

AJET CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

APRIL
2019



Back in Black — A Look at One Designer's Monochromatic Fashion Rebellion

Small Space, Lots of Potential — Making the Most of your Japanese Kitchen

Staying Sane During Deskwarming Season — How One ALT Copes

Playable Nostalgia — Insights Into The World of Video Game Remakes and Remasters

Hop, Jive, and All That Jazz — A Peek at the Swing Dance Scene in Ikebukuro



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

Calling all artists!

*Want to get your artwork an
audience in Japan?*

2019



submissions open

C the art issue for 2019

c-theartissue.tumblr.com



**CHANGE THE WORLD
THROUGH LANGUAGE
AND LEARNING.**

Master of Arts in TESOL

APPLY NOW usfca.edu/tesol



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
School of Education

CREDITS

HEAD EDITOR

Lauren Hill

ASSITANT EDITOR

Angela Hinck

SECTION EDITORS

Peyton Goodman
Tresha Barrett
Sarah White
Laura Pollacco
Tayla-Paige van Sittert
Amanda Muller
Alice Ridley
Nikkita Kent
Amy Lee
Annelise Wilp

HEAD OF DESIGN &

LAYOUT

Ashley Hirasuna

ASSISTANT DESIGNERS

Philippa Lawrie
Rhema Baquero

COVER PHOTO

Colette English

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PHOTO

Lauren Hill

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

Colette English
Lauren Hill
Nick Moulds
Ashley Hirasuna
Rhema Baquero

CONTRIBUTORS

Tresha Barrett
Christina Bellevue
Meghana Brandl
Kelly Carr
Charles Chi
Ella Donaldson
Max Friesen
Colin Gamm
Benjamin Holschuh
Dylan Jekels
Rashaad Jorden
Aidan Koch
Damien Levi

Jennifer Madden
Amanda Muller
Sarah Oeste
Laura Pollacco
Alice Ridley
Rebecca Ruth
Yuta Sakamoto
Angela Shrader
Tayler Skultety
Talisha Vernon
Linka Wade
Robyn Ward
Sarah White

HEAD WEB EDITOR

Dylan Brain

ASSITANT WEB EDITOR

Alex Furukawa

SOCIAL MEDIA

Celine Bennett

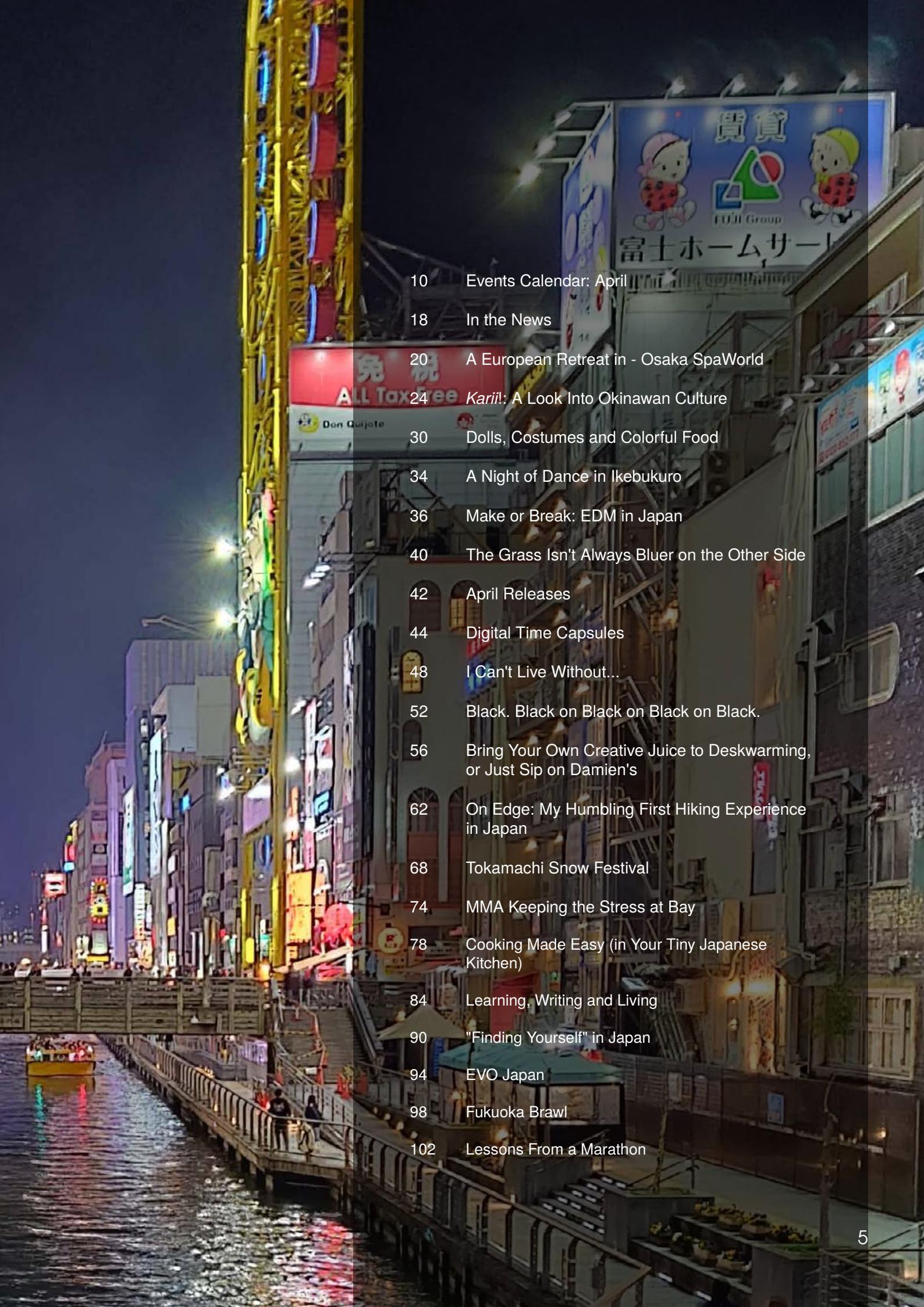
COPY EDITOR

Emily Riley

GENERAL SECTION EDITOR

Tayler Skultety
Gavin Au-Yeung

This magazine contains original photos used with permission, as well as free-use images. All included photos are property of the author unless otherwise specified. If you are the owner of an image featured in this publication believed to be used without permission, please contact the Head of Graphic Design and Layout, Ashley Hirasuna, at ashley.hirasuna@ajet.net. This edition, and all past editions of AJET CONNECT, can be found online at <http://ajet.net/ajet-connect/magazine-issues/>. Read CONNECT online and follow us on ISSUU.



- 10 Events Calendar: April
- 18 In the News
- 20 A European Retreat in - Osaka SpaWorld
- 24 *Kari!*: A Look Into Okinawan Culture
- 30 Dolls, Costumes and Colorful Food
- 34 A Night of Dance in Ikebukuro
- 36 Make or Break: EDM in Japan
- 40 The Grass Isn't Always Bluer on the Other Side
- 42 April Releases
- 44 Digital Time Capsules
- 48 I Can't Live Without...
- 52 Black. Black on Black on Black on Black.
- 56 Bring Your Own Creative Juice to Deskwarming, or Just Sip on Damien's
- 62 On Edge: My Humbling First Hiking Experience in Japan
- 68 Tokamachi Snow Festival
- 74 MMA Keeping the Stress at Bay
- 78 Cooking Made Easy (in Your Tiny Japanese Kitchen)
- 84 Learning, Writing and Living
- 90 "Finding Yourself" in Japan
- 94 EVO Japan
- 98 Fukuoka Brawl
- 102 Lessons From a Marathon

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy New (School) Year!

For 1st and 5th year JETs alike, April is full of all kinds of newness - new teachers and other colleagues, new students, new classes and textbooks. There's a lot to get to grips with, and while that can be a challenge, it's often an exciting one! Plus, what better way to hit the reset button than going from zero classes a week right back to 16+?

In the middle of all this month's change, don't forget to take a break and sit down with Connect's April issue. The extra long Golden Week is just round the corner, and we've lots of inspiration if you're still working out how to spend the once in a lifetime 10 day break. Flick through to discover contributors' experiences of Osaka Spa World, the unique Japanese-but-not culture of Okinawa, the Fukuoka-based e-sports brawl that was EVO Japan 2019, and an adapted version of the Tokamachi Snow Festival that goes to show smaller is not always less of a good time.

Of course, desk warming doesn't always go away the second students are back on campus. If your schedule takes a bit of persuasion to get going, why not use the extra downtime to get creative? This month, our arts section follows one ALT's daily song review challenge.

On top of that, don't forget to check out our regular monthly features to stay in the know - events, news, apartment-friendly recipes, beauty essentials, and the latest entertainment releases - there's really something for everyone!

Enjoy!

Lauren Hill
Head Editor
3rd Year Tokyo ALT



Photo: Nick Moulds



NEWS AND EVENTS

A dark, moody photograph of a lush green forest. In the foreground, there are several small trees and bushes. A paved path or walkway leads through the forest, visible in the middle ground. The overall atmosphere is dense and natural.

NEWS EDITOR

connect.news@ajet.net

Tresha Barrett

EVENTS EDITOR

connect.events@ajet.net

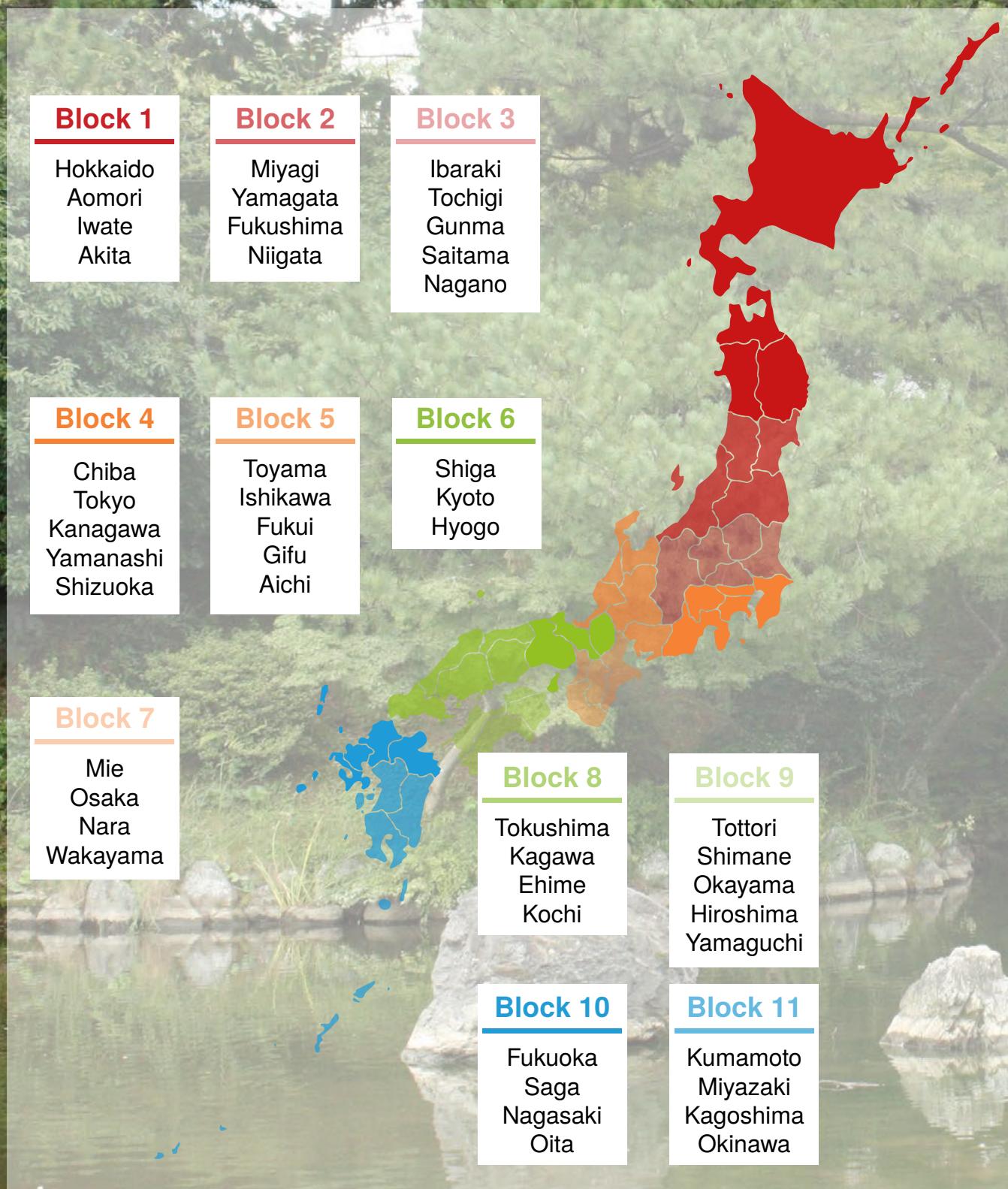
Peyton Goodman

Photo: Rhema Baquero



Events Calendar:

April 2019





Block 1

32nd Spring Ichiban Date Half Marathon

14 April

Date City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kagura Dance Day

14 April

Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Niseko Mountain Range Skiing Walk

14 April

Niseko Town, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hirosaki Cherry Blossom Festival 2019

20 April - 06 May

Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 15th Yadoricho Tokutanjo Spring Festival

28 April

Yahaba Town, Iwate Prefecture

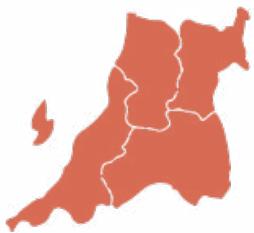
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Akita Ramen Festa 2019

30 April - 06 May

Akita City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 2

Natori Spring Festival 2019

13 April

Natori City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tsuruoka Sakura Festival

Hanami Tea Party

16 April - 17 April

Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kamiyama Castle SAKURA Concert

20 April

Shonai Town, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kashiyama Park Sakura Festival

20 April - 21 April

Kaminoyama City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

The 77th Bunsui Sakura Matsuri Oiran Dochu (Oiran Parade) 2019

21 April

Tsubame City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

ARABAKI ROCK FEST.19

27 April - 28 April

Kawasaki Town, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Fukushima Ramen Show 2019

27 April - 06 May

Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Sendai Ramen Festa 2019

02 May - 06 May

Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Akagi Nanmen Senbonzakura Festival

06 April - 21 April

Maebashi City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Ramen Festival in Oyama 2019

06 April - 14 April

Oyama City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Tulip Festival

06 April - 07 April

Osusu City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

The 30th Bando City Furusato Sashima Castle Festival

07 April

Bando City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)





Block 4

The 10th Higashi Azumacho Suisen Festival 13 April Higashiazuma Town, Gunma Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	Tanada Camp 2019 in Spring 13 April - 14 April Ueda City, Nagano Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	Hitachi Oktoberfest 2019 24 April - 05 May Hitachi City, Ibaraki Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	Nagato Fuji Festival 2019 27 April - 06 May Nagasu Town, Saitama Prefecture Website in Japanese only	Togyo 1,000 Samurai Procession 18 May Nikko City, Tochigi Prefecture Website in English and Japanese
--	---	---	--	--

Shingen Public Festival 05 April - 07 April Kofu City, Yamanashi Prefecture Website in Japanese only	Shizuoka Matsuri 2019 05 April - 07 April Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	Cherry Blossom Festival by Hananomi-en 06 April - 07 April Narashino City, Chiba Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	GO OUT JAMBOREE 2019 12 April - 14 April Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	The 7th Japanese Sake Tasting 2019 in Nihonbashi Area 13 April Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture Website in English and Japanese
Fuji Shibazakura Festival 13 April - 26 May Fujikawaguchiko Town, Yamanashi Prefecture				

Website in English and Japanese	Yoyogi Park Wanwan Carnival 2019 13 April - 14 April Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	CONNECT KABUKICHO MUSIC FESTIVAL 2019 20 April Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	HAISAI FESTA 2019 01 May - 05 May Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	EDC JAPAN 2019 11 May - 12 May Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture Website in English and Japanese
			ECOPA GOURMET STADIUM 2019 11 May - 12 May Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture Website in English and Japanese	





Block 5

Takaoka Sakura Festival

01 April - 14 April

Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kasugai Gourmet Championship 2019

06 April - 07 April

Kasugai City, Aichi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Daisenji Sakura Festival

13 April - 14 April

Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Echizen Pottery Village Cherry Blossom Festival

13 April - 14 April

Echizen-chō, Fukui Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Takayama Festival in Spring (Sanno Festival)

14 April - 15 April

Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Sakura Festival in Tochio-Onsen

2019

23 April - 06 May

Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

All Japan Umaimono Matsuri

2019

27 April - 06 May

Nagakute City, Aichi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 6

Miyako Odori

01 April - 27 April

Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kyo Odori

01 April - 16 April

Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Minamiyama King's Spring Festival.

04 April

Hino Town, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Koshien Ramen Matsuri

12 April - 21 April

Nishinomiya City, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hikiyama Festival

13 April - 16 April

Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture

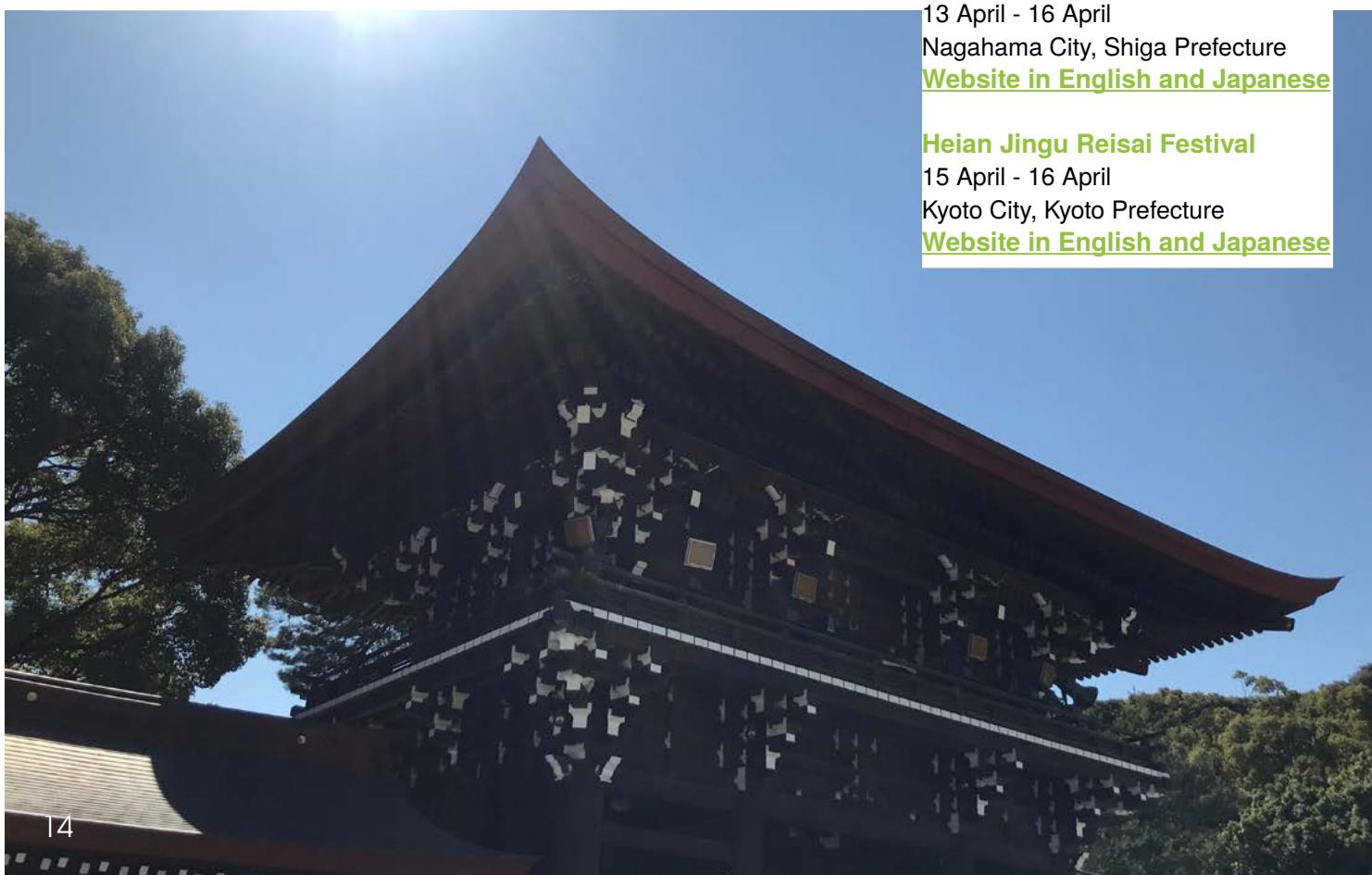
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Heian Jingu Reisai Festival

15 April - 16 April

Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)





Block 7

Jiuhua Park Sakura Festival

01 April - 17 April
Kuwana City, Mie Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kimigano Dam Park Sakura Festival

07 April
Tsu City, Mie Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Busshoe Ceremony

08 April
Nara City, Nara Prefecture
[Website in English only](#)

Osaka Mint Bureau Cherry Blossom Viewing

09 April - 15 April
Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture
[Website in English only](#)

Mita Ki Sakura Festival

13 April - 14 April
Tsu City, Mie Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Spring Botanical Art Class

20 April - 21 April
Iwade City, Wakayama Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

LOHAS FESTA BANPAKU 2019

26 April - 01 May
Suita City, Osaka Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Iga Ueno NINJA Festa

27 April - 06 May
Iga City, Mie Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Ham Bierfesta in Spring

27 April - 30 April
Iga City, Mie Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

RoboCup Junior Japan Open

2019 Wakayama
28 April - 29 April
Wakayama City, Wakayama Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 14th Wakayama Magical Music Tour

