! That's when I realized I was depending on the other place to be much better than this one that I wasn't trying to make this one the better place.)

I think as a *hafu*, even though the word literally means half, we experience more. (Way more than anyone who treats us like idiots.) To me that is something I secretly think when anyone dares to be unkind.”

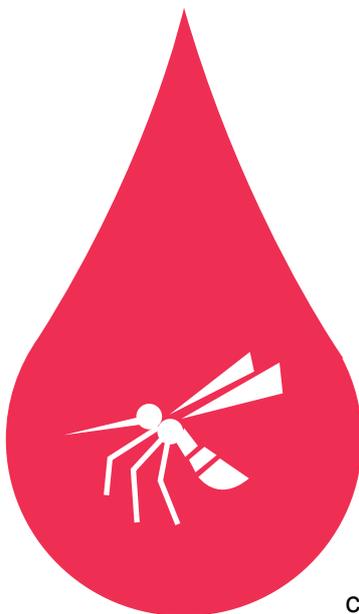
— Amy, 17, New Zealand/Japan

Photos: Shantel Dickerson

**STARVE A
MOSQUITO:
DONATE
BLOOD**

**WEST TOKYO
JETS STEPPING
UP FOR DISASTER
PREPAREDNESS**

Chad Grover (Tokyo)



“There is currently a 70% chance that a magnitude-7 earthquake will hit directly beneath the Greater Tokyo area within the next 30 years. It could happen today, or even tomorrow. What are you willing to do to protect the ones you care about?”

As a Western Tokyo JET living in the suburbs, part of my job entails completing a mandatory earthquake and disaster course every September. Last year, as part of the training, the staff screened a film none of us had ever seen before. The movie showcased footage from the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and subsequent tsunami, as well as the Great Hanshin earthquake of 1995. As the haunting images faded to black, a question was posed:

“WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO TO PROTECT THE ONES YOU CARE ABOUT?”

My senior co-teacher and I went home that night, and began looking into disaster relief measures online. He noted that emergency services require suitable blood donors before, not after, such a crisis strikes. This is where the West Tokyo JETs communal blood donation project was born.

The Tachikawa Blood Donation Room is one of many clinics run by the Japanese Red Cross Society. Every weekend, workers march into the heart of Tachikawa Station with a megaphone in hand to recruit new donors. Upon entering the clinic, we were warmly greeted by the office staff who guided us through the registration process. Although there was an obvious language barrier, the clerks did their best accommodating us, clearing a place for us to sit and offering complementary

sugary beverages. When your name is called, you make your way to the on-site doctor’s office for further queries. A word of warning before donating blood: Japan imposes strict requirements on foreign residents (due to antiquated safety concerns) which may not apply in your home country.

After having a small amount of blood drawn to measure your suitability, you are given a beeper to alert you when your bed is ready. The nurse informed me that I am blood type O, currently the highest in-demand for Japan. Patrons may choose between donating 200 or 400ml of blood; however, the latter is often preferred, provided that the individual is cleared to do so. Each bed is equipped with a miniature LCD screen and a variety of channels to keep you distracted throughout the process. Once finished, donors are required to rest in the lobby for an additional thirty minutes before getting back on their feet, so make sure that you have an ample amount of time set aside. You will be given a small, gold token to exchange for a vending machine treat to aid in your recovery. After half an hour passes, you are given a personal donor card stating the next earliest date on which you may donate blood.

As of this month, the West Tokyo JETs have hosted two separate blood donation events, with a third projected for May this year. Each event featured new and familiar faces alike, willing to roll up their sleeves and give to people in need. If you are currently in a leadership role on JET, please consider starting a blood donation initiative within your community. There may come a time when your support is needed. It could happen today, or even tomorrow. What are you willing to do to protect the ones you care about?

Chad Grover is a fourth year ALT based in Tokyo. His hobbies include video games, professional wrestling, and getting told he looks like Seth Rogen a lot. You can ask him which brand of canned coffee he’s currently addicted to on Twitter @chadgrov



SPRING SNOW SPORTS

Peter Lennox (Hokkaido)

The trees are turning to green, birds are chirping, and you can breathe easily without your nostrils freezing together. Spring has finally come! Time to clean your skis and board, put away your winter jacket and prepare for another season of Japan's great outdoors sans frostbite!

Wait, wait, wait...slow down there cowpoke.

It might be March, and in the south sakura might be ready to bloom, but Hokkaido's highest ski fields are open until Golden Week and this is *Kamui Mintara*, The Playground of the Gods! If you're in Honshu, you may have missed the best of the powder but there is still some mighty fine spring riding to be had. Kurodake and Asahidake both offer backcountry runs with gondola access, and for much less than what you'd pay

at the bigger resorts.

Kurodake, located in the Kamikawa district at the Sounkyo Onsen resort, is open into Golden week and has plenty of areas to have fun ducking in and out of trees. Once I even had a big white hare running next to me like he was about to miss tea time! Two of the best onsen here are Choyotei and Hotel Taisetsu; they sport some of the finest views you can find for less than a sen! After you've exhausted yourself on the mountain and had a good soak, go check out Beer Grill Canyon restaurant for some pretty decent food, including my favourite, the deer meat stroganoff. If you make it here before March 18 you can even catch the tail end of the *Hyobaku Matsuri* which has some really beautiful ice castles and fireworks displays!

Asahidake, located near Higashikawa,

next to Asahikawa, is one of my favourite mountains. There are massive powder runs here in January and February, but even in April you can have some epic days. My first time riding real powder was years ago here in April. After you finish your day of riding head over to the Bearmonte Hotel for a good soak and then into Higashikawa. This is one of Hokkaido's only growing towns and has some amazing food and coffee. Pizza-
tei has some of the best stone oven cooked pizza you will find in Hokkaido for a reasonable price and then you can head over to Roaster Coaster for some in house roasted coffee and talk it up with the owner, Karl.

If you have the skill and the gear you can also still find some good snowshoeing, climbing and backcountry runs. Mt. Shokanbetsu near the Japan Sea has a beautiful hut. The road gets plowed around golden week. You can stay at the hut and climb the mountain, riding the entire way down if you feel like it. Mt. Unabetsu, near Shiretoko, is a mountain you can only climb in winter and around March the road is plowed to the start of the hike. There are no markers and you'll need a GPS tracker or topo map to do it without getting lost, but the views of Shiretoko are breathtaking.

Backcountry is where things get tricky, however. Kurodake and Asahidake are generally safe but when you're out on mountains like Unabetsu, Tokachi, and Furano you must take care. There's no one there to check conditions and springtime is one of the most dangerous times to be out. Even if you're a pro, you can be caught in a life and death situation like my friend Toby, the first owner of Roaster Coaster. He was a king in his element and was still caught in an avalanche where he sadly he lost his life. Have fun out there, but be safe and smart. Use your knowledge to mitigate the risk and if you don't have that knowledge go with someone who does, and if you don't know someone who does, go elsewhere.

Peter Lennox is a 10th year ALT and an aspiring mountain man, currently living in Kitami, Hokkaido. Go get a little lost with him as he wanders through this Kamui Mintara.

His Instagram is [lennoxpeter](#)

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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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