28 April
Wakayama City, Wakayama Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Kemari Festival

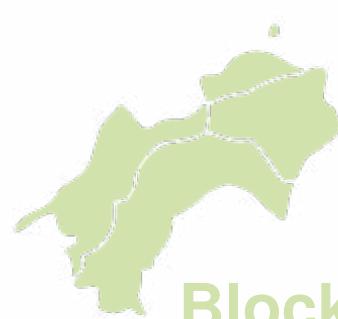
29 April
Nara City, Nara Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Shirukake Festival

05 May
Nara City, Nara Prefecture
[Website in English only](#)

Manyo Gagaku Festival

05 May
Nara City, Nara Prefecture
[Website in English only](#)



Block 8

Marugame Castle Sakura Festival

23 March - 14 April
Marugame City, Kagawa Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

The 16th Katsuura Sakura Festival

25 March - 07 April
Katsuura-gun, Tokushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Suwa Park Cherry Blossom Festival

27 March - 07 April
Miyoshi City, Tokushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Iwaki Cherry Blossom Festival

01 April - 14 April
Ochi Town, Ehime Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Tosa food 1 Grand Prix 2019

06 April - 07 April
Nankoku City, Kochi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Okoyama Cherry Blossom Festival 2019

06 April - 07 April
Nankoku City, Kochi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 36th Flower Festival

13 April - 14 April
Iyo City, Ehime Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Hana Haru Festival

20 April - 21 April
Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)



Block 9

2019 Okayama Sakura Carnival

29 March - 07 April
Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

2019 Yonago Cherry Blossom Festival

29 March - 07 April
Yonago city, Tottori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

2019 Tsuyama Sakura Festival

29 March - 14 April
Tsuyama City, Okayama Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Matsue Mushi Gyoretsu Warrior Parade 2019

06 April
Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

The 41st Cherry Blossoms Sakura Cup Contest Sumo Tournament

21 April
Kurayoshi City, Tottori Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Kintaikyo Bridge Festival

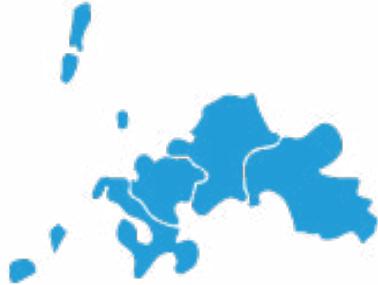
29 April
Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Hiroshima Flower Festival

03 May - 05 May
Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Shinkawa Market Festival

03 May - 05 May
Ube City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)



Block 10

BEPPU HATTO HOT SPRING FESTIVAL 2019

01 April - 07 April
Beppu City, Oita Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Minami-Shimabara Sakura Festivals

06 April - 07 April
Shimabara City, Nagasaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

Nagasaki Tall Ship Festival

18 April - 22 April
Nagasaki City, Nagasaki Prefecture
[Website in English only](#)

TAKASU KAGURA (SHINTO THEATRICAL DANCE)

26 April
Fukuoka city, Fukuoka prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

ARITA CERAMICS BAZAAR

29 April - 05 May
Arita Town, Saga Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Hakata Dontaku Festival

03 May - 04 May
Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Block 11

[Yoshino Park Sakura Festival](#)

23 March - 07 April
Kagoshima City, Kagoshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

[Nabegataki Falls Light-up Show](#)

29 March - 03 April
Oguni Town, Kumamoto Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

[Nobeoka Daishi Festival](#)

12 April - 13 April
Nobeoka City, Miyazaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

[Shimazake Festa 2019](#)

13 April - 14 April
Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

[Mikasho Shrine Spring Festival](#)

21 April
Gokase Town, Miyazaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

[GREAT EARTH 8th Miyazaki Nichinan Coast Ride](#)

21 April
Miyazaki City, Miyazaki Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

[2019 Fukiagehama sand festival SAND & FLOWER Festa in Minami Satsuma](#)

01 May - 26 May
Minamisatsuma City, Kagoshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

[Hina Jomatsuri](#)

12 May
Akune City, Kagoshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

[The 31st South Japan Cross Country Tournament](#)

12 May
Kanaya City, Kagoshima Prefecture
[Website in Japanese only](#)

In The News

April 2019

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)



JAPANESE OLYMPIC COMMITTEE CHIEF STEPS DOWN AMID CORRUPTION SCANDAL

The president of the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) has stated that he will step down amid allegations of corruption pertaining to Tokyo's successful bid to host the 2020 Games.

Tsunekazu Takeda, 71, was placed under investigation by French prosecutors for allegedly using 230 million yen (\$2 million) to secure Tokyo's winning bid, beating Madrid and Istanbul.

Since the allegations of bribery came to light, Takeda, who was the head of the 2020 bid committee, has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, and stated at a recent news conference that he will resign from the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

"I am extremely sorry for causing the trouble for the public," Takeda said. "For the future of the JOC, it is appropriate for me to leave and have a new young leader, who will shoulder the next generation, take over and pave [the] way for the new era."

"I don't believe I've done anything illegal," he added in defense of his decision of not seeking an election. "It pains me to have created such a fuss, but I believe it is my responsibility to serve out the rest of my term."

Takeda's tenure ends in June.

The French authorities' investigation of corruption in the bidding and voting process has been going on for years, and encompasses the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro as well as the upcoming Tokyo Games.

For the 2020 Olympics, the investigation centers on the total payment of 230 million yen by Tokyo's bid committee in July and October 2013 to Black Tidings, a Singaporean company linked to Papa Massata Diack, a Senegalese marketing executive and the son of Lamine Diack, a former head of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). The payment to Black Tidings is believed to have been a means of winning support from African countries.

The sum also includes money channeled to the elder Diack, who was an influential member of the IOC at the time of the bid for the 2020 Games.

According to Takeda, however, the payments were for legitimate consultancy work, a justification which was agreed upon by a JOC panel that commissioned their own independent investigation into the allegations back in 2016.

The investigation, which took only four months to complete before Takeda was exonerated, has been widely criticized for its lack of credibility — not only because of the brevity of the investigation but also because the officials were unable to question the Diacks, the administrator of the Singaporean company, or peruse official committee documents, since they had been destroyed after Tokyo was selected.

Although many in Japan would like to have the negative light of the scandal removed from the upcoming Games, the likelihood of that happening seems improbable and some people are quite dubious as Takeda's resignation and denial of any wrongdoing does not help the situation.

"Those working for the Games including the IOC are hoping to make a fresh start with a clean image by renewing the board. And yet, he is resigning without giving us any explanation to clear the doubt about his involvement. That will make it even more difficult to dispel our mistrust," said

Mitsuhige Tsuruno, an independent media consultant and commentator.

"Up to now, we don't know what he really knows, and what he does not know. We've been left in the dark, and still remain so," he added.

Former prosecutor Nobuo Gohara, who runs his own law firm, has also been critical of how the scandal is being handled.



SLIPPER THIEF FOUND WITH 300 PAIRS AT RESIDENCE

A 38-year-old man from Ichikawa City, Chiba, was arrested in January after being allegedly caught on a security camera stealing six pairs of slippers from a kindergarten in Matsudo City.

This led Chiba Prefectural Police to later conduct a search of the man's home, and around 300 pairs of slippers were found.

After further investigation, police ascertained that the alleged slipper burglar, Norihisa Mitsusawa, began his footwear thievery in October 2018 at the kindergarten in Matsudo, and then directed his attention to other locations across the country, including Tokyo and western Japan.

Mitsusawa, whose occupation is not known, has so far been served arrest warrants in four cases. The latest one is the purported theft of 29 slippers worth about 12,000 yen from three elementary schools in Kagoshima, Yamaguchi and Shizuoka prefectures last December.

The other three cases, which include the one in Matsudo, claim that a total of 75 slippers from 12 elementary schools and kindergartens in Chiba and Osaka were stolen by Mitsusawa.

As the investigation continues, Mitsusawa maintains that he is innocent of the allegations against him.

Source:
<https://bit.ly/2HwdzWm>
Image Source:
<https://bit.ly/2HwdzWm>

"What's important is that his resignation alone will never clear the doubt over the Tokyo's bid for the Games," he wrote on his blog. "The fundamental problem is 'inaction' on the part of the Japanese government and the JOC."

Source:
<https://wapo.st/2Wbexuo>
Photo source:
<https://wapo.st/2Wbexuo>



SUPREME COURT: OWNERS OF TV-CAPABLE CELLPHONES MUST PAY NHK

The Supreme Court has ruled that a subscription fee to Japan's public broadcaster, NHK, is now warranted for television-capable cellphones.

According to the Japanese Broadcast Law, anyone who has a TV signal receiver has to sign a contract with NHK. And in two recent cases, Presiding Judge Toshimitsu Yamasaki ruled that the broadcast law applies to individuals who own a cellphone with a TV function.

In both cases, the plaintiffs were denied the possibility of an appeal.

Last year the Tokyo High Court overturned a previous ruling made by the Saitama District Court, which had determined that a plaintiff who did not possess a TV was not obliged to pay the subscription fee because having a cellphone did not equate to having a TV signal receiver.

The Tokyo High Court, however, ascertained that a cellphone with a TV function is equivalent to installing a TV receiver - and those who own such devices should be treated the same as those who own TVs.

NHK, decidedly pleased with the ruling, issued a statement commending the finding as "reasonable."

Source:
<https://bit.ly/2F0oaQG>
Image Source:
<https://bit.ly/2F0oaQG>

A European Retreat in Osaka- SpaWorld

Rebecca Ruth (Hyogo)



There's a magical place in Osaka, a fantasy world of whimsy and wonder. I'm totally serious: Spa World is fabulous.

The first thing that you see when you reach Spa World is the Grecian fountain outside. It shows masculine figures having a picturesque frolic in the water. It really sets the tone for the adventure you're about to have.

On March 9th, AJET Block 6 made a trip over to Osaka. JETs from Hyogo, Kyoto, and Shiga met in the lobby near the statues of improbably muscular men. Inside the lobby, we bought entrance tickets from a machine and then received our wristbands that would track any purchases we made inside. After stashing our shoes in a locker, men and women separated.

There are two zones for Spa World; European and Asian. They both feature art, architecture, baths, and spa treatments from multiple cultures in the regions that they represent. Access changes on a monthly basis because they separate men and women. In March, the ladies were able to go to the European zone.

Both zones are wonderlands of fantasy, art, and delight. Therefore, you really ought to go to Spa World twice for the full experience.

In the European zone, we took a dip in the individual barrel baths, enjoying the hot water jets. Eerily realistic wolves watched us from atop a wooden cabin. Next was a short stop in the Finnish sauna, where you can watch or ignore the TV as you sink your toes into the cushions that cover the wooden plank floor.

After that, we went to a stone Grecian section and enjoyed the bath of herbal water and compared which scents we could detect. We picked up on mint, lavender, and other herbs, but no one smelled the pinch of rosemary. Right next to that, there was a special fruit-scented bath. The fruit scent changes every month, which means there's always a new sensory experience.

In that room, there's a door that looks like a

service entrance. I've been to Spa World four times before and always assumed it was off-limits. But the bravest of our group strode in and revealed that this was a secret chamber where we could take a mud bath. The mud was smooth and rich and scented with herbs. After the steamy heat of the herbal baths, the mud was a chilly relief. We were so soft after we washed the mud off.

At that point, we had gone to perhaps a fifth of the baths available in the European section. I don't think there's space to go into detail about everything, but I'll say that a definite highlight is standing underneath the powerful waterfall in the open-air bath. You can exfoliate in the salt baths, lay out in the blue-lit grotto, and if you're really brave you can step into the golden tub of cold water before you leave the baths. If you're tacky like me, you can take the time to lean against the wall and copy the poses of the beautiful Roman statues in the atrium.

But after that, it's a rush to get down to the third floor and make appointments for massages and spa treatments. My favorite massage parlor had a great deal on an hour-long full body massage, so two of us took those appointments. Others spent more time in the baths, got facials, or ventured to put their feet into the blue-lit foot bath full of tiny silver fish who cordially visit and nibble the dead skin between your toes. I'll admit that their feet were indeed very soft afterward, but fish are scary.

There are multiple restaurants inside Spa World, which is very good because we were not ready to leave by lunchtime. We had Chinese food. We were severely tempted by the ice cream and Dippin' Dots stands, but we were just too full. The last thing we did together was take a group photo, posed against the golden railing in our pink spa pajamas.

Rebecca Ruth is currently a 4th year JET in Hyogo Prefecture. She is also serves as the Block 6 Representative.

ARTS AND CULTURE



CULTURE EDITOR

connect.culture@ajet.net

Annelise Wilp

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." – Anais Nin

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

connect.entertainment@ajet.net

Sarah White

"There is nothing I enjoy more than sitting down with an old movie, game, or book and rediscovering why I love it so much."

STYLE AND BEAUTY EDITOR

connect.fashion@ajet.net

Laura Pollacco

ARTS EDITOR

connect.arts@ajet.net

Tayla-Paige van Sittert

"Don't you think that if we do what we love when we have the time, the day will feel more friendly..."

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



YAH

A LOOK INTO OKINAWA

Angela Shrac

Ryukyu
NAWAN CULTURE

der (Okinawa)



When I first received the email informing me of my placement, I was excited. *Okinawa!* It was a familiar name due to the U.S. military presence there, but that was the extent of my knowledge about Okinawa. I was sure the location would be great, though: right off the western coast of Japan...right? Suddenly questioning where Okinawa was, I ran to my computer and did a quick search and - wait - Okinawa was *where*?! I think I may have physically gasped as I learned very quickly that Okinawa was a subtropical island just about as far south as you could get from the mainland. A whopping 640 km (400 mi) southwest, in fact.

I dug further into the internet and realized that things would be much different than they were when I had studied in Kyoto and central *honshu*. In Okinawa, most of the houses and buildings were square, concrete, red-roofed, and painted in pastels or white; there weren't Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples on nearly every corner, and some people spoke a language called *uchinaaguchi*.... I was sure I wasn't getting the "true"

Japanese experience, but I tried to prepare for my new home with an open mind.

At the end of July, after our long, meeting-filled days in Tokyo, my first few steps on Okinawan soil were cooler than I expected — usually the summer temperatures are around 30 degrees Celsius (85 degrees Fahrenheit). As I made my way through the airport, I was greeted by beautiful orchids and the word *mensore*, or "welcome" in Okinawan. My supervisor and his coworker greeted me and the other ALT with a friendly Okinawan hello: "*hai sai!*" Many of the people greeting their ALTs were dressed in colorful *kariyushi*, or as many often call them, "the Hawaiian shirt of Japan." Everyone looked comfortable and laid-back while all of us new, foreign faces shuffled and sweated in our suits — far too formal (and hot!) for Okinawa. As we drove past palm trees on the expressway, I knew my experience in Okinawa would be especially unique. In true Okinawan fashion, my coworkers, neighbors, and the people in my community greeted me with open hearts, and in many ways, I was baptised by fire into

the Okinawan culture.

Obon season was quickly approaching, and I was invited to participate. While Obon in Okinawa shares many similarities to its counterpart in the mainland, it has many big differences too. The biggest are the dates and customs. This is largely due to the fact that, prior to being annexed by Japan, Okinawa was a sovereign country known as the *Ryukyu Kingdom*. It had deep connections to China and was heavily influenced by their traditions. Thus, similarly to some Chinese holidays, Obon in Okinawa is celebrated according to the lunar calendar. Typically it occurs later than it does in mainland Japan. This past year, the dates fell in September.

The most popular event during Obon in Okinawa is a unique dance known as *eisa*. During an *eisa* performance, a number of songs are played on the *sanshin* — the *shamisen*'s ancestor and king of Okinawan music — and sung in *uchinaaguchi*. (If you're used to the traditional music of mainland, you will notice very quickly the differences in Okinawan music!) Traditionally, men with *taiko* dance and drum to the song, while the women perform *te odori*, or hand dances. *Te odori* is often accompanied by props such as fans or small flags.

The costumes worn during *eisa* are unique to Okinawa and usually display vibrant yellows, reds, greens, and purples. Men wear white with colorful knotted head wraps, vests, sashes, and special leggings. Women wear short *yukata* with the sleeves tied up, polka dotted kerchiefs over their hair, and red and white flip flops. Groups travel around the towns and religious spots through the evening and late into the night as they dance, sing, and

celebrate their ancestors. It's an amazing display of community and celebration - with households often participating alongside the dancers and offering treats during the hot, humid nights of Obon.

Summer in Okinawa isn't just a time for Obon — it is also festival season! My first Okinawan festival was the *Ogimi Summer Matsuri*. There were people performing dressed as pigs, lots of matsuri food, and even the raffling of a single goat! During this festival, two people in a costume of a *shisa* (Okinawan lion dogs said to protect the home) performed a dance called *shishimai* to ward off evil spirits. Of course, this dance was accompanied by the playing of Ryukyu songs on the sanshin! At the end of the night, right before a display of fireworks, an eisa group performed. It's tradition to welcome the audience to join in for *kachashi*, a group dance done at the end of many celebratory events. I was pushed into a crowd of people chanting "iya sa sa!" and finger whistling as they waved their hands in the air to the music. While it seems daunting at first, singing and dancing along is one of my favorite parts of the festivals here!

Festival wear is also unique in Okinawa. While some girls do wear yukata to festivals, it is less common than on mainland where *kimono* and *yukata* abound. Many people wear casual clothes. When Okinawans do dress up, *hakama* and Okinawan *bingata* patterns are most popular for many occasions. *Bingata* are usually a bright color and often feature objects from nature such as leaves, flowers, and trees. The *ryusou* [is another kimono-like garb but often has brighter colors, lighter fabric, and larger sleeves to allow for cooling during the hot Okinawan summers. *Ryusou* are also often paired with

a hibiscus-shaped hat called *hanagasa*, although it is typically worn during performances of traditional Ryukyu *koten* (Ryukyu court music). Men and children are more often seen in lightweight *jinbei*, a short-sleeved garment worn with loose pants.

By now, it must be obvious that Okinawans love to gather and celebrate. While on mainland people might share sake with a cheerful] "kanpai!", here in Okinawa sake seems like it is nearly a foreign word. Ask for sake and you may get a quizzical look followed by "awamori?" That's because awamori is a distilled beverage unique to Okinawa, known for its high alcohol content and bitter taste. Some people cut it with *shikuwasa* juice, an Okinawan fruit that's comparable to the love child of a lime and an orange. Once you have your drink in hand, you'll commonly hear "karii!" when someone makes a toast although "kanpai" usually follows close behind.

There are many other differences in Okinawa, but you may not notice many until you live here. One of the

major differences, and best parts of life here, is the laidback lifestyle which includes the infamous "Okinawa time." People here generally dress a bit more casually to cope with the heat. It's also not uncommon for the buses to run a little late or for your friends and coworkers to show up to casual events a half hour late. While jobs hold you to a standard more like that of the mainland, the general way of life in Okinawa is a little slower and more relaxed. When you're living on a gorgeous island, it's nice to know that you can take in the scenery rather than rush to get to one place or the other.

Speaking of public transport, Okinawa lacks it. When friends and family think of Japan, they think of great, accessible public transport. Okinawa is such a small island that it doesn't seem to be as important. Everyone owns a car, and beyond the buses and taxis, the only other major transportation systems are ferries to outer islands and a single monorail line in Naha City. Although traffic can be bad, not relying on transportation gives you more opportunities to explore the more secluded areas of the



island, and the buses we do have suffice for any other needs. It's nice to not have to rely on public transportation — unlike in many parts of mainland — although we pay for it in our waistlines.

While I can't speak for everyone, my waistline definitely grew since coming here, and it didn't happen just because I have a car — the food in Okinawa is delicious! Okinawa's mix of cultures and agriculture makes for unique flavors that are hard to find anywhere else. Okinawans love (and hate) *goya*, a bitter melon that's extremely popular on the island. Walk through *Koukusai Dori* in Naha and you'll see goya juice, goya snacks, and even goya-flavored ice cream. Most natives seem to stick to goya *champuru*, which is a stir fry that features the fruit.

Another popular food is Okinawan soba. Unlike the soba on mainland, and to the surprise of many, the soba noodles here aren't buckwheat! Pork is usually the protein of choice, with *rafute* and *soki soba* being popular dishes that feature the meat. Goat is another particularly Okinawan dish, and while some people love goat *sashimi*, I haven't had the chance to try it. Finally, the food that makes all other prefectures cower in its wake (at least for those of us who dream of Mexican food while we're here): taco rice. Born and raised in Okinawa, taco rice began at King Taco in Kin (luckily for me just a 20-minute drive from my village).

Beyond just dishes, Okinawa also has many delicious fruits such as mangoes, pineapples, and guava. They also rely on many resources from the sea. *Mozuku*, a type of seaweed, and *umibudo*, sea grapes, are farmed from

Okinawa. The most well-known crops in Okinawa are the *benimo*, a purple sweet potato, and sugar cane. It's nearly impossible to go somewhere and not see a *benimo* tart or *kokuto*, a brown sugar candy.

All in all, Okinawa is a bit like Schrödinger's cat: it is and is not Japan all at the same time. The main language and the overarching culture are the same, but the architecture, the traditions, and even the history vary greatly from that of the mainland. While at first I thought these differences made Okinawa practically a different country, I realized it wasn't actually less "Japanese" as I continued to experience the culture.

Okinawa has been able to meld its own culture with that of the mainland to create a place unlike any other part of Japan. The differences and similarities between Okinawa and the rest of Japan go far beyond what can be seen by the naked eye, and they root themselves in the people — people who are kind, hardworking, and value a sense of community. Plus, with its beautiful beaches, hospitality, and relaxed lifestyle, it's no wonder so many Japanese enjoy vacationing here! So if you visit Okinawa, put on your coolest clothes, get your best "iya sa sa!" ready, and be prepared to be enraptured by some of the richest culture and kindest people in Japan.





Angela Shrader is a first year JET from West Virginia, USA. She currently teaches junior high school in a small village in northern Okinawa. She would like to thank her coworkers from her school and board of education for teaching her so much about Okinawan traditions.

But what is hinamatsuri?

Like most foreigners without kids, you've probably seen the dolls without knowing what they meant. Hinamatsuri, meaning dolls' or girls' day, is one of the five sacred seasonal Japanese celebrations.* Observed on March 3rd, it is a day to celebrate girls and pray for their prosperity, wellness, and happiness. During the 8th to 12th century, the third day of the third month was thought to be the day when people could transfer evil spirits into dolls and release them into rivers. These dolls, called *hinaneningyou*, were believed to have the power to control evil spirits and take away the bad luck of girls. Now this tradition has developed into displaying the dolls on platforms. Before a child's first hinamatsuri, grandparents will typically buy the emperor and empress dolls that the young girl will keep for life.



Being in Japan in early March, you've undoubtedly seen red carpeted platforms decorated with dolls. Dressed in Heian period (AD 794 to AD 1185) outfits, these dolls portraying an emperor, empress, attendants, and musicians can be found in malls and at local festivals all around the country. It's a sign that *hinamatsuri* is once again upon us.

However, according to my in-depth, intensive research (asking many teachers with children at my school), this traditional holiday is slowly falling to the wayside; at least when it comes to buying the full collection of dolls. Buying dolls can get expensive. A two-tier set, with only the emperor and empress dolls can cost around 70,000. A full five to seven-tier set, which includes court ladies, musicians, bodyguards, helpers, and a variety of other items could easily cost upwards of 250,000.

The tradition has changed from generation to generation, especially when it comes to smaller modern homes. In the past, families would make room for large platforms which would be passed down as an heirloom. Today, families are simply opting to buy the two-tier platform set or forgo buying dolls all together. In the past, parents would make sure not to leave the dolls up past March 3rd. According to old superstition, keeping the dolls up for an extra day will result in the daughter having a difficult time getting married. In modern times... people still take them down just in case.

Dolls, Costumes, and Colorfu *A Guide to C*

Talisha Vernon (Gunma)

So how do most foreigners celebrate hinamatsuri?

Since it's not a national holiday, most people don't even realize the day has come and passed. At most, they go to local events. As for me, even though I have a daughter, I'm not about to spend \$700 on dolls. Instead, I like to combine the things I like about the tradition to create my own hinamatsuri.

My daughter's first hinamatsuri was two years ago. Around mid-February, my children's nursery school displayed a huge seven-tier doll set in the school's gym. This sight is still my only reminder for when hinamatsuri is around the corner. After some research, I found a cool event happening in the nearby town of Ikaho, a popular hot-spring resort. In Ikaho, actual students (from local nursery schools) are dressed up in traditional costumes and placed on a giant display platform as if they're the dolls. Yes, it's super cute. But, as you can imagine, parents block almost every viewpoint. So, naturally, I used the put-phone-in-air-and-hope-to-get-a-good-picture approach to get a glimpse of the cute, impatient children. As an 11-month-old, my daughter could not have cared less. We went on to relax at an *onsen* foot bath until it was time to go home. You can watch how the day unfolded on [YouTube](#).

This year, we decided not to go to the festival and to just focus on the food of hinamatsuri. We bought a pink, white, and green mochi snack called *hishimochi* and a sweet block cake in the same colors. The three colors represent sakura blossoms, snow, and new growth respectively. I then tried my best to make *chirahizushi*, which is also eaten on the day. Just like the mochi, chirahizushi carries symbolism. The shrimp is for a long life, and the lotus root represents a good future. The soybeans bring the ability to work hard. As a now two-year-old, my daughter wanted nothing to do with the chirahizushi but everything to do with the mochi, which I cut into small pieces.

After eating, my husband and I sat down with my daughter and son and told them how much we love and appreciate them, how smart they are, and that they are strong enough to be whatever they want. They are both two years old, so it was heartwarming for a good 25 seconds until my son said he had to go "number two." And that's how I celebrated hinamatsuri this year. Next year, I want to try making my own dolls.



I Food Celebrating Hinamatsuri

My Thoughts

Having a full day to celebrate girls is pretty unique. Girls often dress up in kimonos, eat sweets, and get blessings for their future. However, many of my female teachers expressed concerns because the origin of this day can be considered sexist in modern times. Hoping for girls to marry a strong, wealthy man in order to be happy is no longer what parents hope for their daughters. I think there is a tremendous opportunity to create a day more centered on girl power, which seems to be missing in the current celebration.

The Gosekku:

Gosekku are Japan's five sacred traditional celebrations that were held during the Heian period by the imperial courts. These ceremonies used to be an all-out event. Now many of these traditions have been toned-down, but parts of the events remain. The five celebrations are:

- *Jinjitsu*, or human day, which is now called *Shogatsu*, or New Year Day
- *Momo no Sekku*, peach festival, which turned into *Hinamatsuri*
- *Ayame no Hi*, also known as *Tango no Sekku*, or Boy's Festival
- *Kikkoden*, a day to give offerings during the *Tanabata* festival
- *Choyo no En*, which is now associated with the autumn rice harvest

Talisha is a fifth-year prefectural JET in Gunma. Gunma is her first home out in the countryside. Through this new, slower lifestyle, Talisha has been introduced to many adventures she simply wouldn't have had if she lived in a big city. Talisha also loves traveling with her twins and documenting it on her [YouTube channel](#).







A Night of Dance in Ike

Kelly Carr (Saitama)

When someone mentions swing dance to you, it may conjure up images of men in suits and young women in flaring skirts twirling around a room to the tune of lively jazz music. Perhaps those images come to you in sepia tones because swing dance seems like a thing of the past, but I'm here to tell you that it's alive and well here in Japan.

When my friend Sam invited me to a swing dance event, I thought it sounded like fun, but I really had no idea of what to expect. My experience with dances has been mostly at school events, where everyone gets dressed up and then most people sit around waiting to be invited to dance by people who are too self-conscious to ask them. However, not knowing what

the evening might bring made it all the more exciting to look forward to. At the very least, I considered it a good excuse to get dressed up, which is not something I get to do every day.

The event was located at a bar that's tucked away in the quiet backstreets of Ikebukuro. I arrived when the doors opened at 6:45 p.m. and paid my 2,000 yen. Luckily, that admission included a little lesson on the basics of swing dance. That was good because I know next to nothing about dancing of any kind, swing dance included. My teacher patiently guided me through the steps, but my poor memory was not on my side, and I found myself awkwardly stumbling the wrong way every time we got past the first five steps. It was not a promising beginning.

We began with only four couples at the lesson, but when the main dancing part of the event began, the room quickly filled up. I was surprised by the number of people there, but as I sat down, I still expected to have to wait a while for a partner. I shouldn't have worried. I was almost immediately approached by a Japanese gentleman whose confident lead made me forget my earlier clumsiness, and I began to really enjoy myself.

When that dance was over, I once again expected to be left alone, but I was approached by another eager new partner. I couldn't believe I had been worried about being unable to find someone to dance with. Everyone was there by choice, so of course they didn't



come to just sit around. They came to dance.

The music was lively, and there were a great variety of people there, both Japanese people and foreigners. I danced with a French woman, a British man in a very cool bow tie, a Japanese man who happily gave me tips and guided me through new moves, and an American who confessed that he was drawn to swing dance events by the abundance of pretty girls (what a line). There was a Japanese woman with an intimidatingly firm grip, who lead so well that I felt like a pro, and a particularly friendly Japanese guy in a bold Hawaiian print shirt who spun me around until I felt like a little kid testing the limits of her balance.

Of course, I also danced with my friends. Sam arrived late and quickly jumped into teaching me and another friend how to do the Charleston. She has been swing dancing for five years and has found places to dance not only in the U.S. and Japan, but in Austria as well. She swept around the floor with great style and confidence, whether she was leading or following, and made a point of dancing with every partner available before the end of the night.

Three hours went by in a flash, and soon they were announcing the last dance. I was absolutely exhausted from dancing so much, and I could already say without a doubt that I was hooked. During the course of the evening I had

learned that there are not one but *two* swing dance organizations in Tokyo that hold regular lessons and events. I had never considered swing dance as a possible hobby, but after just that one event, I knew that I would have to come back for more.

Kelly Carr is a third year American JET living in Saitama Prefecture. She enjoys spending time with friends, reading, and arts and crafts.

MAKE OR BREAK!

EDM in Japan

Yuta Sakamoto (Fukui)

EDM (electronic dance music) has become one of the most popular music genres worldwide. As an avid EDM lover in Japan, I've noticed it gaining popularity here. I see that more and more big cities are hosting huge dance events that rival those in Western countries.

Ever since I was in high school, I've always wanted to go to electronic music festivals like Tomorrowland, Ultra, and Electronic Daisy Carnival. But I had never been able to attend EDM festivals in Japan until I turned 20. The reason is that people under 20 are not allowed to go to EDM festivals in Japan since they sell alcohol. Otherwise, there'd be a possibility of underage drinking. Meanwhile in the U.S., people ages 18+ can gain entry into EDM festivals, and they are only required to show their ID when they buy alcohol at the events. I think this is a good idea because it allows more people who are genuinely interested in the music to attend events and concerts. It no longer affects me now, as I am 22, but I do think granting younger people access would help spread the popularity of these events.



Ultra Japan

As EDM gains popularity in Western countries, more EDM festivals have been held in Tokyo and other big cities in Japan. I've only been to a few, but they have been fun experiences. Electrox, which was held in Tokyo, was the first EDM festival that invited some famous EDM DJs/producers from Western countries, such as Redfoo, Steve Angello, and Steve Aoki. In 2014, Ultra, the music festival from Miami, spread to Japan. "Ultra Japan" has drawn the attendance of over 425,000 people over five years. (1)

Every time I went to these events, I thought that the difference between festivals in Japan and ones in other countries is that Japanese people don't dance as much. Instead, they prefer to sing along to the melody and just

sway to the music. As a Japanese person here, I can honestly say that I feel the same way, and I would rather enjoy listening to DJs' sets without dancing around. Also, at music festivals in Japan, some Japanese people seem to attend the music festivals because they want to be appealing with their fashion and draw attention from other attendees. They are less interested in the music and more interested in the social aspect of EDM.

Regardless of reasons or behavior trends, the number of festivals and festival-goers is increasing, and that shows EDM has truly made headway breaking into the Japanese music world. But these days, music festivals are not as accessible to EDM fans as nightclubs are. This wasn't always

true. There was a long process of making dance music popular at nightclubs in Japan because of the Fueihō law.

EDM started getting popular in the West around 2012 with major acts by Avicii, Swedish House Mafia, and more electronic music producers. But in Japan the J-pop music scene was still strong. EDM didn't start growing here until a few years later, and the growth was slow. Personally, I did not feel strangely about EDM songs when they went viral here because I grew up with music video games such as *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Beatmania*, so I was familiar with those kinds of songs. In recent years, some J-pop artists have started using electronic sound and have even introduced "drops" in their songs. However,

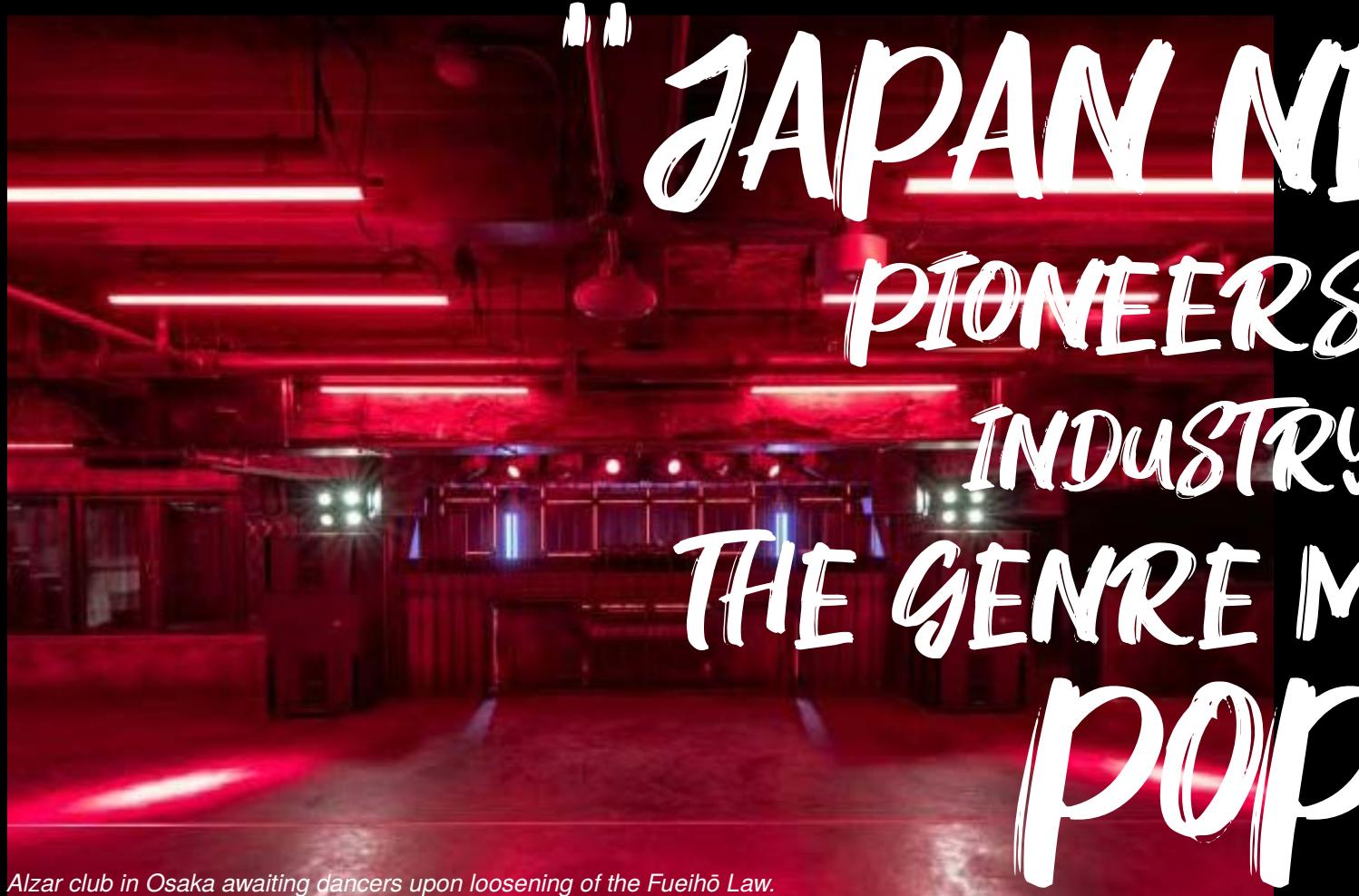
nightclubs in Japan still couldn't really get into that scene as it was getting popular. As mentioned above, there was an anti-dancing law called "Fueihō."

The law was established in 1984, and it was introduced to prohibit dancing after midnight. (2) All the people who owned nightclubs or venues that allowed dancing had to close between midnight and morning. Through several revisions on the law, the Fueihō law finally came to an end in 2016. (3) Nightclub owners could run their clubs the way they wanted, allowing people to dance all night by applying for a new permit called "Tokutei Yukyo Inshokuten Eigyo" (Nighttime Entertainment Restaurant Operations). From

my perspective, it seems this delayed EDM becoming popular since most Japanese people are not very familiar with this kind of music. I think, in J-pop, songs with a rock style are much more popular. It is my belief that the genre was in danger of coming to an end in Japan because of the Fueihō law. Of course there are electronic music producers and DJs in Japan, but they didn't get to be active very often. Also, there was no one to lead the EDM scene here.

Now that the Fueihō law has been relaxed though, and EDM songs are released more often here, I hope that the new permit will give EDM culture in Japan more opportunities to grow and that

more night clubs will implement this new permit. However, I wonder if the genre could stagnate. Most EDM listeners might be tired of the current scene since a lot of EDM songs are over five years old, and they sound the same. Because of that, Japan needs pioneers in the EDM industry to make the genre more popular. Hopefully these people can be the keys to increasing the number of electronic music festivals in Japan and encouraging Japanese producers to become active overseas. Overall, I am eager to see what happens with dance music over the coming years because I think the next wave of EDM has the potential to make or break the industry in this nation.



Alzar club in Osaka awaiting dancers upon loosening of the Fueihō Law.



Source: Andre Benz on Unsplash

Yuta Sakamoto is a university student in Fukui who was born, raised, and now lives in Tsuruga. He is involved with the local English education community in Fukui as someone who provides and shares entertainment with foreigners participating in the JET Program.

Source

<https://bit.ly/2F3Zn4p>
<https://bit.ly/2F0hUhH>
<https://bit.ly/2tXpUtP>
<https://bit.ly/2ih7X3E>
<https://bit.ly/2XOuDM8>

NEEDS
IN THE EDM
TO MAKE
MORE
ULAR.



Source: Brandon Zack on Unsplash

THE GRASS ISN'T ALWAYS BLUER ON THE — OTHER SIDE —



Humbert Humbert are Keeping Folk Alive in Japan

Taylor Skultety (Nara)

The concert experience began in a quintessentially Japanese way. Before being allowed to enter the venue, we were made to stand in line according to our ticket number and wait until we were called. Over three hundred tickets were sold, and each number was called sequentially. This was one of two sold out shows in Osaka at the modestly sized Club Quattro.

Yet *Humbert Humbert* do not sound like a quintessentially Japanese band. Their music is made of bluesy guitar chords, the silver soprano sound of harmonicas, and two uniquely beautiful voices coming together in perfect harmony. Since they started making music in 1998, Sano Yuho and Sato Ryosei have become partners in music as well as in life, now with three children between them. The duo aptly titled their last two studio albums *Folk* (2016) and *Folk 2* (2018). Both albums are a mix of covers and re-recordings. Steeped in country, folk, and bluegrass influence, the sounds transport the listener to the streets of Nashville, or perhaps the plains of Montana. Having recorded a previous studio album in Nashville with famed bluegrass musician Tim O'Brien, they certainly know what they're about. It's enough to make *this* rocky mountain girl a little homesick. The music still keeps one foot firmly in Japan with nods to Japanese music history, covering artists like Yumi Arai and Nishioka Kyouzou who were popular in the 70s during Japan's folk boom. They kept it fresh on *Folk 2* with a slow tempo cover of current hit song "chiisanakoinouta" by MONGOL800.

The band's timeless sound has attracted followers from all generations. The crowd in Osaka that night was full of young parents, many with their children still in tow. There were those with greying hair and young adults clutching their beers, still too fashion-conscious to remove their hats once inside. Eventually the lights dimmed, and a pair of bantering voices came through the speakers, a short introduction of the band. The voices advised us to keep our phones away, creating an intimate, performance-focused atmosphere. When *Humbert Humbert* took the stage, it was clear they were born to make music. Sato's frame is tall and lanky, his fingers wrapping comfortably around the neck of his guitar, hinting at formidable reach for the piano on stage as well. Sano is spritely with a high, lyrical voice. She told an anecdote about her having a night out at karaoke after playing a live show just

to have hours of more singing, highlighting her pure love of the art (yes, *Humbert Humbert* songs are available at karaoke).

The show began with an unexpected and spirited rendition of "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang." The song choice and matching blue outfits radiated wholesomeness. The band's longevity shone as they addressed the crowd constantly and with familiarity. They entertained with stories about their own lives, life on tour, and plugging away at personal projects. Despite the quirky opening number, the first half of the show cast a subtle spell on the room. Almost every song after sounded like a lullaby, the two artists swaying along to the music. Sato often played the piano while the unique timbre of Sano's clean voice filled the room. For one song, Sato switched from a classic acoustic guitar to a custom-made gray electric guitar. The crowd gazed on dreamily as the musicians played. Perhaps this lullaby-like set was a courtesy to the quite old and very young in their audience, or maybe at 41 and 39 the band members themselves don't have the stamina for high-energy sets.

After a short intermission, the second half began, and the pace picked up. Bells and a fiddle were added to the instruments already on stage. As the show progressed, we were treated to more light effects and up-beat songs. The final song of the set was the fiddle-heavy "honmatsutentoumushi." A bit of choreography was performed as they competed for center stage, Sato's driving fiddle against Sano's comically cheerful jingle bells. The most surprising artistic choice of the evening was the strobe lights that violently lit up as the fiddle reached top speed. We were not in Nashville anymore.

They performed a two song encore. After the music was officially over, the show ended as it had begun: in an orderly Japanese way. Sano and Sato promenaded to different parts of the stage while everyone took photos in unison during the properly allotted picture time. It just goes to show that you can take the band out of Japan, but you can't take Japan out of the band.

Tayler Skultety is a third year prefectural JET from Canada living a slow life in the Nara countryside. She is interested in folk culture and sustainability in Japan. Tayler is active in her local AJET chapter and is also a general section editor at CONNECT.

APRIL RELEASES

Sarah White (Fukui)

MOVIES

April 5

- Vice (2018)
- Message Man (2018)
- Holiday (2018)
- I Think We're Alone Now (2018)

April 12

- Hunter Killer (2018)
- Halloween (2018)
- Beautiful Boy (2018)
- First Reformed (2017)
- Backtrace (2018)
- Final Score (2018)
- Marrowbone (2017)

April 19

- Shazam! (2019)
- Boy Erased (2018)
- High Life (2018)
- Stan & Ollie (2018)
- Happy as Lazzaro (2018)
- A-X-L (2018)
- Crooked House (2017)

April 26

- Avengers: Endgame (2019)

GAMES

April 2

- Darksiders Warmastered Edition (Switch)

April 4

- Steel Division 2 (PC)
- Death Mark (PC)
- Overwhelm (Switch)
- Marz Rising - full release (PC)

April 9

- Dangerous Driving (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trilogy (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

April 16

- Final Fantasy 10 & 10-2 HD Remaster (Xbox One, Switch)
- World War Z (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- World of Warships: Legends (PS4, Xbox One)

Sources:

[https://www.imdb.com/
calendar/?region=jp](https://www.imdb.com/calendar/?region=jp)

[https://www.vg247.
com/2019/01/04/video-game-
release-dates-2019/](https://www.vg247.com/2019/01/04/video-game-release-dates-2019/)

Photo: Aneta Pawlik on Unsplash

April 18

- Sigma Theory: Global Cold War (PC)
- Our World is Ended (PS4, Switch)
- God's Trigger (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

April 23

- Mortal Kombat 11 (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen (Switch)

April 26

- Days Gone (PS4)
- Boxboy and Boxgirl (Switch)
- Dauntless (PS4, Xbox One)

April 30

- Final Fantasy 12: The Zodiac Age (Xbox One, Switch)



DIGITAL TIME CAPSULES

In the entertainment world, the term “remake” almost always sparks mixed feelings. While consumers generally wish to be hopeful that a piece of media they love will be made even better through the use of modern technology and techniques, the nagging feeling that something could go wrong is also inescapable. Nostalgia is a powerful emotion, and it can distort our memories of exactly how amazing our first experience with something was. If you have ever tried to watch one of your favorite movies from your childhood, you may have felt some disappointment that it wasn’t as good as you remember it. On the other hand, maybe you felt warm and fuzzy as you were reminded of why you enjoyed it so much in the first place. The power of nostalgia varies greatly from person to person. Emotions are hard to quantify, and replicating an experience that is so individual for a mass audience takes willpower and a large degree of bravery.

Video games are no different. While video games are still a young medium compared to film and television, they have evolved considerably since their conception in the 1970s. Advances in both hardware engineering and software development allow developers to create deeper and more

EXPLORING THE GAME INDUSTRY’S REMAKES AND REMASTERST



visually pleasing experiences than ever before. However, consumers that played games as children in the 80s and 90s are now adults with decades of experience with the medium, and many have fond memories of the games they played growing up. The problem with simply replaying these games is that many don't hold up well against the test of time. Controls can feel clunky and unresponsive, the controllers are less comfortable to hold for long periods of time, and the graphics can leave something to be desired when compared to modern offerings.

Developers and publishers have latched on to nostalgia in recent years, and they have begun dedicating resources to remaking and remastering older games. Often times, this is a win-win for developers. Remaking and remastering old content generally requires less development time and resources than trying to build a new game from scratch. With the primary mechanics and design of the game already created, developers are able to move straight into development, effectively cutting out the planning and prototyping phases of the normal game-making process. In addition to lower costs, the developers and publishers also have a good idea of how popular a

remake or remaster will be based on the popularity of the original game. This makes revisiting an older title much less risky than trying to create a new title from scratch.

Though both remakes and remasters have similar advantages, it's still important to distinguish the difference between the two. Of the two, remasters require less work and development time compared to remakes of similar length. Remasters often reuse large portions of the original game's code and assets, meaning less has to be created from scratch. Generally, remasters are used to make a game more visually appealing by increasing the resolution of textures and adding visual flourishes like particle effects that would not have been possible in the past. Good examples of this method include games like the *Devil May Cry HD Collection*, the *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*, and the *Resident Evil HD Collection*. See a pattern?

Remakes, on the other hand, use far fewer of the base game's original assets compared to remasters. While remakes can generally reuse things like characters, settings, and plot, almost every asset is made fresh for the new game. Remakes also grant developers enough additional creative freedom to adjust game mechanics, add new mechanics, or even make a completely different style of game. The recent remake of *Resident Evil 2*, known as *Biohazard* in Japan, is an excellent example of this. While the original *Resident Evil 2* employed fixed camera angles to increase the tension felt by the player, the remake opted for a more modern over-the-shoulder 3rd person camera similar to *Resident Evil 4*. This is no small adjustment, and I'm sure large portions of the game environment had to be designed from the ground up to better accommodate this massive change in gameplay.

Many remakes and remasters have done incredibly well for themselves since their release. The *Spyro Reignited Trilogy*, a complete remake of the original three *Spyro the Dragon* games released on the Sony Playstation in the late 1990s, managed to score a respectable 82 on review aggregate website Metacritic despite launching with minor technical issues in 2018. In the same vein, the *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy* scored an 80 on the same website when it released in 2017. However, games don't necessarily have to be decades old before they are worthy of a remake. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim Special Edition* was met with generally favorable reviews when it released in 2016, despite the source material being released merely five years earlier. (1) (2) (3)





Based on the information discussed so far, it would be easy to come to the conclusion that remakes and remasters are a money grab by publishers looking to feed off of players' nostalgia. In addition to the development benefits, that nostalgia factor can all but guarantee that a certain amount of units will be sold regardless of the quality of the game. Some argue that this knowledge leads to lower standards when it comes to enhancing the assets for an HD remake. While I don't believe this is the norm, there are certainly examples of remasters that feel like they didn't have the series' best interest at heart.

One of these examples is the *Silent Hill HD Collection*. *Silent Hill* was originally released on the Playstation in 1999, while *Silent Hill 2* and *Silent Hill 3* were released on the Playstation 2 in the early 2000s. Some years later, the original publisher of *Silent Hill*, Konami, hired developer Hijinx Studios to remaster the first three games into a HD collection for the Playstation 3 and Xbox 360. (4) The resulting 2012 release of the collection was met with complaints by some of the fan base. Some argued that the higher resolution negatively affected the atmosphere of the survival horror game, as much of the tension and suspense came from being unable to clearly see the things happening around the player. The HD textures and changes to the fog system also

revealed some artistic shortcuts taken by the original developers and took some players out of the experience.

Some also argue that remakes and remasters are bad for the video gaming industry overall because they do nothing to push the medium forward. It's true that time spent remastering a game is time not spent exploring new ideas or creating sequels, but I would argue that it's not necessarily better to spend time doing new things than reworking classics. After all, the developers and publishers can use the money made by these remakes to fund their more ambitious ideas and sequels. With AAA game budgets ballooning, companies can't afford to take big risks on every product they create. It's good to remember that failed games affect the developers just as much if not more than the disappointed players that play them. Games that don't live up to the lofty goals set for them often result in company wide layoffs or, in the worst cases, studio closures. If anything, the money these remasters earn actually enables publishers and developers to take larger creative risks without worrying about whether they can keep the company afloat should the game not live up to expectations.

I also think it's a stretch to say that a poor remaster ruins the integrity of the original game. The original game still exists, and nothing can change that. Players that are disappointed by HD re-releases or remakes can still play the original if they need to scratch that nostalgic itch. Even if original hardware stops functioning, the continuous improvement of emulation software means that original games should still be playable for years to come.

This point leads me to another reason why I believe remakes and remasters are wonderful for the industry: they introduce new players to these franchises. The games that players are most

nostalgic for have often evolved into cultural icons like *The Legend of Zelda*, *Final Fantasy*, or *Mega Man*. Many of us older gamers are used to the simpler controls and appearance of these games since we grew up with them, but the aesthetic of games made decades ago might prove unappealing to newer gamers who are used to more modern offerings. Newer gamers are also less likely to own the older hardware required to play the originals. Remasters give these new gamers a chance to experience a piece of the medium's history in a more visually attractive way on consoles that they are more likely to own.

For series that are more lengthy, remakes can also serve as compilations to give these same gamers a chance to catch up on the events of previous titles before playing the latest offering. While it's a bit of an exception, the *Kingdom Hearts* series is a prime example of this. Though the first two *Kingdom Hearts* games were released for the Playstation 2 console in the early to mid-2000s, numerous spin-off titles and side stories were released as well. These side stories were released across more than five different consoles, with some titles only being released in Japan initially. Unfortunately, many of these side stories contained information vital to understanding the greater plot of the *Kingdom Hearts* universe, and keeping up with the story was all but impossible for many kids trying to grow up with the series. Such a task would be even more impossible now, considering many of the consoles these side stories were released on are now out of production. Fortunately, at the end of 2018, every game in the series was compiled into one collection: *Kingdom Hearts: The Story So Far*, allowing old fans and new fans alike to experience the entire story in one convenient package before the release of *Kingdom Hearts 3* in early 2019.

Though arguments can be made for both sides, I feel that the benefits for

both developers and gamers far outweigh the negatives of remakes and remasters overall. Remastering old games still benefits the development industry and younger gamers far more than it inconveniences fans of the originals. More than that, when remakes are done correctly, everyone is satisfied. The recent *Resident Evil 2* remake mentioned earlier in this article has been universally praised by critics and fans alike as a wonderful reimagining of the Playstation original. Video games, like those of us who play them, are only going to mature from here. If anything, the demand for remasters will grow with us. With some high profile remakes on the horizon like *Final Fantasy VII*, gamers can only wait and hope that the new products meet their high expectations.



Ben Holschuh is the husband of a second year JET residing in Hita, Oita. Before becoming an expat he worked in video game production for five years in northern California. He is a video game and music enthusiast, and you can follow his assorted musings on Twitter @ TheWholeShoe.

- (1)<https://bit.ly/2ER7Zd8>
- (2)<https://bit.ly/2F1pmt1>
- (3)<https://bit.ly/2V0Rsxh>
- (4)<https://bit.ly/2EUnGAb>



I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT...

There are many amazing beauty and skin products here in Japan. I am sure we have all found something here that we are going to *need* to take back to our own countries with us. Here, a few JETs give a brief description of the beauty products they love and how they might continue to keep them in their lives post-Japan.

Ella Donaldson
CIR, BEPPU CITY, OITA PREFECTURE
1ST YEAR JET

I recommend Etude House's 'Face Blur' BB Cream! I first discovered it during my year abroad, and as a pale person, this is just perfect for some light coverage to even out my skin. It also works as a base before putting proper foundation on, and it has SPF in it to protect your skin. I love it so much that, after I left Japan, my friend would buy it for me when she was in Japan and either bring it back with her or send it to me. You can also buy it, along with a lot of other Japanese and Korean brands, on YesStyle.

I'd also recommend COSRX's Acne Pimple Master Patch. It's a little round sticker for putting on small pimples or even those large cystic acne style spots, and it helps draw out the white part of the whitehead. It's the best of these kind of patches I've tried (the only one I've tried that actually worked, to be honest). I often ordered these on YesStyle when I was back home.



1.



2.



3.



4.



Christina Bellevue ALT, MITO, IBARAKI PREFECTURE 1ST YEAR JET

Before coming to Japan on JET, I was fortunate to live in Toronto, Canada, where there is a sizeable Asian community. I used to work close to Koreatown, which had many beauty shops selling imported K-beauty and J-beauty staples. That's where I found Shiseido body wash and Biore sunscreen. I found THREE cleansing oil at the infamous Pacific Mall in Markham, an Asian maze-like shopping mall infamous for being one of North America's "notorious markets" for counterfeit goods. I repurchased the SUQQU Framing Eyebrow Liquid Pen and Brow Mascara in Khaki from ichibankao.com, a J-beauty online store that ships internationally at a crazy markup. Here's what you need to know about each product:

1. Nothing comes close to THREE Balancing Cleansing Oil. NOTHING. Not too thick and not too thin, it glides on smoothly and removes all the makeup effortlessly with no breakouts, and it's great even for oily skin types. This is the holy grail of makeup removing oil for many Japanese beauty editors.

2. SUQQU Framing Eyebrow Liquid Pen and Brow Mascara in Khaki is the only eyebrow combo I will ever use for the rest of my life. EVER.

3. Shiseido Senka Perfect Bubble for Body Floral+ Body Wash: perfect scent and perfect texture, leaves skin perfectly moisturised. Did I mention it was perfect?

4. Biore UV Aqua Rich Watery Essence Water Base Sunscreen is perfect for oily skin and darker skin tones! It's film-free and has a silky texture. With it, you'll have no Casper face, no breakouts, and no sunburns. #winning



Robyn Ward

ALT, FUKUOKA PREFECTURE 2ND YEAR JET

I absolutely fell in love with "Kiss Me - Heroine Make" (キスミ・ロインメーク) mascara the first time I used it. Not only is it cheap, but they have lots of different types which target different looks (length, volume, curve etc.), and since you can find it in any Japanese drugstore, it's really convenient. The main reason I fell in love with it is its staying power! I discovered during my first Japanese summer that all of the mascara I brought from home was not going to cut it out here and would keep melting down my face. This mascara, on the other hand, does NOT move, no matter the weather or how sweaty I am. I would definitely recommend giving it a try, but be warned, you will need a good makeup remover to get it off. The same brand sells a special mascara removal serum which takes it off in a heartbeat, though.

Dylan Jekels

ALT, KANAGAWA PREFECTURE 1ST YEAR JET

One chilly November evening, as I rode the train home, my eyes fell upon a lipstick advertisement — Excel's new Glaze Balm Lip. The model wore a brick red shade that made her lips look like a candied apple. Naturally, I wanted it that instant. I spent the next few weeks staring longingly at those ads until I was able to purchase the color Chocolate Berry. I liked it so much that I asked for a second color as a Christmas gift and received Cassis Rose. I prefer to wear natural makeup looks on a daily basis, so I love that I can achieve varying levels of coverage with this lip balm (everything from a light touch of color to a bold, deep gloss). Excel's Glaze Balm doesn't do much to moisturize your lips, but it definitely protects them from the elements and prevents dryness. It also feels luxuriously plush on the lips. I can confirm that it will make your lips look like a candied apple.

You can purchase the Glaze Lip Balm at any variety store that sells Excel makeup products. I like it so much that I'd even continue purchasing it when I return home one day. In that case I would purchase it directly from Excel's website.





Amanda Muller ALT, KYOTO 2ND YEAR JET

Before coming to Japan, the most skincare I would do was to *sometimes* wash my face. After visiting Korea last winter and getting a little swept up in their skincare craze, however, I'm kind of obsessed. I've added products little by little over time, and now I'm up to seven steps in my routine!

One of my favorite skincare products found here in Japan is Hada Labo Gokujyn Hyaluronic Acid Lotion, which can be found at any drug store. In Japan, "lotion" is what they call their toner, so I use this product as my first moisturizing step after my oil and foam cleansers. It definitely makes my skin feel moist and plump, making it one of my favorite steps in my routine!

Luckily for me, Hada Labo is pretty easily accessible in the United States, whether it be from Amazon or a third-party website, so I won't have to live without my favorite product when I head back to New York this August. I've also heard that some stores, like Sephora, have started selling Asian beauty products in the U.S., so hopefully they'll become even more easily accessible in the future!



BLACK.

BLACK ON BLACK ON BLACK ON BLACK.

My long-term relationship with dressing in black began during my first year in university. Five years on, and this relationship is still going strong. I have thought considerably about this one topic. Maybe a lot more than the average person. Occasionally, I am probably *too* offended when someone says that they “only” wear black clothing when I know for a fact that they’re exaggerating. It’s a lifestyle, ya know?

My choice to dress in primarily one colour was a fusion of social and environmental reasoning that I hold precious to me. More notorious figures of this monochrome palette can go even deeper into their philosophical reasoning for loving black. For example, my five years is nothing compared to the 40 or so years that Rei Kawakubo, the mother of black, has been designing her iconic monochrome looks. I really admire the philosophy of Kawakubo, founder of COMME des GARÇONS, and her society-breaking crow tribe (*karasu zoku*) that emerged in the 70s. Low-key fangirl alert. Though I may not be able to afford her designs, I can always admire from afar.

I find it amazing that a style of black clothing made it from the streets of Harajuku, Tokyo, in the 70s to

(somehow) becoming a vital part of my personal expression. It’s a testament to how its influence has spanned across generations and international designers to the present. Rei Kawakubo is by no means the only longstanding Japanese designer with a taste for the dark; just this last month Yohji Yamamoto, famous for his wabi-sabi aesthetic, did an iconic runway show true to the *karasu zoku* style. See it [here](#).

Black as a fashion statement will always have a timeless aura about it. Images of people who are dressed in black on black are often difficult to date. It’s chic, badass, and consistently being walked down high fashion

shows everywhere. But this way of dressing in black was once something new entirely.

To contextualize the inception of this style, you must step back into the late 1970s and early 1980s on the streets of Tokyo. This was a compelling time for Japan, and the rest of the world, as it moved forward as a postwar society. New doors opened between foreign countries, which created a buzz in the creative world. On her blog, Amy de la Haye, a fashion curator and a professor at the London College of Fashion, comments on this:

“As (the) first post-war generation Japanese they grew up within a society that simultaneously embraced western popular culture, while preserving native customs. The tension between these dual identities is explored in fashion collections that reveal hybrid east-west influences.” (1)

The collectivist culture of Japan was chipped away at, and smaller niche subcultures of zoku (a.k.a. tribe) fashion groups rose from the cracks. Harajuku was the hub of various subcultures of fashion during this fascinating moment in history. The subcultures that still thrive in Japan today were born amid this clash of Eastern and Western culture, where many different “tribes” appeared. I can’t help but imagine a very animalist Harajuku with tribes competing to be the most prominent group. Sadly, I do not think this was the reality.

The way Japanese women dressed evolved to include French influence, particularly from Marie Antoinette, and early Victorian influence, both seen in the Lolita subculture. It changed to be distinctively feminine and “girly” to mirror the “sexy” appearances of the West. During the 80s, hairsprayed, glamorous, and revealing clothing reached new heights of popularity. These styles introduced new ways that the female body could be emphasized to showcase what society saw as desirable. Clothing was lavished with beading, embroidery and luxury fabric. These styles, in my opinion, very much adhered to the ideals of how women “should look” for the time.

The references to the karasu of this time are mostly about women's fashion (although there were some men who were dressed head-to-toe in black), as it was a rebellion against the prevailing notions of how women should look. As fashion moved in one direction, the karasu style ran the opposite way. What Kawakubo and her brand did was considered a feminist movement at the time. COMME des GARÇONS, directly translated from French, means “like the boys.”

Interestingly, Kawakubo rejects this feminist title even if her branding is a reaction against ideas of femininity. In a recent interview, she states that “the woman's body is no relation to what (Kawakubo) tries to do. There is no challenge to vanity or to beauty, (she) is just not interested.” (2) Even so, the karasu style altered the way women dressed, and Kawakubo's inspiration is grounded in the goal to make clothing for a woman “who is not swayed by what her husband thinks.” (3)

Whilst other designers were cinching waists to showcase womanly figures, COMME des GARÇONS' garments were made independent of these features and were crafted to make the wearer the art piece. Clothing didn't make the women beautiful; the women made the clothing beautiful. These wearers did not have to have the stereotypically thin, womanly figure

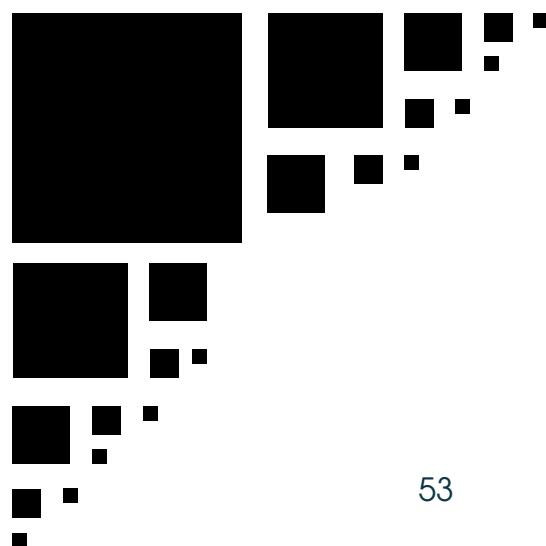
collection was entitled “Destroy.” It marched its way down the catwalks of Paris Fashion Week in 1982 with a bang. Edges were raw, and makeup was nonexistent. It undoubtedly stood out against the offerings of other designers. Written pieces about this collection always note Kawakubo's version of “lace” where holes were punched into sweaters. The karasu zoku aesthetic quickly became internationally trendy after its debut in Paris and changed public opinions on the colour black. Kawakubo told the New Yorker in 2005, “I never intended to start a revolution. I only came to Paris with the intention of showing what I thought was strong and beautiful. It just so happened that my notion was different from everybody else's.” (5)

In 2017, COMME des GARÇONS was a part of the Costume Institute's exhibition in the



— the reimaged loose fit created a new sexy. This unconforming appearance was a middle finger to society, “representing destruction, rejection, and despair,” according to Stephanie Buck in her article entitled “Japan's ‘crow tribe’ is the reason everyone started wearing black in New York.”(4)

It should be mentioned Kawakubo's breakthrough





Metropolitan Museum of Art. The exhibition showed a range of her earliest work, 140 pieces from "Destroy," to her present work. Amazingly, Rei Kawakubo is the second person that has been displayed while still living.

The choice to use black alone was an act of rebellion as it contrasted the other popular palettes of the time. Season after season, COMME des GARÇONS consecutively made garments dripping in punk and heresy. Chanel had brought black out of mourning in the 1920s, and Kawakubo reinvigorated it, giving it new meaning and purpose. Yohji Yamamoto holds the view that "black is modest and arrogant at the same time. Black is easy and lazy, but mysterious. But above all black says this: 'I don't bother you. Don't bother me.'" (6)

His words "modest and arrogant at the same time" encompass my view on the colour. You can quickly throw together an all-black outfit in minutes, and it can look very put-together. Black will never look like you are trying too hard to impress others. It's drawing attention to yourself not with colour but with the subtle features of the designs. It makes people look past the single dimension of colour to the multiple dimensions of the textiles themselves. It is possible to be lazy. But the designs of COMME des GARÇONS have proven it can be a highly creative method of expression.



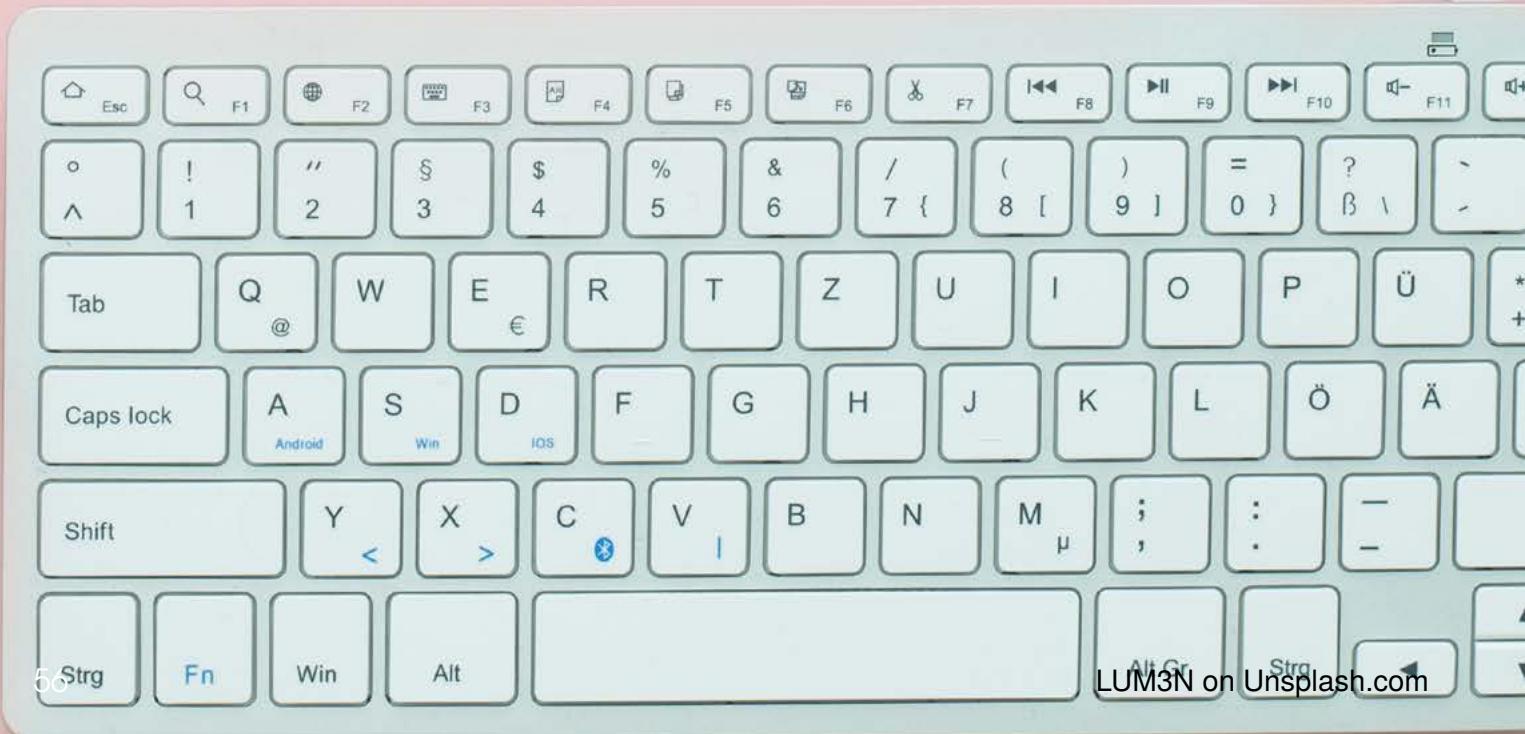
Sources:

- (1)<https://bit.ly/2WHYHaL>
- (2)<https://bit.ly/2pali16>
- (3)<https://bit.ly/2uvCFhR>
- (4)<https://bit.ly/2uvCFhR>
- (5)<https://bit.ly/2uvCFhR>
- (6)<https://bit.ly/2Uc4Krg>

Alice is a first year ALT hailing from New Zealand finding her way in Japan as she resides in the mighty cabbage patch of Gunma. She is a lover of a good coating of sarcasm, finding fellow plant based folk, and wearing black clothing 24/7. You can find her on Instagram @twigsnshit

**BRING YOUR
OWN CREATIVE
JUICE TO
DESKWARMING,
OR JUST SIP ON
DAMIEN'S**

Damien Levi (Tokyo)





Moving abroad is always overwhelming, especially on the JET Programme where you're thrown in the deep end of a town you probably know little-to-nothing about. There's a lot to process there, including new people, places, and routine. Getting creative is unlikely to be the first thing on your mind. Six months later, however, you're settled in with time to spare, and that's when the excuses to put it off a little longer start to run dry. At least, that's my story.

For the better part of the last two years, I worked as a copywriter, producing creative content eight hours a day, five days a week. I had switched jobs not long before coming to Japan but still felt creatively drained for a spell. This excuse not to create persisted throughout my first few months in Japan before it became "I'm still getting set up here."

It wasn't until late January, almost six months into my time here, that I stopped being able to justify my idleness. I made a decision - I was going to listen to a bunch of music (something I did anyway) and write about it on a WordPress blog. I've always been interested in reviewing music and did it a little in university, so I thought this idea was a good opportunity to learn more about the production and technical aspects of music rather than just how it makes me feel.

As a private school JET, my contract has me at school every weekday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Fortunately, the last hour of my day is free time — a perfect opportunity to get a little writing done.

Honestly, I probably could've eased into it better, but I've got the 'too much' gene and decided to go *ham*, writing about a song every day of the month. Spotify Premium is my best friend as I trawl through new releases, personalised playlists, and my own saved tracks. I usually write about new releases because they're fresh and often easier to write about — there aren't any emotional memories associated with the tracks yet. The listening part is a great time killer while commuting to or from school; I have a 30-minute train ride, and by the time it ends I've usually selected the track I want to write about.

After choosing a song I vibe with, I begin listening to it while writing down anything that jumps out at me. Then I focus on just one aspect of the track, whether it's the lyrics, the instrumentation, or the vocals, and pick it apart just a little to understand and reflect on the parts that make the song a whole. Then it's just rinse and repeat. Throw in a little background about the artist, like when their new album is dropping, and include an embed of the music video along with the album artwork, and bam, it's done.

I'm still not very confident when it comes to analysing music, so when I finish a review, I tend to browse around the big sites like *Pitchfork* or *Rolling Stone* and read their reviews. When I compare that writing to my own, I find ideas on how to improve while also gaining knowledge on aspects of music production I didn't know about before. There is still so much to learn!

Like many JETs, I'm a little worried about

entering the job market when I eventually go back to my home country. Those of us who work in creative industries are lucky because, if we have free time and some motivation, we can keep practicing our craft while in Japan. If you're like me and have trouble getting started, set yourself a goal and try to work towards that. Even if it's only an hour a week, every little bit counts! But also, as JET so wisely chants: ESID!



SNIPPETS FROM THE



"Her typical no-fucks-given attitude is present as she raps through the verses, but it's when the chorus kicks in, the sass drops, and her vocals clean up that it becomes clear how genuine these feelings are. The instrumentation fades out and she belts out, 'I'm crying cause I love you,' a heavy phrase that lingers while the track is empty." Cuz I Love You – Lizzo.



"The hype for this track is overwhelming. The JoBros have been out of commission for the last six years while they all worked on solo projects and relationships. Now they're back, mature, free of the Disney Channel, and ready to deliver some bangers." Sucker – Jonas Brothers.



"There's no need to understand Japanese culture to appreciate this track. It's so much fun that you can just jump right in and make this song your own. Though it's not a traditional Japanese style, it's a fun, carefree track that it feels like you've known forever."



SITE:



eed for you to be able to
anese when listening to this
uch fun that you can rock along
e kabuki musical elements that
g so interesting to listen to.
unheard of to marry traditional
s of music with modern ones,
does it so successfully on this
fresh." -鬼-SAKANAMON.

check out
Damien's
website
here.



LIFESTYLE

HEALTH & NUTRITION EDITOR

connect.health@ajet.net

Amanda Muller

TRAVEL EDITOR

connect.travel@ajet.net

Amy Lee

“The flowers are nice, huh? If you’re reborn, be a flower.” — Kensaku Watanabe

Photo: Nick Moulds



ON EDGE:

MY HUMBLING FIRST HIKING EXPERIENCE IN JAPAN

Colin Gamm
(Gifu Prefecture)

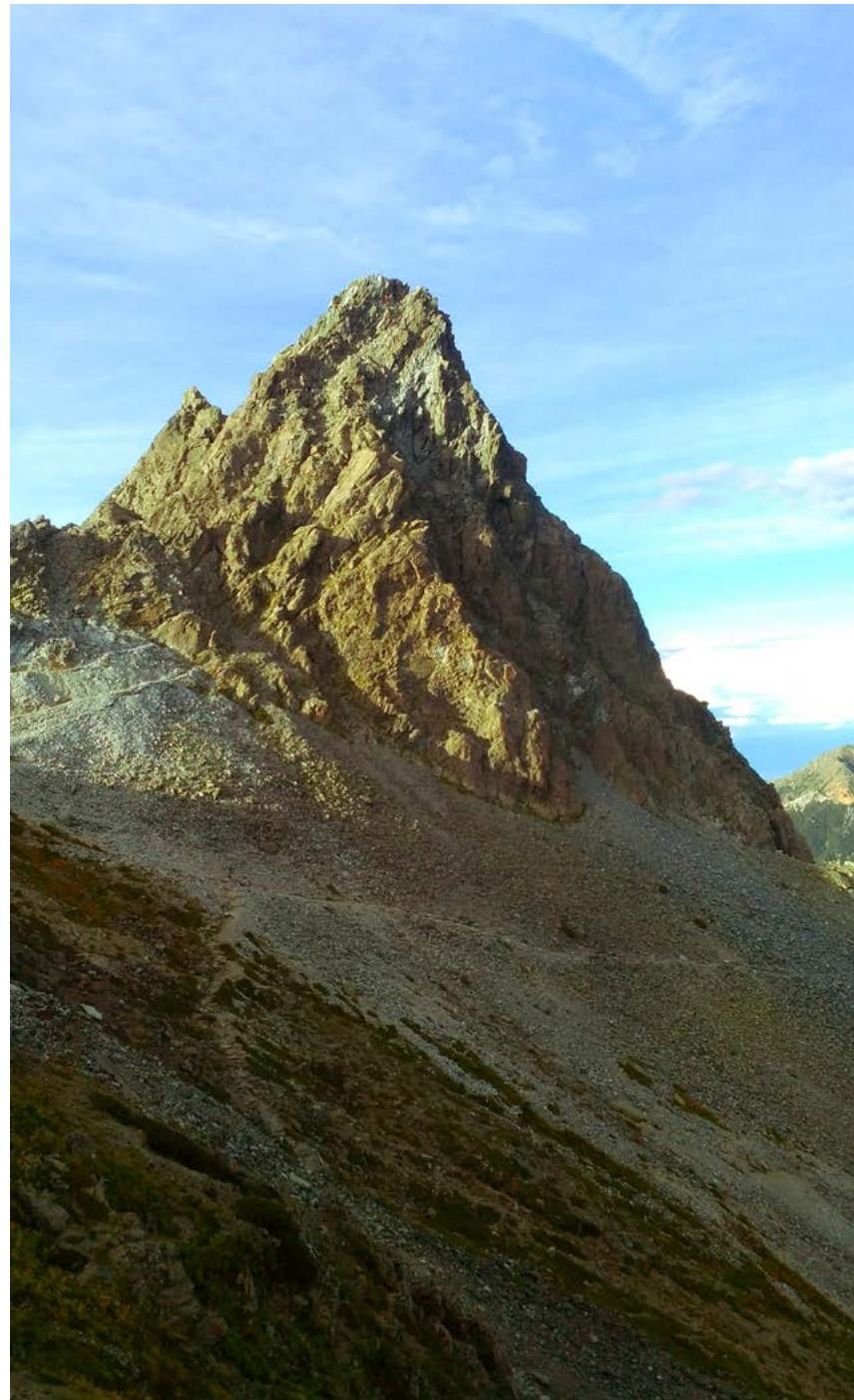
I consider myself a fairly capable hiker – no technical mountain climber but physically fit and with a good bit of experience in the outdoors. As a sophomore in college, I hiked the 220-mile John Muir Trail by myself, finishing it pretty quickly and regularly surpassing 25-mile days in the Sierra Nevadas. I say this only to give context for how humbling my first backpacking experience was in Japan.



At times, trails can be so rough that they're difficult to make out.

My first trip was planned from Tateyama to Kamikochi, and while there weren't many English resources on this route, one blog and some Japanese trail logs were enough for me. I planned I thought, very conservatively in terms of distance, aiming for about 10 miles a day. When I submitted my trail plan, I brushed off the little bit of doubt the policeman expressed about my pace and his admonitions to be careful. What did give me pause, however, was a bulletin board beside him listing recent incidents, including two deaths.

10 miles on these trails was *not* 10 miles on the trails I was used to. These trails were rougher and steeper, often completely unmaintained but simply marked along creek beds or boulder fields. They ran along the spine of mountain ridges instead of between them. This pattern paired uncertain footing with precipitous thousand-meter falls. Devoting so much concentration to not dying made for a less than pleasant experience. I was able to make the necessary time for my plan by breaking camp around sunrise, but by the third day, physical and mental strain had me questioning whether I was really enjoying the hike. With a storm coming the next day, I arrived at my last turnoff for an early exit, and I decided to swallow my pride and go home. It was a good experience, but I would urge you to carefully



consider before making your own plans. The Japanese trails were not the trails I had hiked back home, and the trail logs I had seen were not set by casual strollers but by serious hikers with good gear who likely stayed in lodges rather than lugging around a 40-pound pack with a tent. Plan conservatively, and be educated about what you'll encounter.

That said, there's also so much to love about spending time in the mountains - particularly in Japan, where you can enjoy unique experiences from mountain hot springs to summit shrines. As is true in many realms of Japanese tourism, the spotty state of English support can be intimidating. But with just a bit of preparation, you can have a pretty extraordinary experience. Here's how to start preparing for a successful hike.

WHICH MOUNTAIN?

Japan's 128 million people fit into a land mass smaller than the state of California – of which 90% is mountains. This equation makes for crowded urban areas and, of course, mountains all over the country in all varieties: southern volcanoes like Yakushima, the Central Alps, which contain many of the country's tallest peaks, and of course the solitary figure of Mt. Fuji, Japan's tallest and most famous mountain. (Fuji is a popular climb with no shortage of English resources which I won't be touching on. So if Fuji is what you're aiming for, you'd be better off referring to those resources now.)

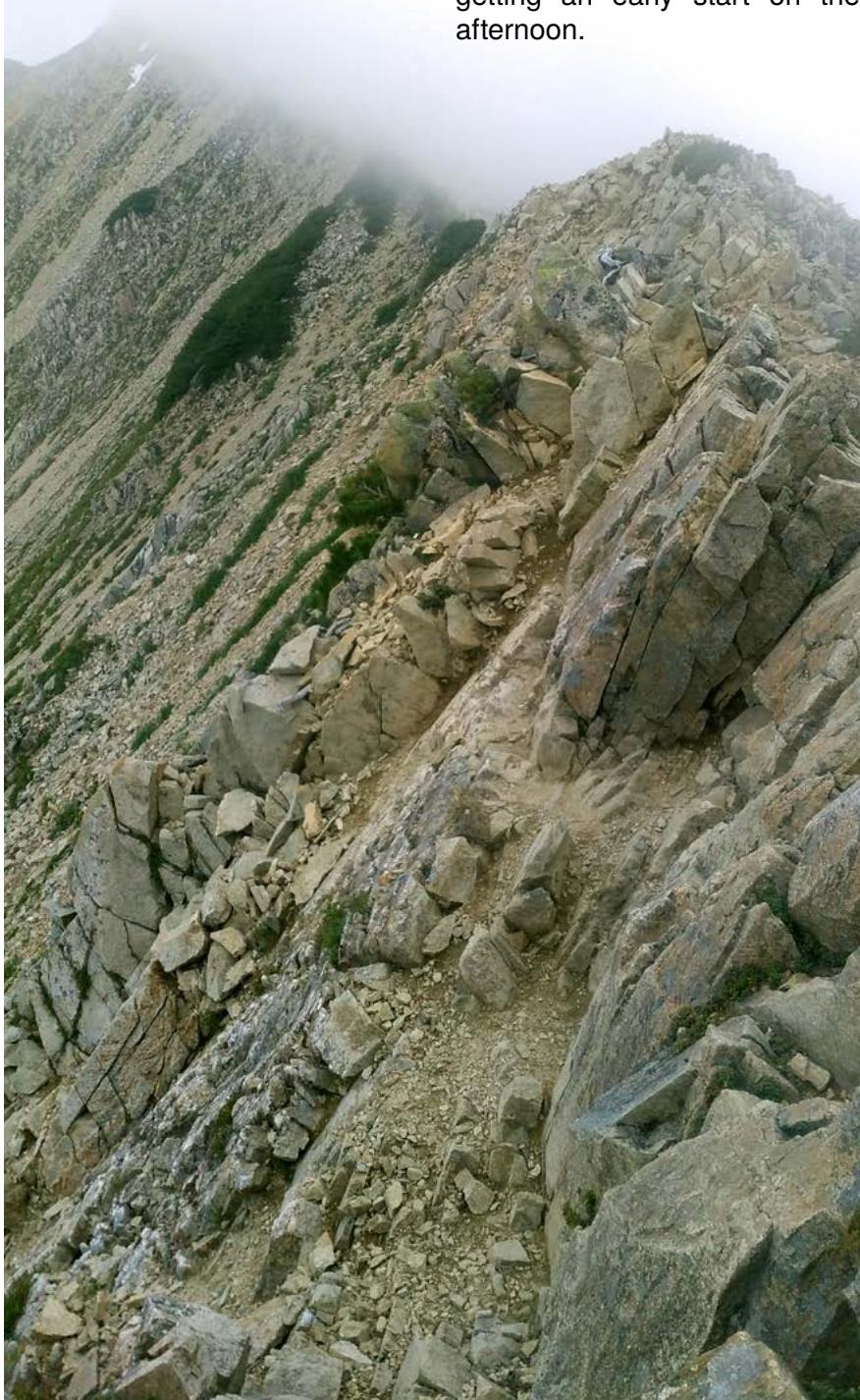
With all this variety, choice becomes an issue. Personal preference and proximity should determine most of it, but for a nice base list of recommendations, it's worth checking out the list of Japan's 100 Famous Mountains. While the list is subjective, it's widely referred to within Japan and takes a number of factors into account, such as geographical distribution, ensuring that its mountains are accessible from anywhere in Japan.

GENERAL HIKING IN JAPAN

Mountain culture is unique in every country, and Japan is certainly a unique country. Here are a few main points that stood out to me in Japan.

Mountain lodges are ubiquitous. Most peaks, and certainly every famous one, have at least one lodge. They're a valuable resource for their free (or cheap) water and toilets, which are around ¥100 per use. Those doing overnight trips can

also opt to spend the night here. For an overnight stay, dinner, breakfast, and a next-day bento, lodge rates tend to be around ¥11,000. Those more inclined to camp can use campsites near the lodge for ¥500-1000 per night. Beer is also obtainable here for those looking to wind down. It's not uncommon to arrive at your destination to find some rosy-cheeked imbibers getting an early start on the afternoon.



Trails often run along the spines of the mountains, rather than between them.

— 2 —

An impressive number of elderly people climb. They are often experienced, dedicated, and in better shape than you...a humbling fact, considering they are at least one generation ahead.

— 3 —

Depending on their use and remoteness, trails do not always live up to the well-maintained reputation of Japanese infrastructure. At times they pass through boulder fields or dry creek beds and are simply marked with paint. ✗ means no, ○ means ok, and a skull – well, you can guess. Some trails can be quite dangerous (see: the infamous Daikiretto), particularly those that are more remote and less-traveled. Caution and planning are advised; hiking under a constant fear of death can be a real mood killer.



PREPAREDNESS AND SAFETY

Speaking of fear and death, let's discuss how to prevent such experiences. Mountain climbing is generally accessible for all; there are some trails on which you could bring your grandmother (or your Japanese great-grandmother). But others are not for the faint of heart. The first tip is to be aware of how difficult the trail you've chosen is. Fortunately, there are resources for this which we'll look at later. If you're smart about matching your experience level with the difficulty of the trail,

you should have no problem. Another tip to remember is that fatigue is a safety factor. If you're in good shape and think you can race through a trail, that's fine – but be aware that planning in such a way can make a trip more dangerous. The combination of a risky trail, the pressure of having to hurry, and the mental and physical effects of fatigue creates an unpleasant experience or even real danger.

If you're unfamiliar with trekking safety, researching that should

be your first priority. Start slow and easy with other experienced hikers. But for now I'll just recommend some things to have before hitting the trails: The ten essentials. Good shoes and rain gear, as the weather changes *fast*. A knowledge of the trail. And the ability to fill out *teishutsu*, or trail registration – this is a form that you submit to the police explaining details like your route and timeline, in case you need to be rescued. Finally, let someone know when you'll be back.



PLANNING THE ROUTE

A lack of English resources is perhaps the biggest roadblock to climbing in Japan as a non-Japanese speaker. While there are English resources, the most useful and prominent ones are in Japanese. A little Japanese ability – even just being able to differentiate kanji – is not required, but it's certainly helpful for both planning and following the signs along your route.

So, once you've picked a mountain or trip, here are your best friends:

— 1 —

Google Maps reviews: They're not perfect or very detailed, but they do offer a general picture of the mountain. Google will translate the Japanese reviews for you, yielding a generally-accurate-if-not-eloquent summary of what to expect. They're good for an easily accessible first impression.

— 2 —

Yamareco is a website for posting records of trips. It's Japanese, but a lot can be deciphered in English too. Its most valuable features are descriptions of access [including parking], a distance and elevation chart, and time checkpoints for the original climber's progress. Be careful; many of these authors

are mountain fanatics carrying no weight and setting incredible paces. Plan conservatively. To find guides for your specific trip, use the website or just google the mountain's name in Japanese with “コース”.

— 3 —

¥1000 maps: It's important to have a proper map, and this series of topographical maps worked great for me. They're called 山と高原地図, usually followed by a number and keywords for the area. Copy and paste the above, plus the kanji for your mountain, and you should find what you want on google. They're in Japanese, but most of the information can be understood intuitively. This series covers most everywhere.

SOME HELPFUL JAPANESE VOCAB:

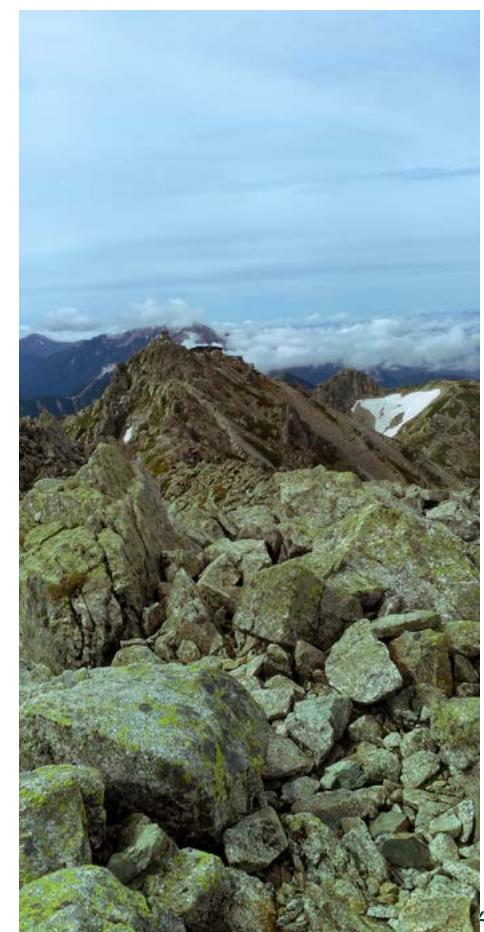
登山・山登り	touzan / yamanobori	mountain climbing
日帰り	higaeri	day trip
～泊	~haku/paku	# of nights (staying)
小屋	koya	mountain lodge
キャンプ場	kyanpujou	campground
危険	kiken	danger
山道	yamamichi	(mountain) trail
分岐	bunki	junction
往復	oufuku	round trip
片道	katamichi	one way
提出	teishutsu	registration (of climbing plan)
遭難	sounan	disaster/emergency/being stranded

Ideally, you should try to learn the kanji for your destination and major waypoints on the trail, as many signs will only be marked with the characters.

Now you're ready to start climbing the mountain. Go early! Good weather is critical, and often worsens as the day goes on. Japanese hikers also tend to start and finish earlier than their American counterparts; it's not uncommon in Japan to sleep in the parking lot the night before or to set out from home at 2 a.m.. If you show up to your lodge or campsite with sunset approaching, well, you'll be the only one.

Follow trail etiquette as you would anywhere in the world. On narrow trails, when descending, yield to those going up. Ecosystems are fragile, so refrain from romping off-trail. And finally, say hi to the people you pass - they're exceedingly friendly. Even if you don't speak any Japanese, English, smiles, and gestures often suffice for communication. And regardless of means, these exchanges make for warm memories on the trail.

Colin Gamm is a third year American ALT in Ena, Gifu. Raised in Kathmandu until age four, he has always felt at home in the mountains, making Ena a natural fit. Other hobbies besides hiking include rock climbing, snowboarding, and eating misokatsu.



TOKAMACHI

— SNOW FESTIVAL —

Sarah Oeste (Niigata Prefecture)



In the search for a snow festival to ease the biting cold of the season, most travelers flock to Sapporo for the grandest snow sculptures and an exciting selection of winter activities. The Sapporo Snow Festival is certainly the most popular winter festival destination, but the Tokamachi Snow Festival is the oldest snow festival in Japan. While the Tokamachi Snow Festival is much smaller than Sapporo's, it offers a small town take on a winter celebration meant to showcase the tight-knit community as much as the heavy snowfall of southern Niigata.

However, this year's tale of the Tokamachi Snow Festival was a story of tragedy, adjustment, and success. Usually, this snow festival draws 30,000 visitors to my town to enjoy a weekend of performances, food, and general merriment. The festival is known for its large, elaborate snow stage upon which famous local performers such as girl group NGT48 entertain the masses. However, this year, as snowfall failed to reach the anticipated levels and the weather warmed, workers struggled to build the yearly snow stage masterpiece. Still, they persevered and began building. The conditions were disadvantageous, but no one expected them to be dangerous until the snow stage collapsed, crushing and ultimately killing a worker.

This sent ripples throughout the community. There were talks of cancellations, replacements, and solutions (it's handy to have a CIR who works in City Hall) until finally the city announced that they would not hold the massive snow stage show that the festival was famous for. Several higher-profile performances were cancelled, and the festival was downsized. We local ALTs understood the circumstances, but we were still devastated – we had seen pictures of and heard so much about the festival, but now we wouldn't be able to see its biggest draw. What would this year's snow festival become? And yet, although smaller and maybe a bit more simple, the festival was still full of fun.

"...when the time to build the snow sculpture arrived, we learned how draining making these massive snow sculptures can be."

The Snow Festival started a bit earlier for the Tokamachi ALTs. For most of us, it was our first Snow Festival, and, naturally, we naively agreed to build our own snow sculpture when presented with the opportunity. However, when the time to build the snow sculpture arrived, we learned how draining making these massive snow sculptures can be. The workers we assisted poured nearly two weeks into the sculpture's construction and upkeep. My entire job was building trees – crafting a forest to line the walkway leading to large snow sculptures of Totoro and CatBus from "My Neighbour Totoro." Our piece was called "*Totoro no Mori*," and although my role was small, I was proud to help. However, as we shoveled snow all Friday night, struggling to finish up the piece, a bus filled with the judges suddenly rolled up! They were early, and we frantically ran around, moving lighting fixtures, smoothing snow, and chucking unfinished mini Totoros to the wayside; calls of "*shogunai*" flew through the air. Then the judges walked in, looked around, and left, just like that. It may have been a bit rough around the edges, but I think our snow sculpture was pretty neat, and I was grateful to have a cute theme like "Totoro's Forest" instead of the "Thomas the Tank Engine" theme that another team came up with.



That Friday night, I took a break from carving out tree roots to head to the main fairgrounds next to the local high school. It was already dark, and I could hear the music from far around the corner, the bright booth lights illuminating the festival. Half of the wide high school field was lined with food stalls hawking anything from beer to fried chicken to ramen. There was a great shop in the corner of the field that sold wonderful blueberry and banana crepes so delicious that it didn't matter that they got my order wrong a couple times.

Between the food stalls, I frequently ran into my students enjoying the festival. Such are the legitimate perks of being a local at festivals. Just after the massive balloon release on Friday night, some of my students ran up to me. "Sarah-sensei! Sarah-sensei! Do you have scissors?"

Of course I didn't, much to his disappointment. I was confused until he turned around and I saw a bright pink balloon securely tied to his backpack, too tight to untie. I guess he got a free balloon out of the night!

Local students, including my own, also took to the stage for the snow festival. Our city is a reputed center of kimono production, and the traditional dress often makes an appearance at festivals in the area. For a couple weeks beforehand, one of my JHS first years had been telling me, through miming and key words, how she was going to perform in kimono on stage. And so to my delight on Friday night, I saw my student gracefully stride across the stage. She stuck out, due, in part, to her bright yellow kimono and, in part, to her beaming smile that seemed to reach everyone around her. I was so happy that students could still show off their kimono this year, as the city had wavered about even holding a show at all this year. Indeed, the event was downsized from the seventy-one or so kimono that they had wanted to show off. The show was small, but it captured the audience's attention, and you could see that the girls and boys were proud to show off such an important heritage of Tokamachi.



I was able to see even more kimono at the Kimono Queen contest held in the community auditorium. This is an annual event that selects three women to represent Tokamachi City for the year. I couldn't understand very much of the show, but just seeing such ornate kimono and understanding a bit of the stories behind their pieces really made me understand why Tokamachi is proud of their kimono.

Tokamachi Station had its own mini festival. On Saturday, my friend Amanda and I stopped by to visit the Tourist Centre. As we were heading back to the car, a man stopped us and gestured to the man-made winding tube hill behind him. Apparently, the hill wasn't just for kids. I wasn't wearing snow pants, but never one to miss an opportunity, I grabbed a tube and followed Amanda up the hill. It wasn't a long ride, but it was delightful. I made the mistake of sitting down into a puddle when I reached the bottom of the slide, and the cold wet feeling haunted me for several hours afterwards. Still, tubing was worth it.



Even the local art museum and souvenir shop were in on the snow festival action. Near the museum, they had a beautiful snow sculpture shaped like a castle, and inside the museum, there were mini cafes and food stands. We sat and enjoyed a quiet morning before heading back to the hustle and bustle of the main stage area. As we were leaving, we passed a small concert playing traditional Japanese music. I'd never heard this before! In fact, I only knew this music from when I'd played the game *Okami* years ago. It was really exciting for me to hear the actual music that'd inspired the video game's soundtrack, and the sound transported me to the mountains of southern Japan even as I stood in the midst of a snow festival. That was one of my favourite moments of the festival.

There was a lot else happening during the Tokamachi festival that weekend, from the Tea House serving *matcha* in the snow to snow volleyball to other performances by guest musicians and comedians. Despite the initial tragedy and planning difficulties, the Tokamachi Snow Festival was a blast! This festival was the type that you could take at your own pace, enjoying the good food, good company, and good community under the snow.

Sarah Oeste is a first year Canadian ALT based in Niigata Prefecture. She has her M.A. in Canadian history. She loves watching movies, exploring Japan, and talking with her highly entertaining JHS students.



MIX

Keep the Stress at Bay

Laura Pollacco (Kanagawa)



People who know me have always commented that I am a little aggressive. Most of this is in jest, the odd punch to the arm here, and an angry scowl there. I joke about it with my friends, and it has become a part of my personality. Sometimes though, it isn't a joke—sometimes it is how I deal with things. Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to prove I was as tough as the boys. This was great for competition and sports, and I did a lot of them: gymnastics, dancing, horse riding, football, netball, rounders, athletics (running and jumping mainly), bouldering, and even, for a short time, sailing. I had way too much energy, and it had to be channeled somewhere constructive, hence all the sports. However, as a young girl, trying to play with the boys meant a lot of teasing, and testing. They would challenge me on mundane things like arm wrestling. They would act particularly aggressive when they were around me as well. Over time, there have been instances that have led me to realise that self defense may be a good idea.



It wasn't until my first year at university, though, that I started martial arts. I ended up joining the Kung Fu Society, where I was amongst a small number of women within a larger group of men. Kung fu is not just a sport, it is seen as a way of being. Anything that is done with mindfulness and constant practice could be considered kung fu, even a chess game. It also includes breathing exercises and focus training. The physical training was exhausting. A typical warm up includes 60 push ups with variations, planking until burnout (first to fall had to do handstand push-ups). This wasn't just physical training, it was mental as well. How far could you push your body and keep going, despite the aching? Then came drills, which trained technique, speed, and power. Often following that we went into sparring, and, depending on your opponent, it could be painful. Here though, the men, though they often joked with me and challenged me, did not treat me differently for being a woman. We trained to understand each opponent as individuals, with each their own unique strengths and weaknesses. We would knock each other down and then offer a hand back up. We respected each

other and had discipline. Those are the main things that doing a martial arts will teach you: respect and discipline.

I did that for over 3 years, adding in a few Tai Chi classes as well, to help balance my aggressive fighting style. Throughout that time I felt fit. Bruised though I may have been from time to time, my body was stronger and in better shape than it had ever been before. I enjoyed the classes and the training because it gave me somewhere to vent and burn off steam. I also became friends with the people there, a few I still keep in touch with today.

When I came to Japan I knew I had to continue in some way. I had to keep in shape and find a way to keep training. I had dreamed of training in a dojo, and I knew that I would join a martial arts club in whatever school I was placed in. Unfortunately, I wasn't based in a school but an Education Center, which required a lot of sitting at a desk. I couldn't join the school's club activities, so I searched to find somewhere to take lessons, but it was difficult to find someone who spoke enough English to train me. I couldn't find websites in English, and the schedules were all difficult to understand. Many of the group classes were aimed at training children, and I didn't really think that I could get a decent spar with eleven year olds. On top of that, the fees were crazy! Nothing seemed to fit my needs, until eventually I found a small place a few train stops away at an MMA gym (Mixed Martial Arts).

When I joined, I learned boxing, kickboxing, a little *Judo* and Brazilian *Ju Jitsu* (BJJ). My trainer speaks English very well, so we have very few communication problems. One of

the cool things about my trainer is his name, 竜彦 (Tatsuhiko). The first kanji in his name means dragon, so we joke about how I am being trained in a martial arts, here in Japan, by a dragon. I personally think that's epic! He is very patient with me, and pushes me, but never uses aggression. A typical sessions starts with me warming my limbs up, doing some dynamic stretching, and working out all the pops and clicks in my joints. From there we start punching drills. I usually wear gloves, though sometimes I use only my bare knuckles (though this can lead to bruising and bleeding). I jab, cross, hook, and uppercut, the pads in set combos. We do three 3 minute sets, and that is enough to get me sweating and gets my heart rate up. We might then move onto kicks, and occasionally work on takedowns and floorwork, such as pinning your opponent on the floor using an arm bar. Every so often we will spar with one another. I have yet to spar with anyone other than my teacher here, though that is something that I would very much like to do before I leave.

I have also taken a few *kendo* classes, *aikido* classes, and one of my co-workers offered to teach me some *katana* techniques using an actual katana! I have learned how to draw, strike and re-sheath the sword, which is by no means easy with a curved blade. So alongside my weekly training, I have tasted and experienced more traditional Japanese forms of martial arts as well, which makes me feel like I have somehow fulfilled that part of what I wanted from my time here.

I really enjoy MMA. It keeps me fit and allows me to feel a sense of achievement, as I can see how I have improved over time. I get a great sense of pride from learning

“It helps channel my aggression and energy in a safe and respectful place.”

martial arts, pushing my body to the limits and getting better and better. It is something that keeps not only my body healthy, but my mind too—I can go and relieve some stress from the week in just a one hour session. If I am struggling with something, I feel like I can somehow work though it in my mind whilst I am practicing my technique. I allow my frustration with things to physically be let go, so I can focus on being pragmatic about the problem. People deal with stress and anxiety in many different ways. For some it is often tranquil or requires concentration, such as illustration or cross-stitch; and for others it may be relaxing by taking long baths or just allowing yourself to be still. For me it's martial arts. It helps channel my aggression and energy in a safe and respectful place. It teaches me discipline and humility. There will always be someone better than me, and I respect them, as well as those who may only just be starting out.

Keeping my body in shape makes me feel good about myself—I like being toned and feeling strong. I am happy I found a way to continue that here. There are so many health benefits to martial arts, mental and physical. There are some downsides as well, such as joint problems and occasional injuries (my knee joint now pops a lot and I believe I have permanent scars on my knuckles), but these things are all worth it for me. I know how to defend myself or, even better, get myself out of potentially dangerous situations, which I have done once before in Japan. I believe

that since I started martial arts, it has helped me deal with stress, given me a safe space to offload my energy, and it's been cathartic. I hope that some of you will read this and want to try it out for yourself. Even if it doesn't help, you may just find it a lot of fun!



Laura Pollacco is a 2nd year JET living in Kanagawa. She is currently trying to do too many things at once, as she loves acting, writing, dancing, travelling and MMA. She can't stop eating chicken right now.

COOKING

Made

Easy

*(in Your Tiny
Japanese Kitchen)*



Ode to My **IMMERSION BLENDER**

Linka Wade (Gunma)



Life in Japan can sometimes be less than convenient, and never is that more apparent than when you're trying to cook in a kitchen with hardly any space to move, let alone prep food. Tiny kitchens are a burden many of us face here in Japan, but some JETs have found unique gadgets that make cooking in them a breeze!

As a person who loves to be in the kitchen, the standard tiny Japanese apartment kitchen is a bit hard on me. I miss my big, glorious stand mixer and my blender. But this winter I found the answer to my problems! My Christmas present to myself was a Tescom stick blender, purchased on Amazon for the whopping price of ¥1,860. It's a lovely little thing that comes in two parts, so storage is very easy. It's electric, so no batteries are required, and it uses a standard Japanese non-polarized plug. It's also very easy to clean.

One thing I desperately craved this winter was soup, like butternut squash and potato. These are thick, creamy soups that require blending as an essential step. The first thing I did when I got my stick blender was to stew up a pot of *kabocha*. When I took that first bite, I knew that this was exactly what I had been missing about winter at home. In the summer, it could definitely be used for making some tasty smoothies, or even milkshakes! The blender also comes with a large plastic measuring cup, which is perfect for making milkshakes.

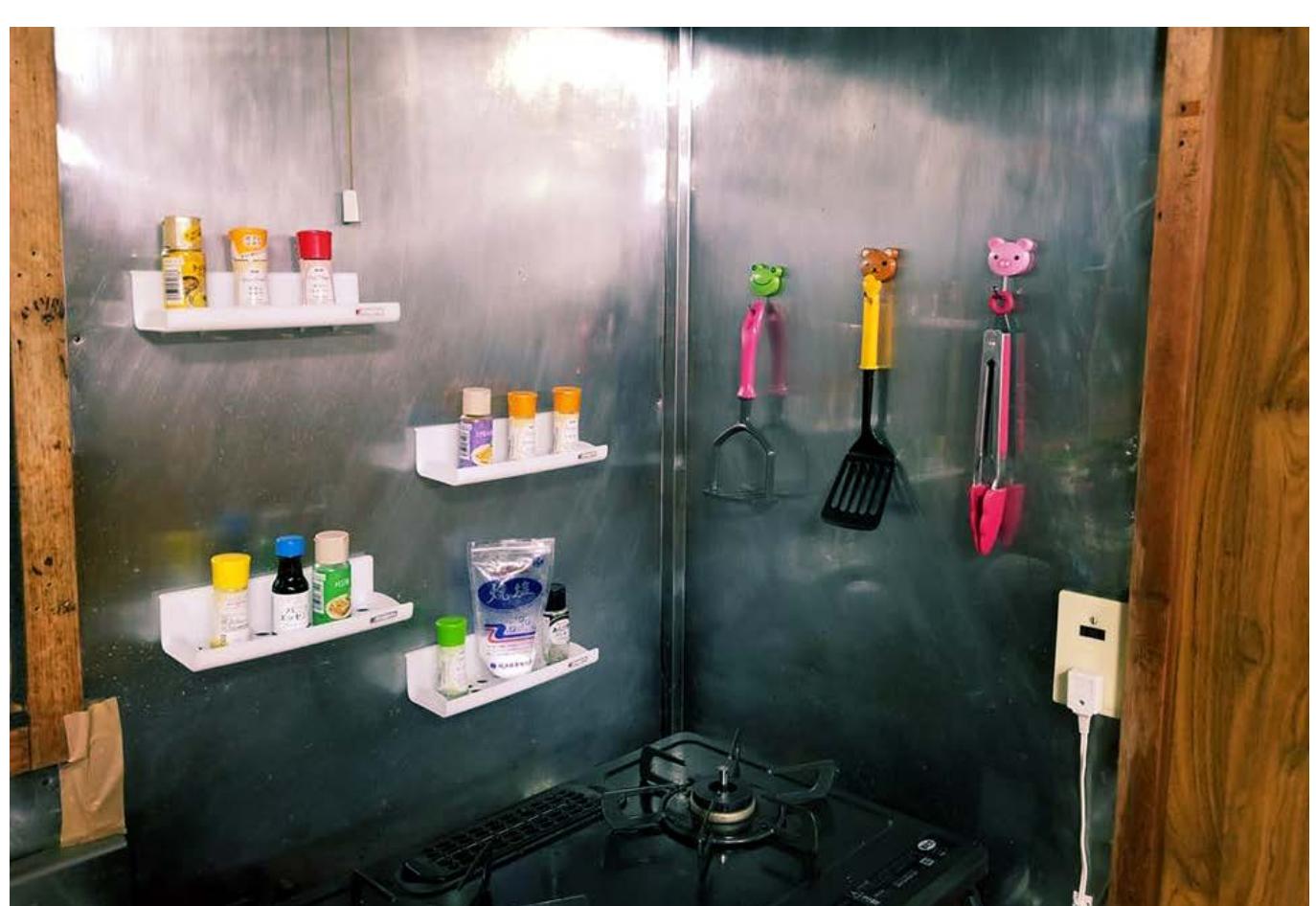
If you need any sort of blending or electric mixing implement, I would definitely recommend the Tescom stick blender!

Spice Up Your Life

Meghana Brandl (Hokkaido)

I love using a variety of different herbs and spices when I cook, but upon moving to Japan, I quickly noticed my precious cooking spices took over my already limited prep space. A neat solution I've found to work is installing a spice rack made from magnets. If your kitchen is like mine (and many others in Japan), its backsplash is made from metal, which of course means it's magnetic! Thinking on my feet, I ran to the Daiso and bought several small magnet shelves, which happened to be the perfect solution to my spice dilemma. Having my spices right in front of me as I cook has made cooking a lot easier. I also bought some cute magnetic hooks to hang spatulas and things from.

A word of caution though: I've found the magnets to be kind of weak, and therefore the shelves have a rather low weight limit. It may be worth it to try and find a higher-end version at Homemac or Nitori so you can store heavier objects.



Single Burner Blues

Amanda Muller (Kyoto)



As someone who hates cooking and likes to do as little of it as possible, living in an apartment with only one burner to cook on really drags out the torture. Luckily for me, I have some resourceful family members on my side. After my cousins visited Japan and saw my apartment, they had a great idea of what to get me for Christmas. And so when I came home for Christmas, there waiting for me under the tree was a divided skillet, AKA my saving grace.

A divided skillet is exactly what it sounds like, a skillet with dividers down the middle so that you can cook more than one thing at a time. Never again will my meat go cold while I cook my veggies, because I can handle those bad boys all at the same time. My skillet has two sides, one side being a normal skillet and the other side ribbed. You can surely find a variety of skillets on Amazon, some divided in three or more parts.

If you, like me, have only one burner and want to save some time, a divided skillet might be the answer.

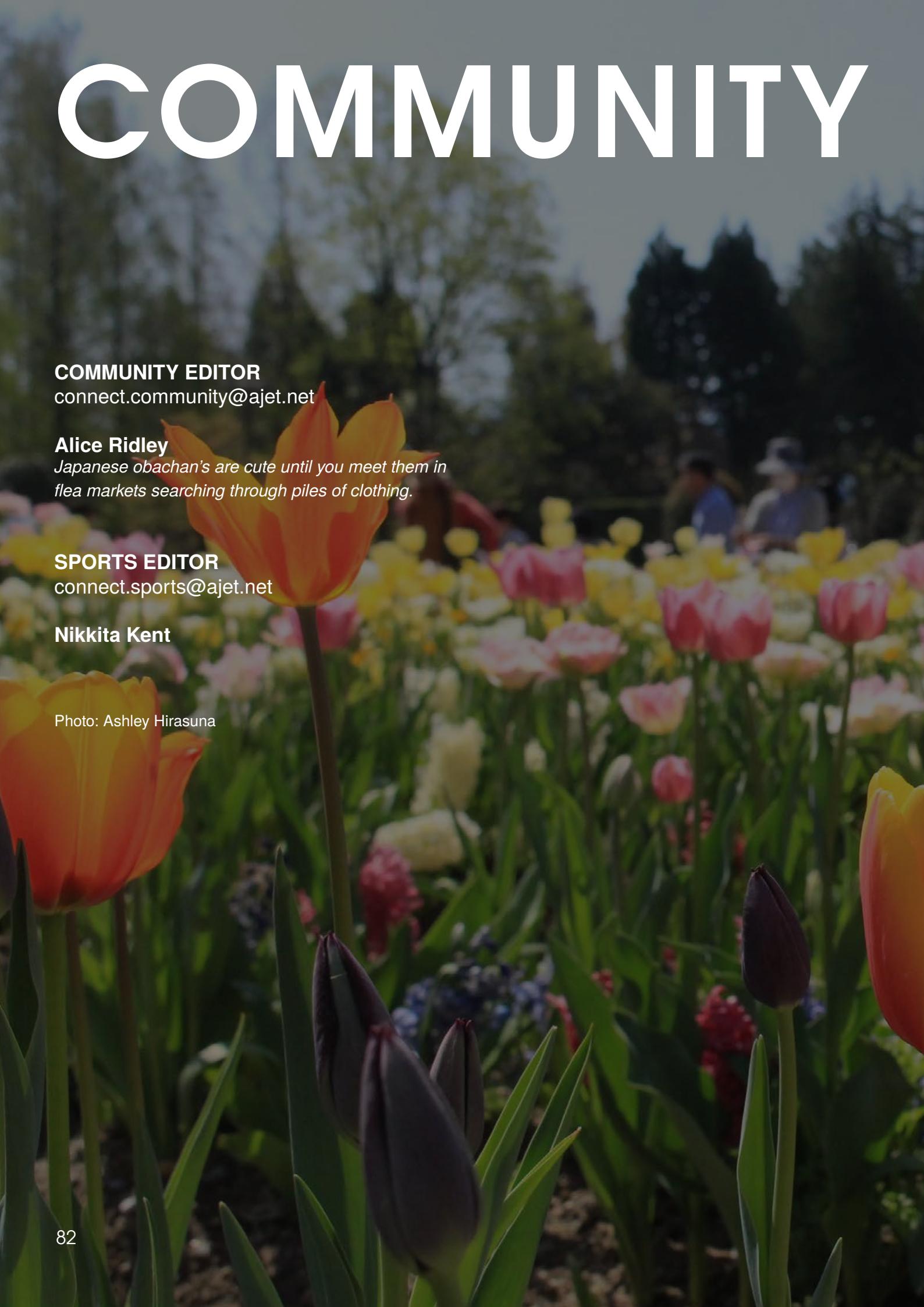
Slow and Steady

Jennifer Madden
(Hyogo)

I'm not a great cook, and having a tiny kitchen does not make that any easier, but one of the gadgets that helps with that is my slow cooker. I went down to a nearby Hard Off second-hand store and bought it for cheap; I don't remember how much it cost but it couldn't have been more than a couple thousand yen. It's been great for batch cooking soups, meats, and a few other things. I can prep the ingredients the night before and toss them in to start cooking before I leave for work. By the time I come home from work, starving for dinner, I have a hot meal ready to go, and my apartment smells delicious!

I generally will cook a couple large meals a week and eat the leftovers for lunch/dinner the rest of the week. My slow cooker is big enough that I can cook enough for the week (with maybe a bit extra to go in the freezer) but not so big that I have to buy a lot to fill it, or have too much left over. My favorite go-to recipe is probably good old fashioned chicken noodle soup, but I've also made some pea soup, juicy pork tenderloin (soooo delicious), and applesauce.

COMMUNITY

A photograph of a vibrant tulip garden. In the foreground, several tulips are in full bloom, their petals ranging from bright yellow to deep red and pink. Some buds are still closed. The flowers are set against a backdrop of green grass and other tulip plants. In the distance, two people wearing hats are visible, sitting or walking through the garden.

COMMUNITY EDITOR

connect.community@ajet.net

Alice Ridley

Japanese obachan's are cute until you meet them in flea markets searching through piles of clothing.

SPORTS EDITOR

connect.sports@ajet.net

Nikkita Kent

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



Learning, Writing, and Living

How Brenden
Bish Finds
Meaning
in Each
Journey

Aidan Koch (Gunma)





As a person who loves to travel and meet new people, I have taken it upon myself to interview and share the stories of my fellow expatriates on my blog, *Memoirs of a Gaijin*. I decided to do this at the beginning of 2019, and Brenden was my first interview. It was a truly memorable experience sitting down and hearing some of his story. He has some very interesting insights on traveling, learning languages, and more. But I'll let him say all of that himself:

For Brenden Bish, 28-year-old international poet and professional student, learning is a way to tune into eternity.

"You never stop learning," says Brenden. "You can learn so many different things under the sun, so you can learn something and be humbled by each new thing. And each lesson is just one tiny piece of the whole expanse of human knowledge, so I really strive to learn something new in every moment."

We are seated in a small coffee shop in Kiryu on a Sunday afternoon, sharing coffee, cheesecake, and conversation.

"I have been to over 20 countries," Brenden remarks between bites of cake. "I've been to every continent but Australia so far, and there are a lot of places I still haven't made it to yet." When he said this, I asked him, why Japan now? Why not a different country?

To this, Brenden gave a simple answer:

To Learn

"I am here to learn about two things," he says. "One, I want to learn more about the culture and people of Japan. But also I am trying to discover more of who I am, since I have lineage that comes from Japan."

Brenden's grandmother on his mother's side was born and raised in Tokyo, and he still has a branch of the family that lives there.

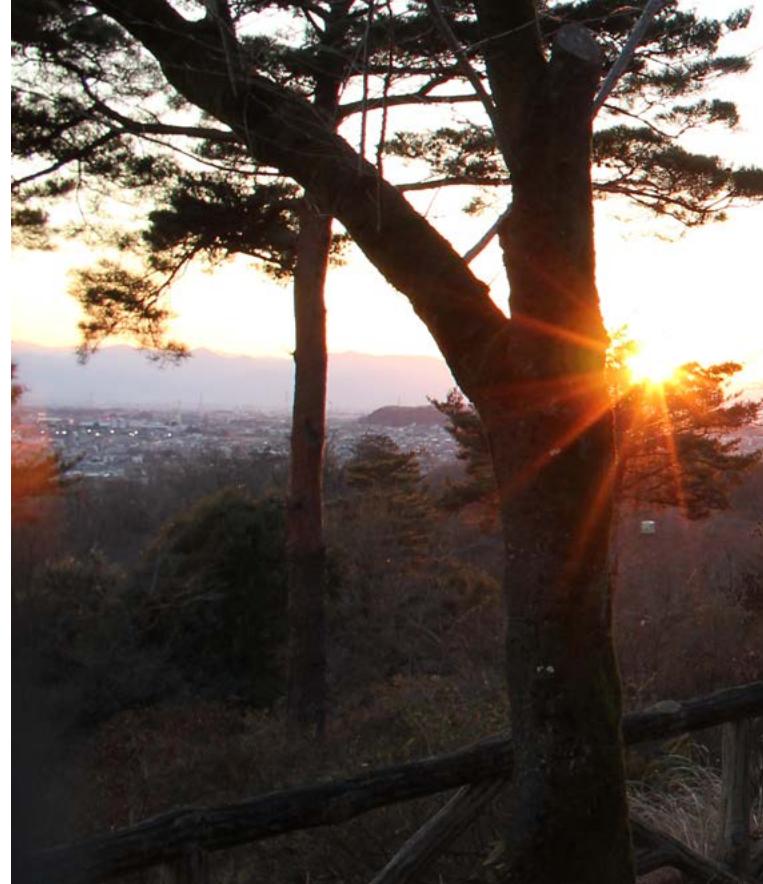
"At the moment, I don't feel confident enough in my Japanese to reconnect with my family over here," says Brenden. "But one of my goals for 2019 is to overcome that obstacle, that's for sure."

In addition to communicating with his family in the Land of the Rising Sun, he also tries to keep in touch with his family and friends in America and other parts of the world.

"With modern technology," says Brenden "it's pretty difficult not to stay connected in some way. Usually I use apps like Line and WhatsApp, but I am also a big proponent of writing letters."

"Writing letters, to me, is something that's much more real and genuine, so they mean a little more than a simple text message. In a letter, there is no place for small chats like a text, so I find them to be much better in communicating how I feel."

In a way, this allows Brenden to keep in touch with himself as much as it does those important to him, and he also has had many travel experiences that have brought him realizations about himself.



A Self Outside of Oneself

Recently, at the end of December, Brenden took the time to travel to the Philippines with his friend Phil. During their time there, they interviewed the widow and brother of a man who died saving other people from a fire, and they were also privileged with the opportunity to see this man's home, children, and everyday life.

"This was the first time that I have traveled for a purpose like this," says Brenden. "Phil is working to establish a scholarship in the name of this man, Melvin, so he wanted me to help interview this man's family to learn more about him."

"Initially, the goal was to tell the story of Melvin from his widow and his brother, but we finished that on Day 1. After that, we had a lot of time on our hands, and we were presented with the opportunity to meet the rest of his family on the nearby island of Samal."

"This was something that happened as a spur-the-moment decision" says Brenden. "but we were still able to combine the two goals of our time in the

Philippines: see new places and chronicle the story of Melvin."

Unfortunately, the duo were unable to meet with Melvin's family due to communication and technological issues, but that did not stop them from enjoying their time in Samal.

"Many of my experiences were eye-opening," says Brenden. "One day, Phil and I were walking down the street and we passed by an alley, and, upon seeing it I said, 'We have to go down that alley.' Phil protested at first, but eventually we went down there and we found a group of kids playing basketball. We joined in, and soon there was a 2 vs. 8 game of basketball between Phil and me and the rest of the kids. There were too many kids for us to win, but we still got to engage with the community and see life in the Philippines."

"When we passed that alley, I didn't know what was at its end," says Brenden, "but all I could think was, 'That is where life is.'"



Where Life Is

To have Brenden tell it, traveling is what keeps the heart young.

"For me, the most motivating thing to keep traveling is the sense of wonderment that I can find in even the smallest and most mundane things," he says. "I think that as you grow older you lose the ability to be astonished and intrigued by the world around you, but traveling, I have found, keeps that sense of wonderment burning inside me. Each and every journey has me feeling like a kid on an adventure."

Part of that adventure is always immersing himself in the culture of wherever he may find himself, and Brenden always tries his best to dive as deep into the culture as he can.

"From my experiences abroad I have learned that the biggest difference between simply visiting a place and genuinely experiencing it comes down to how much you immerse yourself," says Brenden. "There have been times when I traveled to a country for a week with a friend, and while I would just dive right into everything the country had to offer, my friend would stay locked into their phone, missing the world around [them]. In most of those cases, I walked away with some incredible experiences while my friend, who was a bit inhibited in the immersion, didn't get as much from it as I did."

"And, even more than that, living and breathing in the culture is the best way to get that in-depth immersion."



Aidan Koch is a first-year JET living and working in Kiryu, Gunma Prefecture. As a 22-year-old graduate, JET is his first time teaching as well as living abroad. He plans to continue teaching in Japan for the next couple years, as he finds it to be a very unique experience. He manages and writes weekly posts on his blog, [Memoirs of a Gaijin](#), where he collects and shares the stories of travelers from all over the world.

Living and Learning in Culture

In the last 10 years, Brenden has lived away from Bridgeport, Connecticut, his hometown, many times, from nearby places like New Hampshire to far-off destinations such as Chile and, most recently, Japan. And whenever he moves to a new place, Brenden learns everything he can about the culture, especially the language.

"Language, to me, is a way to put yourself in the mind of the people who live somewhere," says Brenden. "When you know the language, and you can move around, communicate, and construct a thought in the same way as the people around you, that makes a world of difference when you are traveling."

Learning lessons is the most consistent aspect of travel, though some lessons are more impactful than others. For Brenden, the largest lesson he has taken from his travels has, and always will be, the perspective that he gained.

"Many revelations, big and small, have come my way during my travels," says Brenden, "but one of the most meaningful ones came to me while I was

in Peru. I had just completed a climb up to Machu Picchu, and because I had a bus to catch I had basically sprinted down the mountain to make it in time. I made it to the bus by the skin of my teeth in every sense of the word. I was exhausted, sore, had no more money with me, and I had to use my credit card to pay for the bus ticket. Sitting on the bus, I was stewing in my feelings, throwing myself a one-man pity party and kicking myself for being so senseless in my plans. While I sat there, a group of kids walked by, and they were in a much poorer state than my own."

"Here I was sitting in the first seat on the train to go back to my hotel in another city, and these kids were walking back home dirty with clothes that they could barely afford looking at the foreigner at the front of the train. To them, I was living the life. And in that moment, I realized something: rarely will your situation be the worst. Sure, I may have been in a tight spot, but I still had a bed to sleep in and adventures to go on. Since then, I really have done my best to keep that sense of perspective, especially when I'm traveling."

The Last Word

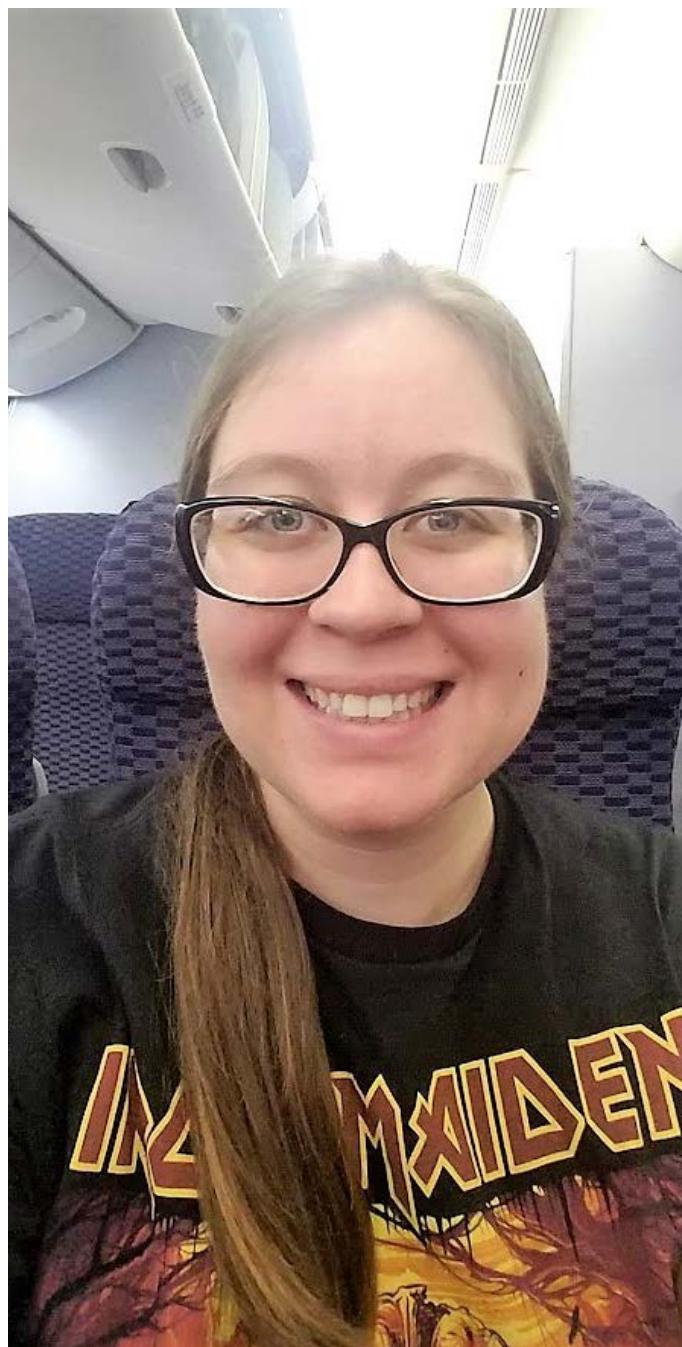
As a professional student and world traveler, Brenden Bish is always learning, and he has no intention of stopping any time soon. He will continue to travel, learn lessons, and share those lessons with his companions and compatriots through his poetry, writing, and spoken words.

Which is what traveling is all about.

“Finding Yourself” in Japan

OR Some Other Cliche and Yet Shockingly Accurate Sentiment

Sarah White (Fukui)



Huddled with my Houston-consulate peers on the eve of my departure to Japan, I distinctly remember one of the coordinators standing before us all and saying the following:

“Take a picture of yourself on the plane to Tokyo because I guarantee that the person who leaves tomorrow will not be the same as the one who returns.”

I wish I could go back in time and ask him if he knew just how literal that would end up being for me. Because as someone who left Houston thinking they were female and will go back realizing they were transgender, my situation is about as literal an interpretation of that as you can get. Now to be fair, I don't think he had a person like me in mind when he said it. I believe this bit of wisdom is relevant for everyone who embarks on JET. I am just one extreme case on a spectrum of examples showing how this experience is life-changing.

This isn't the first program I have done where the journey was prefaced with sentiments like this. Before I left for the Disney College Program (DCP), many people who'd done it (alumni, we call them) told me similar things. Phrases like *“It will completely change your life!”* and *“You'll never be the same afterward!”* were plastered all over social media groups designed for incoming participants. And you know what? They'd been right that time, too.

So *what is it* about these “programs” that is so revolutionary for personal and professional development? I believe there are three parts to this answer, and many participants in programs like this can relate to at least one if not all of them.

These experiences are some of the first times we've:

- had a full-time job.
- been immersed in a completely different culture to the one we know.
- been isolated in some way from friends, family, and other support networks that we've come to rely on in the past.

I know what you may be thinking. *"But you're from America, and the DCP is in America!"* Just because it is in the same country as I was born in does not mean Disney is not a world of its own. Ask any alumni, and they'll tell you the same. But let's keep things within the scope of JET for the sake of this magazine and break these points down one by one.

A person's first full-time job is a big thing. It could be the first time you experience what work in a particular field feels like. It could be the first time you are putting academic knowledge into practice. It could also be the first time that you have so much time—or the first time you have very little at all.

With JET, these factors combine differently for every participant. But a few things that remain static are **a)** having to adhere to a full-time contract and **b)** receiving a salary instead of an hourly-based income.

These are integral. It's here that we decide what kind of workers we are when an hourly income isn't driving us. Staying late isn't rewarded monetarily, and minutes aren't deducted from a timesheet when we don't come in on time. And for better or worse, the ALT contract gives us a lot of freedom in how much effort we put in at our job. There is very little disciplinary consequence for doing the bare minimum or flat-out being a bad ALT, short of extreme cases, and honest feedback from schools is nearly nonexistent. All of this essentially means that we are 100% in charge of making this role our own. We are expected to know what works and what doesn't by ourselves or only with the help of our fellow ALTs. That is *a lot of responsibility* for someone who may be entering the full-time workforce for the first time.

I have always been prompt in arriving to work, but in college, I used to believe in "leaving when the work was done." If I didn't, I would have never sat down and written a complete essay. To an extent, I still believe this. But I had to stop extending myself beyond what was rational. This isn't university, and

my job isn't the same as "homework." If a teacher comes to me at 4:00 p.m. about a PowerPoint for third period the next day, I have to remind myself that I may have time the next day to get it done, and it's okay to use that time instead of staying late. Does this mean I never stay late? Of course not. But once I recognized the responsibility of making this job my own, I was able to realize that being deliberate about my time at work and my time at home is very important. Work-life balance isn't about maximizing the time we get away from our jobs. It's just about maximizing time, period.

In programs like JET, this kind of clarity is often slow to be discovered but ends up more genuine for it. And the reason is that **we are on an island nation with a culture that is likely very different to the one in which we were raised.**

Coming to Japan, we are thrust into an unfamiliar work environment with a plethora of subtle etiquette cues that we aren't often fluent in. Finding balance can seem like an ongoing sink-or-swim decision that we don't always have full control over, even if it feels like we should. And culture shock is the tsunami that eradicates all previously held notions about what is acceptable in the workplace (and life in general) and forces us to *relearn everything*.

This is a big pill to swallow for a lot of people, and for some it's too much of an undertaking. And realizing that you are struggling and that you aren't finding your way in this job is acceptable. What isn't acceptable is knowing that you are failing and then either not making a significant effort to improve or not leaving the program and allowing another, potentially more successful person to take your place. Most of us understand this, and seeing as we are here for at least a year, we choose the former. After all, once preconceptions have been razed to the ground, the only choice that remains is to start over and build anew. The path of least resistance, so to speak.

So we build. And in doing so, navigating this new culture means we have to build slowly and be precise in how we relearn life. This is where terms like "cathartic" and "metamorphic" come from in regards to programs like JET. Because in this slow process of rediscovery, we find things that had been nagging at us or bringing us down even from before we came

to Japan, and we can eliminate or minimize these things.

After a year of working in a culture with notoriously strong gender roles and yet, in my situation, a good degree more freedom in what was considered “business attire,” I realized that no combination of clothes from America or clothes from Uniqlo would make me feel comfortable in feminine wear. It took me a good while to realize the disdain for what it was. I was too busy trying to translate head tilts and “maybes.” But as I came into myself at this job, I was able to clearly see this issue in a way I was never able to before.

In familiar territory, it is so easy to blame discomfort on something else and have that false narrative reinforced by coworkers. In Japan, I am on my own. I decide what an “ALT” should dress like, within reason. And my coworkers, despite having strong opinions about what is appropriate “female” attire, will often not tell me to my face that I can’t wear something a certain way to work. So I was “allowed” to slowly incorporate men’s clothes here and there until I realized, *“Oh, this is what I want to wear from now on.”* Fashion may seem like a superficial example, but as a trans individual, it’s really important to me. And that kind of block-by-block understanding is something I attribute to being in a different culture. As we detangle this job and how we fit inside of it, we create an environment for discovering our true feelings about what satisfies us in life.

Lastly, we are creating this environment away from friends, family, and support networks that we relied on prior to coming to Japan.

This is another sink-or-swim situation, really, and this separation from what we’ve known for so long can be too much for some people to handle. And *that’s okay*. There is no shame in admitting you need to be back on familiar ground in order to grow. Heck, that’s why I am heading home in July. But I find that the majority of people on this program flourish in some way, and

they learn to do so on their own. Not to say that we don’t make friends or build support networks here, but rather that we are forced to go out and do that largely from scratch.

I love my friends and family. I love my hometown. But I believe being away from those familiar people and places helped me realize things about myself much quicker than I would have had I stayed in El Paso. Being isolated and forced to create a new life for myself—one where I couldn’t just fall back on or blame something familiar when times were tough—made me think more critically. Everything from what kind of people I want to surround myself with to what kind of hobbies and routines are vital to my daily health. It could be complex (dissecting my gender and what that means for me), or it could be simple (realizing that just because I *can* eat a tub of ice cream without permission doesn’t necessarily mean I *should*).

Ever since realizing I am trans, I have wanted to write something about it for the JET community. But every time I sat down to talk about how I discovered myself, I realized I couldn’t do it without bringing up what a unique situation JET is and how that helped me along the way. And in doing that, I realized that this is not something no one else can relate to. We all change during our time here.

So no, I am not going to go on about what my childhood was like or how I am feeling about pronouns, names, or medical decisions. I am more than willing to discuss all of that one-on-one with people who are questioning or want to educate themselves further on what being transgender means. But that isn’t what matters for this magazine. What matters is that my case, despite being an extreme, is partly about how JET has shaped me—and how it shapes all of us.

We all come into this program with different backgrounds. But whether we are 22 or 40, whether we never lived away from home or we are leaving a spouse and child behind for this journey, JET gives

us the unique opportunity to live outside of our old lives and look back at them with a new perspective. For someone like me, this really is life-changing. And I know I'm not the only one who feels that way—like I've "found myself" in Japan.

So I challenge you to think back on the person you were before you arrived here. It doesn't matter if you just arrived last summer or have been here for much longer than the JET Program allows. If you could see a picture of yourself then and a picture of yourself now, would you say the person in one is identical to the other?

And when you find that they aren't, move on to the better question:

how are they different?

Sarah is a transgender 25 year-old ALT in Fukui and the Entertainment Editor for AJET Connect Magazine. They enjoy long walks on the beach and hacking their enemies to bits with disproportionately large swords in fantasy RPGs. They are currently pronoun indifferent and go by the names Sarah and Garrett.





A Brief Look into the Underground Community of Competitive

STREET FIGHTER

Max Friesen (Gunma)

I had my first taste of a “fighting game” competition when my friend Jordan turned the items off during *Super Smash Bros.* It was like a light switch went off in my head. No longer were we two friends horsing around with a casual game. No random Hammer or Bobomb would decide the fate of the victor. Now it was *mono e mono*, a true duel of smarts, patience, and willpower. I lost horribly. That was the first day I decided to actually practice a video game. I vowed that one day I would finally beat Jordan and assert my dominance.

So here we are, some years later. For

better or worse, I am a competitive *Street Fighter 5 (SFV)* player. Playing, watching, or reading about *Street Fighter* takes up an incredibly large, and incredibly unproductive, chunk of my free time. I am not a professional, but I am a community member, and I have a passion for the game. Chun Li is my character of choice. I would love to tell you I fell in love with her as a character for deep aesthetic and emotional reasons, and that she was the perfect vessel by which I could express my prowess and style both as a competitor and a person. Unfortunately, in actuality, when I first learned the game, I

thought mashing on the kick buttons would be easier than learning how to properly do the inputs. Either way, I have stuck with Chun Li since the beginning.

I recently left my gaming community in Vancouver, Canada, to move to Japan, where competition is much fiercer. This country is one of the only remaining places where arcades still exist, and fighting game communities amount to more than just a dozen friends meeting up every week. This is where the best players live and where *Street Fighter* thrives.

The fighting game genre owes its origins

to the flashing lights and chaotic noises of underground arcades in Tokyo, where overstressed salary-men would go to relax, smoke, and play after a long day's work. When the arcade version of *Street Fighter II* was converted to its SNES counterpart, it became a household name worldwide like *Pokémon* and *Mario*.

While arcades worldwide have largely disappeared in the console age, they are still abundant across Japan. You can find *Street Fighter* cabinets in virtually every arcade you visit. While that world still endures, the competitive community on the whole plays at

home online and at venues called “Console Arcades,” or “Dojos” if you will. These are wide rooms with zero lag-time TV monitors and accompanying PS4s. Players compete using Fightsticks: huge bulky lap-sitting controllers with 8 big buttons on the right and a ball-top stick on the left. It gives the same arcade feel to the game experience. Some individuals have inexplicably decided to play the game using primitive PS4 controllers, but we do not speak of those degenerates. They are almost as bad as *Smash* kids.

My Fightstick and I travel into Tokyo most weekends to a Dojo near Otsuka Station called Studio Sky. Here is where the pros play. The first time I came was an absolutely surreal experience. I was face-to-face with the best players on the planet. Momochi, Itazan, StormKubo, Jon Takeuchi Nemo, Fujimurra, and countless other devoted players make this their resting place to train and develop. To help put this into perspective, these famous players are usually bombarded with adoring fans asking for pictures and autographs when they travel to international events. So it’s quite incredible for some mediocre Canadian Chun Li player to have the opportunity to engage with them on

a regular basis.

More importantly, Studio Sky has been a welcoming community for me. As a foreigner struggling to learn this difficult language, Studio Sky has been a safe haven. It’s a place for me to establish a common interest, try my best at speaking Japanese, and engage with others to practice their English. And even if little is said using words, much is communicated through the dance of competitive play. You learn so much about a person through how they express the personality of their character. It is easy to tell an emotional player from a calculated one, a patient player from an anxious one, and a happy player from a frustrated one. Sometimes even a smile from a regular face is enough to know I am among friends. Everyone there has, like me, found a spark with this game, and devoted their time to mastering its craft.

			Menu
Lopez	lopezky	W W	
noguti	noguti	W	
NSLD	NSLD	W W	
GW/レン	レン	W W	
ryox	Ryox2	W W	
StiLe3	StiLe3	W W	





EVO JAPAN 2019

The first year of EVO Japan in Tokyo was a tournament of massive success. Over two thousand participants entered for SFV and over six thousand joined for other fighting games. This year had slightly less participation since it was in the small town of Fukuoka. Luckily, it still had over a thousand entrants for SFV. Overall there were 12,000 total visitors and spectators and over 10,000,000 JYP or 100,000 USD in prize money to be potentially won.

After eagerly awaiting this day I raced off the plane in Fukuoka, found a quick train to the city's convention center, and excitedly ran for the entrance of EVO Japan. I was expecting it to be a hullabaloo; normally venues are open and bustling the day before a massive tournament. But I arrived to a quiet street

and a sign on the doors. "EVO Japan competitors: please do not enter the building. We are catering a different event today. The venue will not be open until 12:00 tomorrow." Not quite the start I had imagined.

I arrived at 11:45 a.m. on opening day and slowly made my way through the long line of eager players. Walking into the venue, it had a feel like an anime convention: Lights, huge TV screens, a main stage for announcements, costumes, booths for clothing and artwork, etc. In the middle was the battlefield: row upon row of tables with accompanying TVs and PS4s. In three days one thousand players would be reduced to 124, then to eight, and eventually to one sole victor.

My first opponent was the owner of a gaming

team from the United Arab Emirates. I studied his replays, researched his character, and tried to get any info I could from the internet. Our match began at 1:00 p.m. and I stood waiting and ready. 1:00 rolled by ... 1:05 ... 1:10 ... 1:20... and finally the tournament organizers announced that he was disqualified! A glorious first victory for me! I triumphed! HUZZAH! The poor guy was over at the other end of the venue explaining that he had two matches booked at the same time. I ended up meeting him later and introducing myself when he showed up at around 1:30. Really nice guy. It's a shame he was double-booked.

My second match came pretty soon after. I faced a Japanese Ryu player who seemed to be in his first few months of development. It was a pretty straightforward

game for me and my Chun Li. His body language also made it painfully clear that he was not expecting much from himself.

My third game was against the best Karin player I have ever fought. There are certain things about this game I genuinely find beautiful. It is hard to explain, like describing the beauty of a football play to someone who doesn't understand the game rules. One concept in this game that is genuinely beautiful to me is having the talent to "whiff punish." You stand at the perfect spacing, then react to an opponent's outstretched punch or kick when it just misses you, and land a hit during the time their limb is whiffing. This opponent beat me by whiff punishing my moves again and again. He completely out classed me. I was now knocked into "losers bracket" for players who have lost once but were not yet eliminated.

My next match was against someone who took too many huge risks and played a very rambunctious, almost nonsensical style. This can work very well against newer players who get suffocated by high pressure. Luckily my tournament experience helped me weather the storm and I came out victorious by staying patient while

letting him overextend.

The next match was the one to make it into day two. The winner would move onto the next phase of the tournament in the top 124. As I was sitting next to my opponent and waiting to start, the tournament organizers told us to wait, then wait some more, then finally to follow them. We were going to have to play on the stream. My heart sank. I was escorted around to the front where my opponent and I joined the line-up for the big screen. My hands were shaking as we moved up the line. I was quite literally vibrating with nervousness and ruminating over how

the audience would undoubtedly see that I was a gimmicky and fraudulent player. The match in front of me ended and we were told to go up on stage. Gulp. There were a few thousand people at the venue, twelve thousand people watching the livestream of the English cast, and more than that watching the Japanese cast. If you want to watch the replay, click [here](#).

I will try not to spoil it for you, but I will say that this moment, for me, was one of the most cathartic experiences in my life. It remains a big highlight of my *Street Fighter* career and of my time here in Japan.

The next day, I was on a high. I went against a Japanese player using R. Mika, a female pro wrestler. This character tests your reactions and mental fortitude. I fell behind early, but managed to claw my way back to a clutch victory. My EVO run came to an end, finally, at the hands of PBE Don, the best player in the Philippines. His Akuma destroyed my health bar before I could find any solid footing. Overall, I am quite proud of how far I went, finishing in the top 97 with a record of five and two (the DQ totally counts, sue me.)

Once I was eliminated, it felt like a huge burden was lifted from my

shoulders. I was able to go from a competitor to a spectator. I could finally loosen up and just enjoy watching the rest of the tournament.

The third day included the Top Eight finals of every game. It was an absolute spectacle! Quite similar to a major sporting event, the whole stadium watched with bated breath every move of the best Japanese players alive. I lost my voice from all the yelling. You can really feel every heartbreaking moment when players who have made it this far get eliminated. Eventually the whole event came to an epic close and confetti filled the air as Momochi, playing like a god, won over Fuudo.



This tournament really cemented the fact that I care deeply for this community. *Street Fighter* brought me to Japan, and it has been the bridge for me to learn about Japanese culture. It is the way in which I have made friends here, and it is one of the biggest reasons I never want to leave.

Max Friesen is a first Year JET Program participant from Vancouver, Canada. He is a behavior Interventionist for kids with autism, and enjoys playing Street Fighter in his spare time.

FUKUOKA BRAWL

Charles Chi (Hyogo)

"HADOKEN!"

Everyone from the most hardcore video game aficionados to the most casual of *Street Fighters* has heard this word. It's a word I would hear countless times over a three-day period when I participated in EVO Japan 2019 last February.

EVO, the world's largest fighting-genre e-sport (Electronic Sport) tournament in the world, features six world-renowned titles such as Capcom's *Street Fighter* and Namco's *Tekken*. This year's tournament venue brought me and thousands of others to the Kokusai Arena in Fukuoka city. Competitors from across Japan (and the world) travelled there to unleash their skills at what is essentially the Olympics of fighting games.

Compared to other countries, the video game and arcade culture in Japan is quite developed and well-respected. Some of the largest video game companies and titles are from Japan. From my understanding, e-sport tournaments never really took off in Japan due to the country's strict laws. However, recent changes have given us a chance to see how much of a demand there really is for video game tournaments in Japan.

Upon arriving at the terminal in Fukuoka Airport, I was immediately greeted with a giant EVO Japan 2019 poster. As I walked through the streets of the city, I spotted many more posters promoting the weekend's tournament. It was clear from the advertisements that EVO Japan was a big deal. Everyone was encouraged to watch and participate, especially as the event was free to enter.

In order to give my best effort for the tournament, I stayed a night in Fukuoka to prepare. A large school building was offered to tournament players as a place where they could practice. Japanese university students were also invited to observe these practices. Many of these students seemed to be interested in entering a game-related market or business in the future.

The next morning, I made my way towards the Kokusai Arena. I began seeing more and more players headed in the same direction as I neared the venue. An early indication of things to come. When I arrived, hundreds of competitors were already lined up, with easily thousands more coming from behind. Camera operators, staff members, and promoters were all hard at work. Professional players, models, experts, and celebrities like Kenny Omega were casually wandering amidst the crowd. The excitement in the air was clear, and the tournament hadn't even started yet.



Before the action, the mayor of Fukuoka delivered a speech in front of the massive crowd. He expressed his appreciation and dream for the future of Fukuoka and e-sports. The event wouldn't have been possible without the many young Japanese volunteers. The international nature of this event also meant that many foreigners were in attendance. Many volunteers struggled to speak in English, but everyone worked together to successfully communicate. I was happy to see everyone doing their best. I hope the volunteers felt rewarded for their service and had a good time. Hopefully, this unique experience empowers them to continue learning English. For me, this experience motivates me to further improve my Japanese.

Some of my favorite moments were helping out with simple translations for Japanese staff members while making friends with people from various parts of Japan and the world. Of course, it takes a little ice-breaking to get the conversation going. However, in the end, our shared interest in fighting games proved to be stronger than language barriers.

This was my first time entering a gaming tournament, so I was really excited. As a first-timer, I had to adjust to the environment quickly if I wanted to perform my best. Fortunately, I have participated in other tournaments outside of gaming in the past, so the pressure wasn't as overwhelming as it could have been.

My tournament run wasn't too long, as I was eliminated on my third match. It was a good game, but my opponent was clearly superior. It never hurts to seek advice from the better players. We quickly became friends, and I wished for his continued success

at the tournament. One of his more important matches was streamed live on the big stage. The crowd cheered when he was declared the winner. I hope we can have a rematch in the future.

If I can describe this whole event in one word, it would be "opportunity." It was an opportunity for everyone from all walks of life to express themselves in this single event: an e-sports tournament involving Japanese fighting games. It was an opportunity to show the world how much demand there is for e-sports tournaments in Japan. It was an opportunity for Japanese game developers, companies, and entrepreneurs to showcase some of their products in a public setting on a global scale. Additionally, it was an opportunity for Fukuoka city to showcase some of its famous

specialties. When I asked others about their experiences at EVO Japan, it was unanimous that everyone enjoyed themselves. The event was overall a success.

I'm glad to have taken part in what could potentially be an early chapter of something big in Japan. I feel that the future of gaming culture, particularly gaming competition, will be very exciting in Japan. I will definitely be returning to the scene in the near future.

In the meantime, I'll be honing my skills.



Charles Chi is a second year JET in Sumoto, Hyogo. Upon arrival, Charles was greeted with his name pronounced "Churros" by his beloved students. Embracing his new nickname, he's ready to take on the many sweet adventures in Japan. He enjoys an active life of cycling, trekking, and hiking. In his spare time, he enjoys reading manga and taking his time with his coffee. His favorite moments include doing potlucks with friends and learning new things about Japan!





Lessons from Marathon



Rashaad Jorden (Kochi)

A good way to learn about life just might be running 42.195 km. Or trying to.

I live for road races. I've completed several half-marathons and I ran 42 km in the streets of Tokyo one Sunday in February 2010. I had been looking forward to the Ryoma Marathon for quite some time, especially as I'd be aiming to set a full marathon personal best.

Just what is the Ryoma Marathon? Named after a prominent Kochi Prefecture-born samurai, it's one of the biggest events in Kochi City's sporting calendar. Banners promoting the race abound in the city center and it's broadcasted on TV across Kochi Prefecture. Even people seemingly uninvolved in the race feel a bit of the buzz. A member of my biweekly English chat group drove me around as much of the course as possible beforehand, and she pointed out

where she would be cheering for me.

But any realistic possibility of running it in under my goal of three hours and thirty minutes came to a screeching halt when I strained a muscle in my right leg a month prior to the competition, after falling while foolishly running on a dimly lit path at night. I was uncertain that I would take part until an X-ray performed eight days prior to the race confirmed no structural damage.

So I could put my mind on enjoying the experience—well, as much as I could enjoy a punishing endeavor that I hadn't trained for in some time. But at least I could soak in the sights of Kochi City, which the Ryoma Marathon enabled me to do. More important than running on roads flanked by *inaka*-like scenery though was that pushing myself through the early portions



of the race gave me the feeling that I could will my feet across the finish line.

However, midway through the race, I realized it wasn't to be. After crossing an enormous bridge that provided breathtaking views of the Urado Bay, I hit a wall: not caused by fatigue per se, but by increasing muscle pain. Leg discomfort had rendered my slowest possible "running" into walking. I was quickly overtaken by runners. And then, slowly but surely, I was joined by a rapidly growing number of walkers.

The large presence of walkers was not a surprise considering many of the participants could be fairly described as weekend warriors. It's quite possible some of those walkers were experiencing aches and pains, like me.

Regardless, everyone was receiving enormous support from spectators lining the course. It's only natural that cheers of "が

んばれ" and "ファイト" greeted the runners during the early kilometers. But even much closer to the finish line, a large number of locals lined up on the course to will runners onto the finish line while—in some cases—offering competitors soda and chocolates. I was amazed that spectators were cheering on walkers that seemed to be struggling to cross the finish line in under the seven hour time limit.

But the enormous support that the locals showered upon runners and walkers represents a valuable lesson: despite numerous challenges and bumps in the road, there will be plenty of people cheering you on as long you make an honest effort toward your goal. Likewise, moments will abound when quitting seems more appealing than struggling. However, the thought of disappointing others (like Chisa,

the woman who took time out of a Saturday to drive me along a course; and my supervisor, who texted me to mention he had seen my name listed in the *Kochi Shimbun* as one of the participants) kept spurring me on.

I finished the Ryoma Marathon in 5 hours and 38 minutes. Obviously, it's not the time I wanted. But this experience was a good reminder that 42.195 km challenges a lot more than the body—and that I really should pay closer attention to my settings when I train.

Rashaad Jorden is actually a second-time JET Program ALT, having worked in Yamagata Prefecture from 2008 to 2010. During that time, he completed two half marathons, was a part of an ekiden team and finished the 2010 Tokyo Marathon. He has also taught English in France and has a Master's degree from a British university.

THE AJET PEER SUPPORT GROUP IS HERE FOR YOU

050-5534-5566



050-5534-5566

CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT



CONNECT is a magazine for the community in Japan, by the community in Japan. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! If you have an idea you want to see in these pages, reach out to our Head Editor, or any of our awesome section editors. We'll work with you to make it the best it can be and share it with our audience of thousands. Not every article needs to be an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, photo spreads, travelogues, and more.

Contact the Head Editor of *CONNECT*, Lauren Hill, 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.



CONNECT WITH US

Interested in contributing to *CONNECT*? Want to stay up-to-date on interview opportunities, photo requests, and *CONNECT* announcements? Get involved with the *CONNECT* by contacting our current *CONNECT* staff and reading about the possible positions [here](#).

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